

**Generations of Outsiders:  
Marginality in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Jack Kerouac's  
*On the Road*, and Douglas Coupland's *Generation X***

Diplomarbeit  
zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades  
einer Magistra der Philosophie  
an der Philologisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät  
der Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck

Institut für Amerikastudien

Eingereicht bei: Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Gudrun M. Grabher

Eingereicht von: Mag. Theresa Rass

Im Januar 2015

## **Danksagung**

Jede Diplomarbeit trägt die Handschrift des Erstellers, und doch ist sie niemals die Arbeit eines Einzelnen. In diesem Sinne möchte ich an dieser Stelle den vielen Menschen danken, die zum Gelingen dieser Diplomarbeit beigetragen haben.

In erster Linie gilt mein Dank meiner Betreuerin, Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Gudrun M. Grabher, die mich stets motiviert hat, das Beste aus mir herauszuholen, für ihr beispielloses Engagement, ihre Unterstützung und ihre Geduld.

Des Weiteren danke ich meinen Freunden, die mir wertvolle moralische Stützen waren, für ihr Verständnis für meine eingeschränkte Freizeit sowie für die Ablenkung, wenn sie dringend nötig war.

Nicht zuletzt gilt mein besonderer und tiefer Dank meinen Eltern, durch die mein Studium überhaupt erst möglich wurde und die mir stets unterstützend zur Seite standen, sowie meiner Schwester und meiner Großmutter, die ebenfalls immer ein offenes Ohr für meine Anliegen hatten.

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>The American Mind .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.	<b>Heritage and Experience: The Theory of the Melting Pot.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.	<b>Puritanism: Morality and Predetermination .....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.	<b>The Age of Enlightenment.....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.	<b>American Transcendentalism: Intuition and the Divinity of the Individual .....</b>	<b>15</b>
5.	<b>Nonconformity, Self-confidence, Optimism: Toward a Definition of “Americanness” .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>The Concept of Youth .....</b>	<b>24</b>
1.	<b>The Conceptualization of Youth.....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.	<b>Rebelliousness and Juvenile Delinquency.....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.	<b>Subcultures .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Outsiders and Dropouts of Society: Toward a Definition .....</b>	<b>32</b>
1.	<b>Disambiguation: An Attempt at Classifying “Outsiders” and “Dropouts” .....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.	<b>Stigmatization, Delinquency, Isolation: Defining Factors for Marginalization .....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.	<b>Reviving Nonconformity: Outsiderdom as a Statement of Independence .....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.	<b>Social Factors: Marginalization as a Product of Interaction .....</b>	<b>39</b>

5.	<b>Group Identity as a Source of Confidence.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>The Lost Generation and Hemingway's <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> ...</b>	<b>46</b>
1.	<b>The Lost Generation .....</b>	<b>47</b>
1.1.	Cultural, political, and social developments as sources of disillusionment.....	49
1.2.	American expatriation: Dropping out in search of a new perspective .....	52
1.3.	Writing as a way of processing experience.....	54
2.	<b>Outsiders and Dropouts in Hemingway's <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> .....</b>	<b>58</b>
2.1.	Literary conceptualization of the Lost Generation.....	58
2.2.	The significance of group identity .....	61
2.3.	Robert Cohn: The prototype of an outsider.....	63
2.4.	Jake Barnes: The inner life of the Lost Generation.....	66
2.5.	Features of marginality in other characters .....	69
<b>VI.</b>	<b>The Beat Generation and Kerouac's <i>On the Road</i> .....</b>	<b>71</b>
1.	<b>The Beat Generation.....</b>	<b>71</b>
1.1.	Cultural, political, and social developments as sources of disillusionment.....	72
1.2.	The act of dropping out: Resuming the pursuit of independence .....	74
1.3.	Deliberate marginality as an expression of discontent .....	75
1.4.	Literature as a mouthpiece .....	77
2.	<b>Outsiders and Dropouts in Kerouac's <i>On the Road</i>.....</b>	<b>80</b>

2.1.	Literary conceptualization of the Beat Generation .....	81
2.2.	The aspect of travelling: Dropping out in search of a new meaning .....	84
2.3.	Dean Moriarty: The epitome of “madness” .....	87
2.4.	Sal Paradise: The observant outsider .....	91
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Generation X and Coupland’s <i>Generation X</i> .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Generation X .....</b>	<b>97</b>
1.1.	The new role of the media.....	98
1.2.	The factor of youth and the widening of the generational gap .....	99
1.3.	The slacker image and the role of society .....	101
<b>2.</b>	<b>Outsiders and Dropouts in Coupland’s <i>Generation X</i> .....</b>	<b>104</b>
2.1.	Literary conceptualization of Generation X.....	105
2.2.	Loss of perspective, disappointed expectations, and a “no-future” attitude.....	107
2.3.	Storytelling as a way of dropping out .....	109
2.4.	Andy Palmer: Nostalgia for a shared past.....	111
2.5.	Dag Bellinghausen: The epitome of a dropout.....	115
2.6.	Claire Baxter: The female dropout.....	117
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>121</b>
	<b>List of Works Cited .....</b>	<b>124</b>

## I. INTRODUCTION

*I am solitary as grass. What is it I miss?*

*Shall I ever find it, whatever it is?*

(Sylvia Plath, "Three Women")

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American society underwent many changes due to economic, political, and cultural developments. These often very incisive events, especially during the first half of the century, particularly affected the younger segment of the population. Consequently, it can be observed that these troubled times produced various groups and movements of young people. They attracted public as well as scholarly attention and would later be referred to as "generations."

The group of young American writers who served in and witnessed World War I is commonly referred to as the "Lost Generation." Due to their traumatic experiences, and the changes they were confronted with upon returning to their home country, they were disillusioned and lost perspective. Many of them consequently went into self-exile in order to find new meaning and inspiration. After World War II, the "Beat Generation" arose, the members of which were characterized by an affinity to art and literature, by rejecting the standards of conventional society, and also by finding ways to "escape" reality, e.g. by travelling or through the use of drugs. Interest in and experimentation with various experiences with drugs, sexuality, or religion are also considered common features of this generation. In 1991, Douglas Coupland popularized

the term “Generation X,” referring to the successors of the “Baby Boomers,” who were born between 1961 and 1981. The members of this generation were characterized by their “no-future” attitude, a perceived passivity in contrast to their rebellious predecessors, as well as a feeling of nostalgia for the “good old days.”

At first sight, these generations may not seem to have a lot in common. However, it will be shown in the context of this thesis that they all can be regarded as “generations of outsiders.” The basic assumption behind this approach is that all of the members of these different generations can, to some extent, be regarded as outsiders and/or dropouts of conventional society. In other words, they have either been marginalized by society, or have actively decided to withdraw from it. The exclusion of an individual from society may be based on various reasons, such as appearance, deviant behavior, or attitude, whereas dropping out usually involves an active choice that may be rooted, for instance, in discontent with the values of a society, or disagreement with the legal system. Even though marginality is often put on a level with solitude, it does not necessarily infer loneliness. People who share the same interests, or the same attitude toward the values of society, often find common ground and consequently form new, smaller groups, or subcultures. The result of such a process is often referred to as “generation” in retrospect.

There are numerous factors that can bring about the exclusion or the withdrawal of an individual from society. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus will be on the aspects of marginality considered most important with regard to the generations concerned. To start with, it is important in this context to take into account the history of the “American Mind.” Hence, an

outline will be provided of the central ideals that emerged in the course of time and shaped American identity. Some of the most important values, such as independence or individualism, are considered to be equally significant factors with regard to marginality. As another factor in this respect, the conceptualization of youth will be examined, i.e., the way adolescents and young adults are seen by mainstream society and how the feeling of being disregarded can affect their attitude and behavior. The acknowledgment of youth as a distinct social group with individual needs and interests is considered important for the establishment of their identity. Finally, a definition of the terms will be provided and the main factors for the exclusion or voluntary withdrawal from society shall be analyzed.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the process that leads from being an outsider or dropout of society to the development of a new group will be illustrated in the analysis of three novels representative of some of the major “generations” that developed in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, which portrays the lives of American expatriates of the Lost Generation, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, which documents the travels in search of a new meaning of the members of the Beat Generation, and Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*, the novel that provided a name for the generation of disillusioned “slackers” toward the end of the century. On the basis of these literary works it will be shown that the generations in question emerged from a regrouping of outsiders and dropouts of society and can therefore be regarded as “generations of outsiders.”

## **II. THE AMERICAN MIND**

The philosopher George Santayana once stated that “[t]o be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career” (qtd. in Commager v). This quotation alludes to the significance of identity in American society. It also provides an insight into the main principles of the “American Mind,” attributing “Americanness” with the status of an occupation, of something valuable that can be achieved through hard work. In the course of time, the American Mind has developed as a distinct set of ideals and values that, although rooted in the traditions of European forebears, was inspired largely by the experiences of the people and a strong desire for independence. Freedom, independence, self-reliance, and individualism have emerged as central ambitions that reveal how important it was for the citizens of the still young nation to establish their own identity and to break free from tradition and European ancestry.

### **1. Heritage and Experience: The Theory of the Melting Pot**

---

The history and development of an indigenous “American philosophy” and thus American identity can be viewed as “an amalgam of inheritance and experience; and if the inheritance is more obvious, the experience is more interesting” (Commager 26). From the beginning of European settlement, there was a great variety of cultural heritage in the American colonies. Even though there was an “enormous racial and ethnic diversity” (Cullen 41), these

differences were outweighed by the “crucial similarities” that were shared by a large number of people, such as Protestant religion and the English language (cf. *ibid.*). These similarities have formed the common ground, or “inheritance,” upon which American society is based. Additionally, the experiences gained on the basis of living together in such a heterogeneous environment had a significant influence on the shaping of American identity: “Here were the seeds of the idea of the melting pot, the most popular and long-lived explanation of what transforms a polyglot stream of immigrants into one people” (Levine 106). In order to be able to live together and to learn and profit from each other’s experience and knowledge, people had to find common ground and determine a set of values they agreed upon. The result of this compound was a new, independent, American identity.

As a consequence of this newly established identity and in order not to endanger it, new immigrants to the nation were expected to adapt to the prevailing principles (cf. Levine 110). As long as they agreed to acculturate, everyone was equally given the chance to become an American. In this way, “the outsiders, the strangers, passed through without leaving any trace of themselves, of their cultures, of their identities” (Levine 111). This process of “beginning again” was essential for the formation of an original American identity and expressed the refusal of European ideals (cf. Day 50). As citizens of a still young nation, the people had to find their own voice and to define their own morality and values.

## **2. Puritanism: Morality and Predetermination**

The foundations of the central ideals of the American Mind can be traced back to the times of Puritanism. During this time, a pattern evolved that can be detected also in later developments and already indicates what will later be regarded as the ideal of nonconformity. Many American thinkers were inspired by philosophies from the “Old World,” which were subsequently combined into new, individual theories (cf. also Commager 26f.). In the case of Puritanism, the influence came to America with the first settlers. The Puritans were a group of Protestants “piqued by Elizabeth’s compromise church of 1563” (Day 7), who, after unsuccessfully trying to change the Church of England, finally had to leave the country due to prosecution, and, after a short period spent in the Netherlands, came to America in 1620 (cf. *ibid.*). The principles of Puritanism were based on the doctrines of Calvinism, which included the notions that all human beings were evil, and that only those whose election was predestined could achieve salvation (cf. Day 8). This meant that the individual was born sinful and there was nothing in his or her power to work against predetermination.

Over time, the principles of the Puritans have changed and developed in a slightly more liberal direction; however, their influence on American society can still be observed in many aspects of the American Mind. Indicating what would later become part of the conditions for achieving the American Dream, Puritans promoted “conscientious thrift and hard work” in order to accumulate wealth and success (cf. Day 10). With regard to most aspects of everyday life, discipline can be defined as one of the highest virtues in Puritanism (cf. Cullen

14). Accordingly, there has also always been a lot of importance attached to the field of education and learning. From the beginning of American settlement until today, the establishment of schools and universities has been one of the top priorities (cf. Day 11). Ambition and the willingness to work hard are features that may also be considered important with regard to the pursuit of freedom and the establishment of independence.

Due to their religious beliefs that “threw the burden upon the individual,” the quality of self-reliance can also be traced back to the Puritans (cf. Day 11). Self-reliance can be regarded as one of the most significant values with regard to American identity, which will be shown also with regard to American Transcendentalism. Another ideal that originated in the Puritan principles is democratic liberty. Democratic liberty can be regarded as one of the most important ideals, as it represents the “desire for equality and for freedom from unwarranted restraints” (Day 11). Both equality and freedom are central values of American identity that were consequently also set down as basic rights in the Declaration of Independence.

The remnants of Puritan influence can most clearly be observed with regard to religion and morality. Both are considered significant features of American identity up to the present day. The position of religion is revealed, for instance, with regard to politics: While in most countries of the world, politics and religion are strictly separated, religious belief is still of relevance in American campaigns (cf. Day 11). With regard to morality, it is assumed that “until World War I the U.S.A. proved the most Puritanical nation of Western society” (Day 10). In comparison to other Western societies, Americans can be regarded as rather conservative. The remains of Puritan piety

can also be observed with regard to “conscience stirrings”: “When he revels in pleasure, the American has a sneaking suspicion that he is sinning” (Day 12). The feeling of sinfulness can clearly be traced back to the Puritan concepts of predetermination and inherent depravity.

### 3. The Age of Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Western civilization was shaken by the advent of the Age of Enlightenment, “an intellectual revolution [that] turned the tables upon the theological orientation and the rigid dogmatism of the previous age” (Day 16). This new era brought about a new *Weltanschauung*, and a turn away from religion toward reason and rationality, promoted by European intellectuals like René Descartes, Baruch de Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Isaac Newton, who also inspired many American thinkers. The major concerns of the representatives of this movement were the quest for truth and understanding and the explanation of the world based not on religious beliefs, but on one’s own physical impressions of the world. In this respect, reason is the only acceptable means to gain valuable insights. Due to this shift in perspective, also an increase in tolerance could be observed; the representatives of the era welcomed a variety of opinions, as long as they did

---

<sup>1</sup> If not indicated otherwise, information in this section is taken from Martin S. Day, *A Handbook of American Literature: A Comprehensive Study from Colonial Times to the Present Day* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1975) 16-28. Direct quotes are indicated with page numbers in parentheses.

not involve fanaticism. This can also be regarded as a step closer to equality and the acknowledgment of individual thought. As religious concepts like predetermination were no longer regarded as the cause of inferiority, it was assumed that it “arose from inadequate training and opportunity” (17). Accordingly, everyone is (theoretically) granted the same chances for becoming a fully-fledged member of society, as long as they have access to education and the ability to make use of it.

As a result, the people of the time were encouraged to ask questions, to think critically, and to challenge existing views and philosophies. The influence of Enlightenment also affected Puritanism and changed the American mindset: “Freedom of conscience [...] effectively broke the back of Puritan theocracy and would subsequently prove the universal American practice” (18). However, religion was revived to some extent by the Great Awakening of the Evangelical Movement in the 1730s. By offering a less orthodox alternative, with a democratic structure and “the appeal of an individual religion with each man encouraged to his own interpretation of faith” (19), the religious spirit of the Americans was, at least partly, reestablished.

However, the main interest of Americans was concentrated on expanding both economically and geographically. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a tendency to move westward that is generally referred to as “frontier spirit,” which revealed new features of the American character, such as a “tendency to experiment and improvise. The rough democracy of the frontier, where what you could do far outweighed what you had been or what you thought, was starting to mold a new America” (20). These new ideals contributed to the shaping of what would later be referred to as the American

Dream. With Benjamin Franklin, the Age of Enlightenment brought forth the “apotheosis of the American ambition”:

Here is the self-made man who rose from rags to riches, the self-educated man who surpassed most of the formally trained of the world, the man of humble origins who walked with the great and proved at least their equal. Franklin was the leading American utilitarian, a potent blend of shrewd commonsense and optimistic confidence in physical progress. (24)

Franklin unites all the ideals of the American identity of the time in his character and can thus be regarded as the epitome of Enlightenment and, to some extent, also as a role model for the accomplishment of the American Dream.

#### **4. American Transcendentalism: Intuition and the Divinity of the Individual**

---

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an intellectual movement and with it also a literary current emerged that is commonly referred to as American Transcendentalism. Inspired by Romanticism, the European literary movement that followed the Age of Enlightenment, the Transcendentalists relied on intuition rather than reason. The representatives of this philosophy can therefore be described as “intuitive idealists,” which means that “they accepted ideas as a reflection of ultimate reality whose direct apprehension could be reached through the imagination, or one’s intuition” (Kaplan and Katsaros 16). The reason why imagination is particularly significant in this context is that

taking into account “ideas,” and not just physical impressions, for the perception of reality means that a certain amount of interpretation is involved. Ideas have to be viewed in contrast to an objective view of reality based exclusively on facts and on the actual sensory perception of one’s environment. They also involve a mental concept, i.e. a representation in the individual’s mind, and sometimes even personal connotations of the subject in question. Thus, an idealist perspective on comprehending reality can be regarded as a more direct, definitive form of understanding. At the same time, the emphasis on intuition indicates that it is also a more subjective, interpretative way of seeing the world, which involves impressions and experiences that can vary from person to person. The idealism put forward in American Transcendentalism highlights a new significance that is attached to the mind and thought of the individual.

Religion can, to some extent, also be regarded as a form of idealism, as it relies on knowledge that cannot be gained solely through physical experience (cf. Kaplan and Katsaros 16). Despite this similarity, religion was viewed skeptically by American Transcendentalists. At the time, most Americans adhered to the tradition of Unitarianism, a religious view that accepts God as only one person instead of a trinity (cf. Kaplan and Katsaros 17f.). As religion generally was still important for the thinkers of the time, they tried to find a way to bring into accord their religious beliefs and their general view of the world. The turn toward Transcendentalism is thus not to be mistaken for a refusal of religion altogether, as in fact many of its representatives were at one time clergymen (cf. Kern 250). Rather, it shows disagreement with certain principles and a shift of central beliefs. While the main objectives remained the same, a change of basic principles can be observed: “Both Unitarianism and

transcendentalism looked forward to an all-inclusive, non-denominational religion; but while the Unitarians based their fundamental ideas upon rationalism and empiricism, the transcendentalists celebrated emotion, imagination, and intuition” (Kaplan and Katsaros 18). These central elements – emotion, imagination, and intuition – also show the connection to Romanticism. European Romanticism served, to some extent, as a role model for the Transcendentalists, as it also “favored spontaneity, intuition, and emotions over restraint, logic, and balance” (Kaplan and Katsaros 18). It can be seen here that European thought still had an influence on American thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although American Transcendentalism can be regarded as a first step for the nation toward its own voice and toward finding its own way of independent thinking and philosophy.

These central elements – emotion, imagination, and intuition – also show the connection to Romanticism. European Romanticism served, to some extent, as a role model for the Transcendentalists, as it also “favored spontaneity, intuition, and emotions over restraint, logic, and balance” (Kaplan and Katsaros 18). Other important sources for Transcendentalist ideals were Neo-Platonism, which emphasized the “elevation of the spirit over matter” (Day 81f.), the German idealism of Kant, Schelling, and others, which understood intuition as the primary means for understanding truth, and also Oriental mystical writings, which inspired some of the works of Thoreau and Emerson (cf. Day 82).

As can be seen, the American Transcendentalist movement had its roots in various philosophies, which mostly originated in Europe. The reason for this is relatively obvious, as American culture developed on the basis of the

experiences of the European settlers (cf. Kaplan and Katsaros 337). At the same time, American Transcendentalism marked the beginning of a new, independent way of seeing the world and the establishment of new, American ideals. This was also noted by Emerson, who “recognized that American transcendentalism was an indigenous movement, eclectically borrowing from other cultures but still unfolding gradually and independently from the American past” (Kaplan and Katsaros 18). The thinkers of the time were inspired by already existing theories which they combined into a new philosophy of their own. In this context, the meaning of individualism becomes evident. It can be regarded as a central ideal of the American Mind, and is also related to freedom and independence.

The individual as well as individual thinking were very important for the Transcendentalists. They worshipped it in contrast to

conforming masses who inadvertently behaved as slaves in accepting the will of a political or social majority. In obeying the will of God rather than that of the majority, the transcendentalists affirmed liberty and self-reliance over slavery and conformity. [...] This belief fostered an optimistic view of man’s capabilities and the world’s destiny. (Kaplan and Katsaros 17)

The Transcendentalist philosophy, albeit still on a religious basis, encouraged critical thinking rather than agreeing with the majority. This attitude is considered a means to expand and develop one’s mind and to open up new possibilities, and thus new ways of understanding. It encourages the individual to practice self-reliance and nonconformity, which means that being

different is no longer regarded in a negative way, but even respected as a positive, almost prestigious feature, and also as a way to achieve freedom.

In the process of turning away from the majority, intuition again plays an important role. It is seen as a “manifestation of the divine within man” and a means to make possible the “expansion of his consciousness”: In order to grow, the imagination of the individual has to be free of “material and commercial considerations” and so he or she will discover that conformity does not match their ideal of uniqueness and self-reliance (Kaplan and Katsaros 20). To achieve freedom and self-reliance can therefore be regarded as key objectives of the Transcendentalists. With regard to society, nonconformity can also play a significant role as a means of expression of an individual’s attitude toward the community he or she lives in. This aspect is relevant especially for the examination of outsiders and dropouts of society, which will be discussed in more detail in a separate chapter.

## **5. Nonconformity, Self-confidence, Optimism: Toward a Definition of “Americanness”**

---

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American social life was in flux in many respects. Over the years, some central ideals had emerged that were eventually combined into the larger picture of what may be referred to as “Americanness.” Ideals like freedom and independence became essential characteristics of American identity. The concept of nonconformity often lies at the heart of changes in society, especially with regard to moral values. A “sense of equality” was established that “introduced an ease and sincerity into social

relationships not to be found elsewhere” (Commager 14). This development is of significance especially with regard to the American history of slavery, which has shown most clearly that, for a long time, not all people were considered equal. In this context, however, equality refers particularly to social ranks and hierarchy, as there were no social classes in American society (cf. Commager 14f.). Considering the situation in Europe, and particularly England, where there is a long tradition of class consciousness, this clearly suggests that the American emphasis on social equality simultaneously exhibits nonconformity and the desire to break with tradition and cultural heritage.

Another result of the nonconformist mentality was that a negative attitude toward rules became a characteristic of Americanness, which stressed the contrast to England and the “Old World” even more. Commager mentions this attitude as one aspect of “carelessness,” a feature that he describes as typically American (17ff.). It can be argued that carelessness is also a result of the newly achieved independence that to a certain extent makes the citizens feel invulnerable and free to do whatever they wish to. The disapproval of rules and regulations, however, does not apply to two specific areas of daily life: sports and constitutional law (cf. Commager 19f.). While in sports there was the ideal of fair play, the subject of law was to some extent a double-edged sword. On the one hand, “[i]t was the universal observation that few people were more lawless than the American” (Commager 19), which is already implied by their general disrespect for rules. Constitutional law, on the other hand, had a very different reputation, as it enforced the ideal of equality and granted it general validity (cf. Commager 20). It can be observed that today law and justice still play a significant role in American society. Although often ridiculed due to negative examples of legal cases, the constitutional right of

equality before the law can be seen as a privilege that is by far not available to all people of the world and gives informative evidence of American moral values.

The only field where Commager identifies a tendency toward conformism in American society is the field of morals, which originated in the ideals of Puritanism (cf. 22f.). As has been mentioned, religion and virtue were always highly valued in American society and, although some aspects may have become subject of discussion, remained means of guidance for social behavior. One of the consequences of conformity concerning morals was censorship, especially with regard to language and sex (cf. Commager 23f.). This piety is an aspect of the American Mind which can still be observed today, e.g. in American film or music productions, where abusive language is often replaced with a beep, or pictures that are considered offensive are pixelated. It can be seen here that moral values and ethics still play an important role and can thus also be regarded as characteristic features of American identity.

It has been shown already with regard to Puritanism and Transcendentalism that American ideology was often inspired by philosophical ideas and theories from the “Old World,” and Europe in particular. For the establishment of a truly American identity, however, a distinctive set of values had to be determined and adapted to the requirements of the unique constellation of American society. The “distillate” resulting from this process of reuniting ideas in a new way is characterized by Commager as follows:

American thought, like the American character, was permeated with optimism, with the sense of a spacious universe, with confidence in the

infinite possibilities of human development, and with reverence for a righteous God and a just moral code. Americans believed in a universe governed by laws which were immutable and unassailable but which left room, somehow, for the play of free will, and they were confident that their reason was sufficiently acute to discover these laws and their will sufficiently firm to observe them. (28)

This excerpt summarizes the central ideals of American thought and highlights two important factors, optimism and free will, which both demonstrate to some extent the meaning of faith. The reason for the indestructible optimism of Americans can again be sought in the conditions under which their society had developed, as “[c]ollectively, [they] had never known defeat, grinding poverty, or oppression, and [they] thought these misfortunes peculiar to the Old World” (Commager 5). As Americans as a nation had yet been spared of any traumatic experiences, the basis for the establishment of their identity was of a rather positive kind. The second factor, the importance of free will, demonstrates the value of freedom and independence. Together with optimism, it lays the foundation for the concept of “that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start” (Adams qtd. in Cullen 4). As every individual has a free will, everything they desire can be achieved if their will is strong enough.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a turning point in the history of the American Mind that can be considered a challenge to its hopeful and enthusiastic attitude. During the “watershed of the nineties,” “[t]he mood of

optimism [...] was succeeded by a mood of scientific skepticism which inspired confusion and stimulated doubt” (Commager 49). The reason for the loss of enthusiasm was that, due to recent developments, some of the principles the American ideology was built on had become outdated and needed revision, such as the moral values rooted in Puritanism (cf. Commager 49). The technical progress of the time was a challenge to keep up with, new labor conditions revealed that there were in fact social inequalities between people, some of whom demonstrated their discontent in strikes, and there was a conflict between rural, agricultural areas and the urban, “modern” America (cf. Commager 41ff.). In this time of change at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American nation had to put into practice the philosophy that had been worked on for so long in order to distinguish itself and hold its ground in a world rapidly changing. In the course of the following century, American identity and its central ideals were repeatedly subject to major challenges and neglected due to traumatic events. However, as the analysis of three generations of young people in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America will show, there were also repeated attempts at reestablishing these ideals, often by young people in marginalized positions, in order not to let them fade into oblivion.

### **III. THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH**

In the previous chapter, an outline has been given of the development of the American Mind, which has shown that individualism and independence arose as central ideals in the America of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These ideals also play a significant role with regard to the social marginalization of people. Another factor that is considered relevant in this context is youth, and especially the position this particular age group is attributed in society. The acknowledgement of adolescence as a particular period of life is a relatively young phenomenon that developed during modernity and began to find recognition only toward the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Savage xv). This change of perspective brought about the development of various forms of youth culture and also had an influence on the structure of modern society, as can be observed in many areas of the Western world. Especially American youth served as a role model and inspiration for the young people of other Western societies, and shall now be examined in more detail.

#### **1. The Conceptualization of Youth**

In the history of the American Mind there has always been a tendency to look forward rather than back. Although some of the Puritan ideals and morals needed revision in the course of time, the system of values can generally be regarded as oriented toward the future. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when America was already considered a “rising power,” an

awareness of youth as a “separate stage of life” began to develop (cf. Savage xv). This awareness was triggered by accounts of adolescents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century like Marie Bashkirtseff and Jesse Pomeroy, whose diaries made clear that there was an important transitional phase between childhood and adult life (cf. Savage 3ff.). This transition, which is today referred to as puberty, marks a progress which involves physical as well as psychological changes that the children then have to learn how to handle. The more or less successful accomplishment of this task can have a significant effect on the moral and social behavior both during adolescence and later in adult life (see below).

Although adolescence had already to some degree been recognized as an individual stage of life, the term “teenager” was first used in America only in 1944 in the context of marketing as a classification for the age groups from fourteen to eighteen years (cf. Savage xiii). The explicit distinction as a target group confirms the acknowledgement of youth as a separate social category. In the course of the century and especially after the victory in World War II, America had taken on a position that can be described as that of a role model, especially in Western civilization. Like many other developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of the “teen image has dominated the way that the West sees the young, and has been successfully exported around the world” (Savage xiii). The American influence on European culture had become evident already in the time after World War I. After the years of war, the emergence of movies and especially jazz music was a welcomed delight for people: “America epitomized the innocence and enthusiasm of youth, and for Europe’s young, there was no question about its appeal” (Savage 178). In this context, the positive features of youth were highlighted as a means to handle

the events of the past, but also as an inspiration to look forward and engage in new optimism.

The first to use and define the term “adolescence” for the period of juvenile struggle was the psychologist G. Stanley Hall. He found that in Western civilization, where there were no traditional ceremonies to mark the passage into adulthood, adolescence “was not just biologically determined but socially constructed” (Savage 66). Although the physical and psychological processes of puberty are due to natural processes, the role of the social component is not to be neglected. It determines what is expected of the individual and provides rules and moral standards that have to be followed in order for one to become an adequate member of society.

The expectations of society can put a lot of pressure on young adults. Hall described these challenges as a (universally valid) period of “storm and stress” and believed that “those who managed to make this transition successfully would reach a higher level of being (the fully rounded adult), while for those who failed the future held delinquency, degeneracy and perversion” (France 26). Against the background of this theory it becomes evident that adolescence can have a decisive influence on the future prospects of the individual. Especially with regard to social structure, this aspect should not be neglected, as the future of the young is directly related to the future of society.

In Hall’s definition, the period of adolescence is applied to the age of fourteen until the age of twenty-four (cf. Savage 71), which is roughly consistent with the definition given by the United Nations in 1985 that places it between fifteen and twenty-five years of age (cf. Brown qtd. in Tyyskä 3). This

classification is significant as it exceeds the “teenage” years and includes the early twenties. Evidently, the categorization is very general and can vary from culture to culture; therefore it should be regarded more as a guideline than as a strict parameter. Differences can be observed between the northern and the southern hemisphere: While in large parts of the southern hemisphere age limits tend to vary widely, the northern hemisphere and especially the Western world have a more concrete conception of youth (cf. Tyyskä 3). These differences are due to the diverse traditions and social standards of the countries. In more industrialized countries, youth is often extended by additional education and dependency on parental care, whereas developing countries tend to reduce the period to fewer years (cf. Tyyskä 4). This also confirms the fact that youth is socially determined, as young people in a poorer, less privileged social environment are often expected to grow up faster than those living in more privileged areas. Youth can thus in itself be regarded as a privilege and as a “period of grace” before one has to take over the responsibilities of adult life.

The young people in question, however, may often not have felt as privileged. During the time of World War I, when the concept of youth had just been fully established, it was exactly this classification that emphasized even more the “sense of being lost,” which was “inevitably endemic to adolescence: adrift in a world made by adults, not for you” (Savage 201). Adolescence is a time that involves a reasonable amount of confusion, during which the individual is concerned with self-discovery both in terms of identity and sexuality, the development of attitudes and opinions toward certain subjects, and also tries to find his or her place in society. If there is not enough feedback from society or a shortage of options, feelings of disorientation and not

belonging anywhere can arise in young people. The result can be a loss of perspective and even indifference, which in turn may become a reason for juvenile delinquency.

## 2. Rebelliousness and Juvenile Delinquency

Despite the increasing acknowledgment of youth as a distinct social group with individual needs and interests, young people often feel disregarded by society. As a consequence, some of them try to reclaim attention or express their discontent through deviant behavior. David Matza analyzes the tendency toward “rebelliousness” of adolescents, stressing that, although they may in some ways be susceptible to rebellious behavior, only a minority of young people can in fact be described by this feature (cf. Matza 103f.). He defines three modes of rebelliousness, referring to attitudes that in their extreme form are only practiced by very few people, while more moderate varieties are relatively common in society (cf. Matza 104). The first type, delinquency, is distinguished by the pursuit of excitement: The individual is constantly looking for adventures, which are often defined by breaking the law (cf. Matza 107f.). Such an “adventurous” lifestyle can be found in young people who, intending to continually increase the level of thrill in their activities, at some point cross the line to criminal behavior. The second form, radicalism, refers to “unconventional political action” (Matza 111), such as taking part in demonstrations. The participants are rewarded with the impression of making a change or doing something meaningful, and often feel connected to the events of real rebellions in other places (cf. Matza 111). The third type of

rebelliousness is Bohemianism, which basically defines an unconventional lifestyle closely related to art and the ideals of Romanticism (cf. Matza 111ff.).

Matza's categorization defines the most common characteristics of juvenile deviant behavior. They all have in common a certain degree of nonconformity and a critical, if not deprecatory, attitude toward rules. The philosophy of the American Mind has already shown that these kinds of attitudes are not restricted to young people; however, the consequences depend on what part of society is involved. When America as a nation was nonconformist and defiant of established rules, it was because this behavior reflected the attitude and ideals of the majority of its people. If young people – or any other subgroup or minority – act in the same way, they exhibit their rejection of this agreed-upon set of values and thus may be confronted with animosity and distrust.

There are many different reasons that can lead to criminal behavior in adolescents. Problems often arise from the physical and psychological changes that come with puberty and can lead to insecurity concerning one's identity and sexuality. Disorientation and unease about the future and one's place in society can also be side effects of this process. This is especially true for young people born into a less privileged, or lower class, environment. For these adolescents, realizing that their opportunities in life are limited can lead to disillusionment and ultimately to the feeling that there is nothing left to lose. The turn toward criminality is often the consequence of such an attitude.

The most obvious example of juvenile delinquency was the formation of gangs in American cities that began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Savage 34). Many delinquents were members of lower social classes who had realized

that the American Dream was not available for everyone but rather predetermined by birth (cf. Savage 36). In gangs, young people got together who shared the experience of disappointment and developed their own set of values in contrast to the established ideals of society. Adolescent gang members “had little chance but to band together to survive, and, once banded, to reproduce the might-is-right ethic that was their social reality” (Savage 40). The group dynamics strengthened the confidence of its members and delinquent behavior served as a way to get back the respect that they were denied by society.

Margaret Mead observed that “the American way of life was to blame for the neuroses of its adolescents” (qtd. in Savage 224). She concluded that many problems of young people could be traced back to the excess of possible choices implied by the ideal of unlimited opportunities. The result was the so-called “Cinderella complex”: The classical rags-to-riches story was made even more popular through the media and “created a welter of conflicting desires” (Savage 225). As already discussed above, the ideal of the American Dream was shaken when adolescents realized that it was not equally accessible for everyone.

In his “strain theory,” Robert Merton also defines society as an important factor for the deviant behavior of adolescents. He states that, in contrast to what the American Dream implies – that everyone can achieve wealth if they work hard enough – “America was not open and that sections of the population found their aspirations blocked” (Merton qtd. in France 36). This account illustrates how a conflict between the factors “youth” and “American Mind” can lead to social exclusion or dropping out.

Although only a minority of adolescents was involved in criminal activities, many shared the feeling of social exclusion. As a result, they turned to each other and formed “subcultures that rejected dominant middle-class values and allowed the young to develop alternative social systems where adjustment to their environment could be made” (France 36). Within such groups, people could meet others who shared their interests and beliefs. In the 1950s, there was already a large variety of youth cultures, such as the Beats, who will later be discussed in detail, but also “Rockers,” “Teds,” or “hippies” (cf. France 16). In the course of the next decade, many members of subcultures tried to make public their ideals and became politically active, “whether they took to the streets, stormed university offices, smoked dope, burned their military draft cards or their bras, ran away from home or dropped out” (Duncan 144). The countercultures, as they are often referred to, illustrate the aspect of political radicalism analyzed by Matza (see above). The young people of this time were more active and more determined to fight for their rights and ideals than other groups before them. Their actions also revived the ideals of freedom and independence in many respects. Due to its radicalism, “[y]outh in the 1960s and early 1970s was then being seen as the new vanguard generation of social change” (Musgrove qtd. in France 17). Considering the development of youth culture, the achievement of social change would imply the completion of an idealized circle: from the withdrawal of the individual from society due to disagreement with its ideals, over the gathering in groups which share the same attitude, to political activism and commitment to a cause and finally a certain degree of social change, depending on the success of the particular movement.

#### IV. OUTSIDERS AND DROPOUTS OF SOCIETY: TOWARD A DEFINITION

##### 1. Disambiguation: An Attempt at Classifying “Outsiders” and “Dropouts”

---

After the discussion of the development of the American Mind and the concept of youth, this chapter will be looking more closely at the terms “outsider” and “dropout.” These expressions are not really psychological terms but are rather intended to function as models to illustrate certain aspects of society and also how they are portrayed in literature. As Howard S. Becker noticed in 1963, there is not much scientific fact to be found about deviant behavior, although there are some theoretical approaches to the subject (cf. 149). Often, theories about outsiderdom have to rely on personal impressions or the experiences of small reference groups, which can also lead to wrong or deficient results (cf. Becker 150f.). Another problem may be the distance of the observer to the phenomenon. As there may be different understandings, interpretations, and connotations of the concepts of outsiderdom and dropping out, a definition shall be given here to clarify the characteristics that are relevant for the context of this thesis.

The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines an outsider as “a person who does not belong to or is not accepted as part of a particular group or organization” (“Outsider”). Although the term is rather transparent, the focus lies on the processes described in this definition. Both “not belonging” and “not being accepted” imply an exclusion of some sort rather than

withdrawal; in other words, being an outsider can be regarded as a more passive condition. Outsiderdom can be caused by many different factors that in some way distinguish an individual from the general public, such as looks, behavior, or occupation.

The situation is different in the case of a dropout. *Merriam-Webster* provides two definitions for this term, first “a person who stops going to a school, college, etc., before finishing,” and second “a person who stops being involved in society because he or she does not believe in its rules, customs, and values” (“Dropout”). The first meaning apparently is the more common connotation of a dropout, but on closer inspection the two definitions are not mutually exclusive, i.e. the reason for dropping out of school may also be founded in disagreement with established rules. The second definition already shows the contrast to outsiderdom. Dropping out implicates an active and conscious decision to “stop being involved” at some point, and exhibits the ideal of nonconformity. On the one hand, dropping out can be expressed through the rejection of the values and moral principles of society, as mentioned above. On the other hand, it can also occur in the form of leaving one’s home country or familiar surroundings.

Hans Mayer defines the crossing of borders (“Grenzüberschreitung”) as a factor for the exclusion from society, which can be either intentional (“intentionell”) or existential (“existentiell”; cf. 13). This distinction refers to the difference between self-inflicted (intentional) withdrawal and involuntary, not self-inflicted (existential) marginalization: “Ein anderes ist es, ob sich einer von der Gemeinschaft, ein anderes, ob die Gemeinschaft einen Einzelnen oder eine ‘besondere’ Gruppe von sich abstößt, fernhält, schließlich absondert”

(Mayer 22). Existential forms of crossing borders have already been mentioned above; they develop when an individual does not fit the ideals of society and is therefore stigmatized to some extent. A person may be excluded because of an appearance regarded as inappropriate or even unpleasant, because of “abnormal” behavior, e.g. in cases of mental disease, or due to his or her personal history. Sometimes people are even born as outsiders, for instance when their parents have already been marginalized by society. Owing to these circumstances, the birth of an individual, one’s sheer existence, can be considered the crossing of a border (cf. Mayer 18).

Of course, this is not to be considered a strict separation, as there can also be types of outsiders who contribute to some extent to their exclusion, for instance by willingly adhering to certain habits despite the awareness of disapproval. The distinction only serves to demonstrate that outsiderdom often is a more passive and less “chosen” situation than dropping out. As Mayer’s definition implies, dropouts tend to cross certain lines intentionally. With regard to behavior, examples would be delinquency or voluntarily living in total isolation. Especially delinquency can often be traced back to the disagreement with established rules. While outsiders often suffer from exclusion and their subsequent loneliness, dropouts may be a lot more comfortable with their isolated position, not least as they themselves have chosen it.

## **2. Stigmatization, Delinquency, Isolation: Defining Factors for Marginalization**

---

Generally speaking, the characteristics of outsiders and dropouts of society can largely be summed up under the aspect of deviant behavior. As Becker observes, the violation of an established rule is often the first step into exclusion or withdrawal (cf. 1). From a scientific perspective, the factors that lead to the breaking of rules as well as common characteristics of the individuals concerned are of interest. In this context, Becker gives an outline of various definitions of deviant behavior:

- The most trivial perspective defines deviance as everything too far from average, i.e. anything that can be distinguished from what is considered ordinary and “normal.” As this interpretation would also regard unconventionalities like left-handedness as deviances, it is too simplistic for the context of outsiderdom and disregards many aspects of the actual problem (cf. Becker 4).
- Another approach is to view deviant behavior as a form of “illness.” This definition unfortunately is very common; it suggests that there must be some malfunction involved with people who behave in unusual ways (cf. Becker 4f.). A negative example of this perspective is the view of homosexuality as a disease.
- A more relativistic and sociological perspective classifies deviant behavior merely as the disobedience of an individual to the established rules of a group (cf. Becker 7).

The third definition evidently is the most relevant for the analysis of deviant behavior and can be expanded by including other aspects; in order to distinguish between outsiders and dropouts, for instance, the features “intention” or “social stigma” can be added.

The aspect of stigmatization shows the role society plays in the development of outsiderdom. Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson observe that some characteristics of social stigma are universal, such as poverty or a low standard of living, and that it is very common that indignity is caused by those in power who look down on the less privileged (cf. 21). Generally, the most powerful and influential are more privileged members of mainstream society, who live according to conventional ideals and strive for the maintenance of established rules. Due to their influence, they often appear to represent the majority of society. Consequently, marginalized people tend to feel inferior as they define themselves by the standards of the established group (cf. Elias and Scotson 22). Social stigma thus can also affect the self-confidence of people.

Deviant behavior also manifests itself in the way marginalized individuals interact with others. Georg Simmel argues that “isolation is itself a *social* relationship” (qtd. in Craib 150; emphasis in original): Isolation can be the result of the rejection of established values as well as the rejection of people who represent these values, and therefore it embodies a form of interaction or, in this case, a deliberate lack thereof. This process is principally possible in both directions, as “insiders” also tend to isolate themselves from people they disagree with. The significance of a conscious decision becomes apparent once more in this context and shows that isolation can be a form of dropping out.

As dropping out often involves the aspiration for independence, Simmel argues that isolation to some extent also “implies freedom” (Craib 150). By omitting closer connections to “conventional” society or even retreating into isolation, the individual breaks free from any obligation and, having nothing left to lose (e.g. a reputation or career), can follow his or her impulses and desires without restrictions (cf. Becker 24f.). Even though it may be a way to achieve freedom and independence, a decision of this sort inevitably involves the sacrifice of most forms of social contact. An alternative to the radical step of complete isolation is dropping out “internally,” for instance by retreating into an imaginary refuge. In this context, literature plays an important role, as both reading and writing can function as a form of escapism. Additionally, as can be seen with the novels analyzed in this thesis, literature can also have a uniting effect on marginalized people, as it reveals that there may be others who share the same attitudes and ideals.

### **3. Reviving Nonconformity: Outsiderdom as a Statement of Independence**

---

In *The Greening of America*, Charles A. Reich emphasizes the relevance of nonconformity for achieving freedom and independence:

[A]n individual cannot hope to achieve an independent consciousness unless he cultivates, by whatever means are available, including clothes, speech mannerisms, illegal activities, and so forth, the feeling of being an *outsider*. Only the person who feels himself to be an

outsider is genuinely free of the lures and temptations of the Corporate State. (Reich 255; emphasis in original)

What Reich describes here is rebelliousness and deliberate unconventionality as a result of discontent with an established system of values. In his opinion, actively becoming an outsider is the only way to become truly independent of this system. The characteristics that are developed in the course of distinguishing oneself from society may simultaneously be the beginning of another process: Often, people with similar attitudes find similar ways of expressing their discontent in terms of appearance, language, or “illegal activities,” as mentioned above. These features can unite them into a new, smaller group with its own set of ideals and values based on mutual understanding. This can be the first step into the emergence of what will be referred to as “generations of outsiders.”

The generation Reich refers to in his statement is the American counterculture of the 1960s that “struggles to feel itself as outsiders”: The young people of this movement identify with marginalized groups of society, “with the losers of this world, celebrated in folk songs such as Bob Dylan’s album ‘John Wesley Harding.’ These suggest that only by an antisocial posture can people really be ‘alive’ in a society that is essentially dead” (Reich 255). In the process described, conventional members of society – in this case young people – decide to withdraw into the world of “actual” outsiders to demonstrate their attitude toward mainstream society. The deliberate choice of conversion classifies them as dropouts.

The power of a movement of this sort lies in the passion of its participants, as “the convert is characteristically more enthusiastic about and

committed to his or her new faith or country or political party than established members” (Simmel qtd. in Craib 159). This enthusiasm can be attributed to the feeling of having nothing left to lose that often comes with dropping out and encourages a new confidence. With impulsivity taken into account as well, many parallels can be observed between deviant behavior and juvenile rebelliousness (cf. Becker 158). It seems that, although it cannot be defined as an exclusive criterion, youth is an important factor in the development of generations of outsiders, not least because it unites features like impulsivity, passion, and the willingness to side with a minority. Many aspects of juvenile behavior – positive as well as negative – are significant in this context.

Other important factors for the exclusion or withdrawal from society include individualism and the aspiration for independence, which have already been discussed extensively. These ideals seem to lie at the center of all processes involved and are therefore also regarded as fundamental principles in the examination of outsiderdom and dropping out. There are also factors on the part of society, as the reaction of people to deviant behavior must be regarded as part of the process of exclusion as well (cf. Becker 12).

#### **4. Social Factors: Marginalization as a Product of Interaction**

---

According to Becker, deviant behavior is a product of the relations between the actions of people and the ways others react to them (cf. 13). Unconventionality is thus not created merely through the behavior of the individual but can also emerge through the contact and interaction with others.

This makes society as a whole an important factor. Simmel explains the role of society based on the various and often inconsistent stimuli it offers the individual, which can affect his or her ability to judge what is adequate in which situation (cf. Simmel qtd. in Craib 148f.). As already discussed with regard to the concept of youth, an excessive supply of options can lead to inadequate choices, or even none at all. The expectations and ideals of society may appear conflicting for some people, e.g. when they are confronted with the choice between family and career. People who feel that they are not able to fulfill the expectations of their community are often prone to discouragement and consequently may give up trying to conform altogether.

It can be assumed that there are many people who feel that they cannot meet the expectations of society. However, only a fraction of them solve their problems by actually turning away from it. The reason why most people do not follow their deviant desires but continue to conform to social conventions can be explained by the factor of commitment (cf. Becker 24). The individual is linked more closely to his or her community by the guidelines that have developed from different interests, the compliance with which lays the foundation for a functioning and efficient society (cf. Becker 24). The awareness of the consequences of not obeying these guidelines is for most people strong enough to outweigh their more “unconventional” or deviant interests. The connection between the individual and society is tightened through each interaction, so it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore it and behave in a divergent way. In other words, the longer someone lives conforming to the system, the closer they become attached, commitment is increased, and thus more effort is required to break established rules.

Whether or not an action is regarded as deviant also depends largely on the judgment of the community. Although people themselves have put into effect the laws and regulations that organize their society, this does not mean that every breach of a rule will be punished as such; alternatively, there can also be cases where people are judged without having broken any rules (cf. Becker 10). In this context it becomes evident that the reactions to unconventionalities are based on a rather subjective assessment. As Becker observes, there are various factors that can influence such a decision. The aspect of time is an important factor in this context: Due to specific events or developments during a certain period of time, there are violations that are paid particular attention and accompanied by forms of “campaigns” against them, while at other times they are overlooked (cf. Becker 11). An example of such a campaign is Prohibition, when the consumption of alcohol was punished by law, while in the time before and after it was, if anything, disapproved of only as a bad habit.

This example is connected to another aspect that influences the reaction to deviance. The seriousness of misdemeanor often depends on who acts and who is affected, in other words, the members of which social groups are involved. Becker observes this in the context of juvenile delinquency, where it shows that boys from middle class backgrounds often do not have to face the same penal consequences as their counterparts belonging to lower classes (cf. Becker 11). Inequality becomes evident especially in cases that involve black and white people (particularly at the time when Becker conducted his studies, in 1963), where the aspect of who is affected plays an even more important role for the judgment of the severity of a case (cf. Becker 11f.).

These relations between different social groups – lower and higher class, younger and older, or black and white people – once more reveal the significance of power: Those who have more power are generally those who impose rules on the weaker ones (cf. Becker 16). This circumstance is remarkable with respect to the fact that it suggests that the rules for specific groups are not made by their members, but by others. The “others,” the ones in power, are actually outsiders of the group they try to command. The laws that regulate the lives of young people, for instance, have been established by older and more experienced members of society (cf. Becker 15). Such a model of administration can be problematic, as it brings about a certain potential for conflict due to the different interests and attitudes of the parties involved.

The relation between the more influential and the weaker social groups manifests itself in the self-perception of the members. People of higher classes often regard themselves as “better” and gain confidence from the common values and ideals of the group, while the weaker ones often lack this feeling of social cohesion (cf. Elias and Scotson 8). This indicates that members of less powerful groups are not only regarded as inferior by the more privileged, but also develop a corresponding self-perception. Becker describes this process as a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” as people who are in some respect regarded as deviant are first of all judged by this characteristic before any other aspects of their personality are perceived (cf. 30). The result is to some extent a vicious circle, as the individual develops according to the image others have of him or her. Another consequence for people who are marginalized in this way is that they are deprived of some of the basic practices of everyday life, which Becker demonstrates in the case of a drug addict (cf. 31f.). This special example of deviant behavior includes the aspect of criminality, which makes it impossible

for the individual in question to satisfy his or her desires in a conventional way. Another example would be that of an immigrant without a work permit, who may feel forced to find other, i.e. illegal, ways of earning money in order to provide for his family. Although in the latter case the motive may be honorable, it still includes the breaking of the rules of society.

## **5. Group Identity as a Source of Confidence**

In both cases, that of “insiders” as well as that of outsiders of society, group identity plays a central role. It functions as a source of strength and confidence, as already mentioned above. Concerning groups of outsiders, such as the counterculture of the 1960s as portrayed by Reich, the establishment of a group identity is essential for achieving the aim of freedom and “independent consciousness” (cf. 255). The power of the group serves for its members as a reassurance that they are on the right track concerning their ideals. The new value system is based on the consensus of a smaller group and just like in other communities has to be regarded as a guideline for adequate behavior. As long as the individual acts according to the new rules, he or she is rewarded with the confirmation of his or her own ideals.

The overarching characteristic that the members of groups of outsiders have in common evidently is their deviant behavior, which, apart from confirmation and confidence, also provides them with the feeling of a “shared destiny,” i.e. they all have to deal with the problems of rejection in one way or another (cf. Becker 34). Especially for these individuals, group identity at the same time has the effect of restoring their own identity and self-perception.

The effects can differ slightly with regard to outsiders and dropouts. For an outsider, who may have suffered from the exclusion to a point of self-doubt, a new confidence through group identity can be salvation, whereas for a dropout, whose withdrawal was intentional, the new confidence can increase an already existing enthusiasm to a point where another line is crossed. Problems arise when members of a group keep pushing each other further until they cross the legal line into delinquency, a phenomenon which is very common among young people in pursuit of adventure and excitement (cf. chapter III.).

The social cohesion of already established groups, “majority groups” so to speak, often is based on a “common past” (cf. Elias and Scotson 37). This can be regarded as the equivalent of the shared destiny of minority groups and provides at least as strong a foundation. The shared history serves as a source of power, as it unites all the knowledge and experiences that have been gathered by the members’ ancestors. Experience and continuance are also reasons why “conventional” communities have already established hierarchies and a working “internal ranking” (cf. Elias and Scotson 37). This kind of structure is something a newly emerged group lacks and that its members first have to figure out in order to be able to organize themselves.

The unity and cohesion of the more powerful group also enables them to stay in power, as they are able to save essential social positions for their own members, which again reinforces their union and further excludes outsiders from their ranks (cf. Elias and Scotson 12). Due to these circumstances, a shift in power is generally highly unlikely in modern societies. The activities of outsider groups can, however, bring forward social change to some extent, even if the result is often rather a compromise between their ideals and those of

mainstream society. Sometimes, the influence of subculture movements is revealed only after some time has passed. On all accounts, it can be stated that especially generations of outsiders offer valuable clues and provide an insight into the processes going on in the societies of their time.

V. THE LOST GENERATION AND HEMINGWAY'S *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

Based on the theoretical aspects discussed in the preceding chapters, the following parts of this thesis will show how the different developments in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America are involved in the emergence of “generations of outsiders.” This term is intended to illustrate that the members of the different generations were all outsiders or dropouts of society to some extent. Before this assumption is examined in more detail, the term “generation” has to be clarified, even though it is difficult to determine its exact meaning. The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary offers three definitions: “a group of people born and living during the same time,” “the people in a family born and living during the same time,” and “the average length of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their children” (“Generation”). From these definitions it becomes clear why a generation can only be distinguished roughly, as the time periods can never be limited to an exact number of years. It seems that generations are easier to define in retrospect, when we look back at actual experiences and developments that united people in a certain way, such as times of war. The most important aspect of the definition is that a generation always refers to people of approximately the same age, as it can be assumed that they will react similarly and bring along comparable premises. Additional characteristics are suggested by F. Scott Fitzgerald: “[I]t appears when writers of the same age join in a common revolt against the fathers and when, in the process of adopting a new life style, they find their own models and spokesmen” (qtd. in Cowley 238).

Based on the analysis of the novels by Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, and Douglas Coupland, three generations will be examined that are considered “generations of outsiders.” The characters portrayed in these works are regarded as representatives of these generations who also exhibit characteristics of social marginality and illustrate how this basis is relevant for the development of new social groups.

## **1. The Lost Generation**

The first generation that will be examined is the so-called Lost Generation, a term that refers to writers active in the early 1920s. To define a time frame for the members of this group, Malcolm Cowley argues that they were born between 1894 and 1900 (cf. vii), i.e., they were coming of age around the time of America’s entry into World War I. During this time, many young men were drafted as soldiers and it was experiences like these that most of all “made them a generation, by changing their world and by giving them shares, as it were, in a rich fund of common emotions” (Cowley 3). They were welded together by these incisive experiences into a new group with shared knowledge and a new understanding of the world. Furthermore, they developed a consciousness of these circumstances that Cowley grants no generation before or after it (cf. vii).

However, the distinctiveness of the Lost Generation is not only to be seen in a positive way. As the name implies, its members define themselves as “lost,” as “the specially damned and forsaken, lost from all others and themselves by the unique conviction of their loss, the conviction by which they

lived, wrote, and perceived the life of their time” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 3). The feeling of not belonging anywhere is very common among young people who try to find their place in the adult world. Due to their age and against the background of the experiences of the war, the reintegration into everyday procedures of “normal” life was even harder for young men. The result often was a feeling of disillusionment, which awakened in many of them the desire to break free from the daily routine of their postwar environment: “They left college and jobs to find, in what seemed a glorious adventure, escape from boredom and a cause worthy of belief” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 3). Young people, especially writers, decided to drop out of society in order to find new meaning and a new confidence.

A shift in the meaning of the term illustrates that the act of dropping out soon came to be a characteristic of the Lost Generation. The first to apply this name presumably was Gertrude Stein, who is quoted in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* as having stated: “You are all a lost generation”<sup>2</sup> (cf. also Monk 1). While the term was first used to refer to “the younger generation” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in general, its denotation was soon reduced to expatriate American writers (cf. Monk 2). Expatriation, at least for some time, and a literary profession thus became distinguishing features of the Lost Generation. In a way, both can be regarded as forms of dropping out: leaving the country on the physical side, retreating into imagination by the act of writing on the psychological side.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*, 1927 (London: Arrow, 2004) n.p.

Hereafter abbreviated as SAR with page numbers in parentheses.

## **1.1. Cultural, political, and social developments as sources of disillusionment**

The motives for the decision to drop out of society can be located in the cultural, political, and social background of these young Americans. In every respect, World War I was the most influential event of the first decades of the 20th century. Especially for the young people of the time, it can be regarded as an incisive experience, even as a turning point in their lives: “The war [...] gave them the feeling of having lived in two eras, almost on two different planets” (Cowley vii). Due to their age, which already involved the struggle with finding their own identity as well as a disposition to insecurity and self-doubt, the external impact of the war had an even greater effect on adolescents. Being basically only at the beginning of their (adult) life, they felt even more uprooted because of the confrontation with a completely different life after the war.

For young men, America’s entry into the war often meant that they were called to military duty. However, there were – especially among aspiring writers, as Cowley observes – many who did not “wait to be drafted” (10) and often decided to join European military forces (cf. *ibid.*). There are various reasons why people would voluntarily join a war, but in this context, the aspect of age in particular should not be disregarded. As already explained with respect to adolescence and deviant behavior, young people often tend to strive for adventure and excitement, sometimes not even considering the consequences. It is therefore not surprising that joining the war to many appeared appealing in a way: “The possibility, almost the certainty, of being

killed lent meaning and glamour to what might have been aimless lives” (Cowley 7). What makes this perspective fatal is the fact that the awareness of danger is mostly obscured by the prospect of finally finding one’s place in society and a new meaning in life. This kind of fatal attitude is not exclusively a feature of young people, but can be found in everyone who suffers from a certain loss of perspective.

With the end of the war there came a sense of disorientation, which can be traced back to the fact that those who had so eagerly joined the war had not expected to come out of it alive (cf. Cowley 13). As shattering as the experiences of the war had been, in a way they still had provided many men with a feeling of meaningfulness. All of a sudden, they were deprived of what had become the purpose of their lives and were presented with a future they did not expect to see, which left them without any plans, expectations, or occupation. For a short period, there had been a glimpse of hope that they “could play their part in an old American dream, that of building a new order of the ages” (Cowley 14), but soon it was followed by disillusionment. The sources of the disillusionment of the young returnees were changes in society, which in their opinion seemed to take a turn for the worse after the war and involved “[p]rohibition, puritanism, philistinism, and salesmanship: these seemed to be the triumphant causes in America” (Cowley 53). While for the rest of the Western world, America had become a role model with regard to its teen image and culture (cf. chapter III), some members of its society did not agree with this admiration. They suddenly felt confronted with a society that increasingly imposed regulations on its members, controlling knowledge, morals, business and pleasure likewise.

Due to these developments, young writers began to consider themselves “an oppressed minority, orphans and strangers in their own country” (Cowley 14). They no longer felt to be part of their society, but that they were deprived of their freedom and so they finally decided to leave their home country in order to regain it somewhere else. This illustrates how dropping out of society in a physical sense can also be an expression of disagreement with its established rules. The young people who chose to leave behind the perceived oppression of their country by moving to another place at the same time also turned away from the “conventional training in high schools and colleges, where they had been equipped with standard attitudes and prejudices” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 3). Their education had prepared them neither for the experiences of the war nor for the changes in society in the time afterward. For that reason, the young writers felt deceived to some extent by the system of morals and values according to which they were raised and thus preferred going into voluntary exile to remaining part of a society “which was neither gay enough nor cultured enough to deserve their presence” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 12). The form of revolt as exhibited by the members of the Lost Generation can be regarded as an implicit accusation of the hypocrisy of society.

## **1.2. American expatriation: Dropping out in search of a new perspective**

For young American people, writers and artists in particular, who felt deprived of their freedom in their home country, many of the destinations that were thought to promise new independence were located in Europe. Especially Paris soon became a refuge, if not the center for American expatriates, “not as if they were being driven into exile, but as if they were seeking a spiritual home” (Cowley 53). Paris became a symbol for the availability of everything they desired and felt they were denied in their own country.

The writers who decided to leave America for Europe also had the impression that the literary scene of their home country did not offer enough “indigenous creative activity” (Monk 3). This shows that, despite the various efforts in the history of American literature, e.g. by the Transcendentalists, originality and an individual, recognizable voice of the nation were still missed by some. After the war, many young people were left without prospect and therefore turned to Europe, hoping to find in its artistic quality and creativity a new source of inspiration (cf. Monk 3). A slight shift of attitude can be observed in this context, especially in the younger people: Instead of trying to break with the European tradition like many of their predecessors, they began to regard it as more stimulating and in some respects also as more creative.

Although Europe was war-torn and devastated in an emotional as well as in a physical sense, young Americans saw in it a place of hope where they could find new values and ideals to believe in (cf. Monk 9). It seems that this

new hope would in a way fill the void that had been left by the disappointment of the American Dream. The high expectations and visions they had of their destinations presumably were the primary motivation for young writers to leave for Europe. On arrival, however, they were soon confronted with reality: “What was intended as freedom from American subjugation led instead to new limitations, shaped in an environment of largesse” (Monk 6). The new restrictions were caused both by the slightly too optimistic expectations and the subsequent handling of the situation in which the American expatriates found themselves. Inspired by the “environment of largesse” of Paris, they began to develop the distinctive lifestyle that is also described in *The Sun Also Rises*. In the beginning, many writers hoped that the new environment would stimulate their creativity and believed that success was right around the corner, but they soon were disabused of this notion (cf. Monk 6f.). As a result, and also due to the less expensive standard of living, they began to follow a more extravagant lifestyle, getting together in bars and restaurants, drinking a lot, basically arranging their daily routine around their social relations and leisure activities (cf. Monk 6f.). Still, it seems that there was a tendency to mingle with like-minded people who shared the same fate, i.e. the situation of expatriation as well as creative stagnation to some extent. This kind of social behavior also implies that there is little interaction with the rest of society and hence only little integration, which is also illustrated in Hemingway’s novel. Thus, after having dropped out from their own community by leaving the country, the young writers in a way also became outsiders in their new environment.

The economic crisis at the end of the 1920s finally had far-reaching consequences also for the American expatriates, as this meant for them a dramatic reduction of their already few sources of income, and for most of

them it even meant that they had to return to their home country at last (cf. Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 20). The final return was thus not entirely of their own volition, and also implied the failure of their original goals and intentions, which had not been accomplished to a satisfying extent. Although the Great Depression may have been the trigger, it was not the only reason why the time of expatriation came to an end. Another important factor for the perceived failure of the Lost Generation was the way in which its members had tried to realize their ideals: The movement was doomed in a way, as it had been “drawing too long on resources which it did not possess” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 21). The expatriates had lived beyond their means for too long without making profit or meeting with success, and as a result they felt compelled to resign. Once more they were confronted with disillusion and the loss of perspective.

### **1.3. Writing as a way of processing experience**

After the turn of the century, there was a remarkably high number of young aspiring writers in America. Cowley observes that, even before the incisive events of the war, some of them exhibited very distinctive features that distinguished them from their peers:

They had more imagination than most of their contemporaries. They had more vanity [...] more initiative and curiosity, more sympathy with foreign cultures [...] and more eagerness for experience. They wanted to see everything so they could write about everything. They had [...]

stronger opinions than most people, and their attitudes to the war ran the full gamut from pacifism to jingoism. (Cowley 9)

These characteristics show the open-mindedness and also the inquisitiveness of the writers that would soon be referred to as the Lost Generation. Their thirst for knowledge paired with the spirit of adventure that was typical of their young age may have been the primary reasons for them to voluntarily join the war. As already mentioned, many young Americans decided to join European military forces, even though this made them “spectators of somebody else’s war” (Cowley 10). However, it was the “spectatorial” aspect that seemed especially appealing to the inquisitive nature of the writers. Many of the Lost Generation’s most renowned representatives, like Ernest Hemingway or John Dos Passos, served as ambulance drivers, as this would bring them closest to the events on the different fronts (cf. Cowley 10).

Affected and inspired by what they experienced and observed during the war, they tried to establish distinctive characteristics and new styles of expression. The writings of the Lost Generation in many ways reflect their attitudes and ideals, but they also illustrate the sensation of being lost by which they came to be defined, as will be shown using *The Sun Also Rises* as an example. Their works reveal a dichotomy, a “blend of tenderness and violence, innocence and numbness” (Aldridge, *Lost Generation* 6), that can be traced back to the transition from the curiosity-motivated position of the spectator to the active involvement and confrontation with the reality of the war (cf. *ibid.*). They all had considered the war a certain death sentence, and thus their unexpected survival was almost overstraining them. The reason for this has

already been explained; after having found meaning to some extent in the war, the young men were again left disillusioned and without a perspective when it was over. Fitzgerald even stated that the certainty of death had been a major motivation for him to write (qtd. in Cowley 7f.).

Wartime and the traumatic experiences and impressions that came with it demanded a lot of stamina and strength from the people involved. Hence, when the war was over, there was an excess of “nervous energy,” but nowhere to direct it anymore: “Many of them – with Hemingway the most conspicuous example among writers – were to spend the next ten years looking for another stage on which they could re-enact the dangers and recapture the winey taste of war” (Cowley 13). Writing can thus be regarded as an attempt at filling the void that had developed and also as a way of converting the accumulated energy into productivity. This aspect is significant especially with regard to the way of life the members of the Lost Generation cultivated in expatriation: While they seemed to be drifting and without prospects concerning their personal lives and the future, they were “intensely ambitious” about their literary profession (cf. Cowley 250).

The writers of the Lost Generation were particularly concerned with language and the ways in which it could be used (cf. Cowley 16). As language is the primary means for authors to convey their attitudes and beliefs, it often reveals a lot about their general disposition. Hemingway, for instance, advanced the view that “everything that can be taken for granted” can be left out in a text (cf. Cowley 49), a literary technique that would later be referred to as Iceberg Theory. The reduction to the most relevant aspects can be misleading with regard to subject matter, as the omission of “unnecessary”

details does not imply the simplification of the content. Rather, it encourages the reader's interpretation and independent (and also critical) thinking – a concern that is reminiscent of what had already been put forward by the American Transcendentalists.

American writers had come to Europe looking for a new perspective and a new way to realize their ideals and values. Although they had dropped out of society, these shared ideals, their origins and especially their interest in literature were the factors that united them in their voluntary exile and made them part of a community – or, in retrospect, a generation – once again. As already mentioned with regard to outsiders and dropouts, group dynamics can strengthen the confidence of their members, which is assumed to be the reason why the writers of the Lost Generation “regarded themselves as an elite [...]. They were an elite not by birth or money or education [...] but rather by such inner qualities as energy, independence, vision, rigor, an original way of combining words (a style, a ‘voice’), and utter commitment to a dream” (Cowley 249). The encounter of like-minded people who shared a similar fate had steadied their belief in their ideals as well as their self-confidence. Even though it can sometimes be regarded as a form of dropping out of reality, writing was also a way out of disillusionment and offered the prospect of making a change by spreading their philosophy and reaching out to even more people who might share it.

## 2. Outsiders and Dropouts in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

---

Due to its detailed description of the life and activities of the Lost Generation, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* was soon considered a "handbook of conduct for the new generation" (Cowley 71). The characters in the novel convey the underlying sense of disillusion and the lack of perspective of the time, and they all can be defined as outsiders to some extent. Like their real world counterparts, almost all of them "have lost their original code of values. Feeling the loss, they are now trying to live by a simpler code, essentially that of soldiers on furlough, and it is this effort that unites them as a group" (Cowley 71). The sensation of being lost is very present in Hemingway's characters, and although this shared experience serves as a bond, they all have to come to terms with themselves on their own. Based on these assumptions it shall now be discussed how Hemingway's portrayal of the American expatriates illustrates the concept of a "generation of outsiders."

### 2.1. Literary conceptualization of the Lost Generation

*The Sun Also Rises* was first published in 1926. It was Hemingway's first novel, written after "an intense four-year writing apprenticeship (to Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and others), [...] with a sense of surety, a knowledge of craft, and a belief that literature could create morality" (Wagner-Martin 1). In contrast to many other

writers of the Lost Generation, who were still hoping to get published, Hemingway had established his reputation as a writer even before his first novel. For him, working on a longer text was the next step in order to increase his recognition as a writer and to “leave his apprenticeship status behind” (Wagner-Martin 3). As he regarded literature as a means to convey morality, the novel can also be seen as a “statement about his life, his friends, his rebellion against the codifying temper of the postwar years in America” (Wagner-Martin 16). *The Sun Also Rises* is a snapshot in time, portraying a group of young American expatriates who epitomize the lives and attitudes, as well as the disillusionment, of the Lost Generation. Many of the characters and events are based on real acquaintances and experiences of Hemingway’s, thus the book can be regarded as a roman à clef (cf. Wagner-Martin 3). Written in Hemingway’s unique style of omitting the obvious, many things remain unsaid and are left to the interpretation and imagination of the reader.

As already mentioned, Hemingway quotes Gertrude Stein as the originator of the term “Lost Generation” (cf. SAR, n.p.). Throughout the novel, there are several other references to the generation and the situation of American expatriates. One of the most significant statements in this context is made by Bill Gorton, who confronts Jake with his definition of expatriation:

You’re only a newspaper man. An expatriated newspaper man. You ought to be ironical the minute you get out of bed. You ought to wake up with your mouth full of pity. [...] You’re an expatriate. One of the worst type. [...] Nobody that ever left their own country ever wrote anything worth printing. [...] You’re an expatriate. You’ve lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined

you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. [...] You hang around cafés.  
(SAR 100)

In this statement, Gorton shows how the Lost Generation is perceived by other Americans, by those who stayed at home and did not drop out of society. However, the main points he addresses can indeed be applied to many of the movement's representatives, such as the eagerness to have their works published, or the adaptation to "European standards," which have influenced the way of life of the expatriates.

The war as a traumatic experience and the source of disillusion is referred to in many respects, its "presence [...] is unescapable in the attitudes and conditions of the characters" (Wagner-Martin 8). At times, allusions are made only subtly, but at other times the war is also addressed very directly. Many of the characters served in the war and on various occasions the reader learns about their involvement, e.g. when Brett wants Mike to tell the others about his medals (cf. SAR 117f.) or when Jake speaks about his accident (cf. SAR 14). When Jake and Bill meet Harris on their fishing trip, he states that he has "not had much fun since the war" (SAR 112). It becomes clear that the experiences of wartime are still very present and in many ways have irreversibly changed the lives of the people involved. In search of new meaning and a new perspective they have come to Europe, where they expect to find inspiration and also the freedom they felt deprived of in their home country (cf. Wagner-Martin 5). These expectations are revealed, for instance, when Jake comments on France as being the "simplest country to live in. No one makes things complicated by becoming your friend for any obscure reason" (SAR

204). This remark is at once a subtle critique of hypocrisy that may be alluding to American society, and the explanation of his choice of France as exile, or even as adopted home. The life in expatriation to some extent seems to be a way of taking a break from responsibility and trying to recover from the recent events. In a way, the war and especially coming out of it alive are seen by many as an inspiration to seize the moment and live life to its fullest, although with the side effects of recklessness or indifference. Expatriate life is an attempt at coming to terms with traumatic experiences in order to be able to find meaning again.

## **2.2. The significance of group identity**

To some extent, all of the major characters in *The Sun Also Rises* can be regarded as dropouts, even if it is only for the aspect of expatriation. Even though the reasons for leaving their home countries are not revealed in detail, it becomes clear that they share similar attitudes and beliefs. Apart from these similarities, what unites them as a group is the impression that they all share the same fate: “These are people who understand each other, the rules they live by, and the reasons for their choices” (Wagner-Martin 7). What is also significant in this context is that, despite having left their native countries, they seem to stick mainly to people of the same origin or people who at least speak the same language (cf. SAR 14f.). Although they interact with locals and other Europeans from time to time, and some of them – like Jake – have put effort into learning the local languages, their behavior implies that they are not really

interested in fully integrating into their new country of residence. On the other hand, they sometimes also dissociate themselves from their compatriots, which can be observed in Jake on several occasions, e.g. when he remarks that he does not go to a restaurant anymore as there are “[t]oo many compatriots” (SAR 67), or when he distances himself from the (other) tourists in Pamplona (cf. SAR 178). He makes a clear distinction between himself as an expatriate and his compatriots, who only come to the country on vacation. It seems that he does not consider himself as much a “foreigner” as his fellow citizens, from whom he tries to separate as he can no longer identify with them.

It seems that the company of like-minded people is essential for the expatriates in the sense that it reassures them that they are not alone, and so a form of group identity develops that provides them with the confidence they have been lacking ever since the war. Being part of the group becomes what defines them, and social activities like “hanging out” in bars and restaurants are essential for holding up the impression of recuperation. It has a diverting effect and is thus practiced almost excessively. When they are alone and confronted with their own thoughts, however, their anxiety is revealed, and their thoughts reflect “[t]he old grievance” (SAR 27). The reader can observe such moments of self-doubt and distress in Jake, who often gets lost in his thoughts after returning from evenings in company involving a lot of alcohol: “In five years, I thought, it will seem just as silly as all the other fine philosophies I’ve had. [...] I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it” (SAR 129). These thoughts once more illustrate the feeling of being lost that can be assumed to be shared also by the other characters from time to time, as well as the significance of group identity and the sensation of “being in this together” for their ability to overcome this state.

### 2.3. Robert Cohn: The prototype of an outsider

With regard to the subject matter of outsiders and dropouts, Robert Cohn can be regarded as one of the most revealing characters. His personality unites many characteristics that are generally attributed to outsiders. In a way, he can even be seen as a “prototypical outsider”: As a Jew, he was born into a group that has been repeatedly marginalized by society, which makes him an existential outsider in Mayer’s definition (cf. chapter IV). When he realized that his religion was a stigma to some extent, he took up boxing “to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew in Princeton” (SAR 3). As Jake observes, his general appearance is rather inconspicuous: “I never met anyone of his class who remembered him. They did not even remember that he was middleweight boxing champion” (SAR 3). Robert Cohn is described as a modest character who tries to avoid being the center of attention. It almost seems that he deliberately keeps in the background: “I never heard him make one remark that would, in any way, detach him from other people. [...] If he were in a crowd nothing he said stood out” (SAR 39). Jake attributes this behavior to his shyness, but also feels pity for Cohn when he realizes that his inconspicuousness does in fact bother him (cf. SAR 4, 9).

Even though at first sight Cohn seems to be relatively content with his modest life, it is soon revealed that he also suffers from disorientation: “I can’t stand it to think my life is going so fast and I’m not really living it. [...] Don’t you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you’re not taking advantage of it?” (SAR 9). With these questions, Cohn addresses one of the

main problems the Lost Generation writers had to deal with. The constant search for meaning and purpose of life left them with a feeling that can be compared to waiting for something to happen (but not actively contributing to inducing it). One can speak of a certain passivity in this context that resulted from disillusion and consequently put the young writers in a state of stagnation.

With regard to women, it seems that Robert Cohn's self-esteem has over the years also been impaired by his shyness. After the divorce from his first wife, he has settled for Frances, a woman that turns out very dominant and controlling (cf. SAR 5, 40ff.). Considering the way Frances' behavior toward Robert is described, it can be assumed that the relationship is maybe not an unhappy one, but, to some extent, a compromise for both of them. There is an undertone on both sides of not being able to "find anything better," due to Cohn's general insecurity and to Frances finding "that her looks were going" (SAR 5). Only when Cohn falls in love with Brett does he show a trace of passion, but his reaction to her rejection shows his inability to deal with the setback. This incompetence is also revealing with regard to his character, as it shows that he seems to be unable to "comprehend and recognize tragedy" (Meyerson 102f.) – a trait that often finds little enthusiasm among his friends.

Due to his generally inconspicuous appearance, his "wonderful quality of bringing out the worst in anybody" (SAR 86), and finally his advances toward Brett, Cohn also becomes an outsider of the newly established group of expatriates. Although most people generally seem to think of him as a pleasant person to be around, they get slightly annoyed after a while, and in some respects he does not seem to fit in with the rest of the group. Despite corresponding to the characteristics that have been defined as most relevant for

the Lost Generation, literary profession and expatriation, he lacks one significant aspect that distinguishes him from the others. As the only one of the men who “has never been wounded and has never learned to be resigned” (Cowley 71), he lacks those incisive experiences that have so dramatically influenced the other young men around him and that lie at the heart of their decision to drop out in search of a new perspective. In contrast to his friends, he is thus “fairly happy” (SAR 5) and not as resigned concerning his situation. He is the only one who has not completely given up hope yet and “still believes in the possibility of a happy ending and in his ability to effect it” (Meyerson 102). In this context, it also becomes apparent that Cohn’s reason for leaving America was not his but Frances’ decision (cf. SAR 5), and so he did not drop out due to his own motivation. This is one aspect that can be regarded as illustrating a somewhat “tag-along” behavior, which he exhibits on several occasions, for instance when he goes to San Sebastian with Brett.

Even though Cohn may not be very popular, and even annoying at times, it turns out that he has an important function for the group. In a way, this character can be regarded as a “human lightning rod, as the salient figure who draws the vicious energies out of a charged social environment” (Meyerson 101). On him, the other characters, like Brett or Jake, can take out their emotions, anger, and frustration. This effect is also revealed when Mike attacks him, even though it seems that he is really upset about Brett and Romero (cf. SAR 154f.).

## 2.4. Jake Barnes: The inner life of the Lost Generation

As Jake Barnes is the narrator of the story, it is his thoughts that the reader gets to know best and that, apart from commenting on activities and events, also provide an insight into the inner conflict of the members of the Lost Generation. Like Robert Cohn, Jake corresponds to the central features of being a writer and the decision for self-exile in Europe. However, the war has significantly affected him, both mentally and physically. The injury he suffered in the war has apparently impaired his virility (cf. SAR 14, *passim*), which can be seen as a psychological strain in addition to the distressing experiences of the war *per se*. His “physical incapacity” can also be regarded as “a striking image of many kinds of disability” (Wagner-Martin 5) and thus represents the feeling of powerlessness of the members of the Lost Generation. Due to the feeling of being emasculated, Jake tends to withdraw and to maintain a certain distance to the women around him. His injury makes him an existential outsider, as it affects his interaction with others. Even though for the reader it seems that the stigmatization is rather a matter of Jake’s own perception than the actual way others act toward him, the issue of the wound is always present in the novel (cf. Wagner-Martin 5).

With regard to the situation of expatriation and the consequences of dropping out, Jake seems to take on a very self-reflective and objective position. Repeatedly, he reminds his friends of the fact that a change of place will not automatically involve a change in them: “I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another” (SAR 10). Even

though he also has left his home country, he is aware of the fact that a change of environment alone cannot solve his problems, and that the same is true for his friends.

The social aspect and the significance of being in company have already been discussed with regard to group identity. In this context, the role of drinking also becomes relevant. Evidently, the use of alcohol is inevitably involved in the characters' idea of diversion and pastime activity. Regardless of the occasion, it seems that all of them are "tight" most of the time (cf. SAR 62, *passim*). On the one hand, the presence of alcohol can be attributed to the purpose of increasing sociability and amusement, an aspect often considered typical of (Southern) European mentality, to which the expatriates tried to adapt. The overcoming of inhibitions, as well as the facilitation of socializing may – in moderation – be considered further positive effects. On the other hand, drinking must always be regarded as a form of escapism and a means of suppression. This contrast is also observed by Jake when he drinks with Bill: "The absinthe made everything seem better" (SAR 192). Again, he exhibits his awareness of what can be referred to as the futility of the expatriate lifestyle, but still he obviously has no ambition to turn away from it. On Bill's slightly exaggerated sermon about expatriation, he even comments that it "sounds like a swell life" (SAR 100).

In the course of the novel, Jake points out several characteristics that can be considered significant with regard to the Lost Generation as well as to marginality. After the first dinner of the group in Pamplona, he compares the atmosphere to evenings he remembers from his time in the war: "There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could

not prevent happening” (SAR 127). His remarks again highlight the role of alcohol as a component of social life, and confirm the permanent presence of anxiety that is pushed to the background when he is in company. Like Cohn, Jake alludes to the sensation of “waiting” for something and admits to a certain degree of passivity of himself and his fellow expatriates. This passivity becomes evident, for example, when he defers to Romero concerning Brett, instead of trying to fight for her (cf. SAR 62).

Jake, also due to his narrative position, sometimes takes on the function of an observer, who comments on the events around him. In this way, he exhibits the spectatorial attitude that is characteristic of many Lost Generation writers and is also realized in his occupation as “newspaper man” (SAR 100). Although Jake is always involved in the activities of the group, he often has “negative moments” in which his passivity toward others is revealed (cf. Meyerson 102). He then seems to feel the need to retreat after a while, and often is the first to leave the party. He does so, for instance, on the first day of the fiesta, reassuring Cohn that he only “got sleepy” (SAR 139). To what extent Jake is convinced of this may be subject to interpretation, however, a more obvious weariness is revealed after the fiesta is over and he is on his own again. Back in France, he realizes that he is “through with fiestas for a while” (SAR 203) and with this expresses a certain longing for peace and quiet. He has a bottle of wine “for company,” enjoying the fact that he can drink it on his own and in a moderate speed (cf. SAR 204).

## 2.5. Features of marginality in other characters

To some extent, the fiesta has become a refuge for the group of expatriates in Hemingway's novel, as it provides them with distraction around the clock over several days: "Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences" (SAR 134). By keeping the people involved and "occupied" in a way, it serves as a sort of exile from their daily lives. Still, there are some moments when the characters reveal more about their inner lives.

Brett, for example, is a very ambivalent character. On the one hand she is very popular, especially with regard to men, and likes to emphasize this fact: "Told him I knew too many people everywhere" (SAR 29). On the other hand, even though it seems to be true that she knows a lot of people, this does not protect her against loneliness. Apart from Jake, most of her relations to others can be regarded as rather superficial, which she even admits in conversation with the count (cf. SAR 51). With Brett, the reader can see most clearly the need for company: "She has never learned the value of anything, has given up or never taken control of her life, and so has passed into the control of random impulse and boredom. In the ultimate sense of the word, Brett is lost" (Aldridge, "Afterthoughts" 125). It shows that it is difficult for her to do anything alone or on her own responsibility, or go anywhere on her own, she always needs someone to accompany her (cf. SAR 89, *passim*). Brett depends on the appreciation of others, especially men, in order to rebuild and maintain her self-esteem. Love and affection are essential for her comfort and serve as a reassurance of her popularity and that she is not alone (cf. Wagner-Martin 5).

Mike Campbell has also served in the war and now is an “undischarged bankrupt” (SAR 69) who often attracts attention due to his drinking behavior. Apart from his engagement to Brett, there does not seem to be much purpose in life for him. Unlike Jake and Cohn, he is not one of the “literary chaps,” which apparently bothers him to some extent as he brings it up in discussion (cf. SAR 154). It can be argued that Mike feels excluded in some respects; he has to witness his fiancée falling in love with Romero, feels that he is intellectually not a fully-fledged member of the group, and also has no occupation to attend to.

As can be seen, all of the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* display certain features of marginality. For most of them, the experience of the war has been the source of their disillusionment. In an attempt at finding new meaning and also distraction, they have dropped out of their own society and come to Paris, where they spend their time mainly “hanging around” cafés and restaurants. In this way, they get together with other people who are in a similar situation, who share the same experiences and have also turned away from society. It is this feeling of a “shared fate” that unites them and lays the foundation for the development of a new group, a generation of outsiders, which would later be referred to as the Lost Generation.

## VI. THE BEAT GENERATION AND KEROUAC'S *ON THE ROAD*

### 1. The Beat Generation

---

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in the 1950s and 1960s, youth culture and nonconformity reached a new peak with the development of new subgroups of society that emerged due to the discontent of its members with the established system of rules. Accordingly, these nonconformist groups are often referred to as “counterculture” (Duncan 144, *passim*). The movements signified by this term illustrate most clearly the features that have been discussed so far with regard to “generations of outsiders.” The most significant group in this context is the so-called Beat Generation. According to the author John Clellon Holmes, it received its name from Jack Kerouac, who used the buzzword “beat” – at the time understood “in the sense of beaten, frustrated, played out” (Cook 6) – to describe his generation.

What defines members of such groups as outsiders, or rather dropouts, of society is the act of actively turning away from this society due to their disagreement with its set of values. As a result, they practice nonconformity, which can manifest itself in various forms of behavior that have been discussed already in the previous chapters. The factor of youth is of special interest in this context: Even though all of the generations discussed mainly involve young people, the youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s illustrates more than any other movement how adolescent impulsiveness and, to a certain degree, rebelliousness can have a significant impact on social developments.

Consequently, what may have started as a small group of marginalized people, can appeal to others who share their attitude, but were not confident enough to turn away from society before. In this context, the factor of group identity becomes evident again.

### **1.1. Cultural, political, and social developments as sources of disillusionment**

The reasons for disagreement are various and originate once more in the social and political developments of the time, which can be understood as a challenge for the central values of American identity as well as “an ordeal for artists and intellectuals” (Tytell 5). America, like the rest of the world, had just endured two World Wars in the recent past, an experience that did not leave its society unaffected and

marked a major shift in the spectrum of American social thought: The mobilization of resources, intellectual as well as industrial, for the war effort ‘had all but eliminated the critical intellectual, drawing even the most disenchanted free floater into supporting the struggle against fascism.’ (Jamison and Eyerman qtd. in Holton 13)

The war was challenging not only from an emotional point of view, but it also consumed the energy the individual needed for personal matters and opinions. During this time, the common good and social cohesion were more important than the concerns of the individual, and due to the almost immediate transition to the Cold War, discussion and the exchange of critical views were

still neglected after the end of World War II (cf. Holton 14). It becomes apparent that some of the central values that had been established over time in American society were no longer working properly after the crisis-ridden times of war. Instead, new ideals emerged “that accepted man as the victim of circumstances, and no longer granted him the agency of his own destiny: the illusion of free will, the buoyantly igniting spark in the American character, had been suddenly extinguished” (Tytell 9). In contrast to the ideal of individualism, there was now a tendency toward conformity, and instead of unlimited opportunities there were new restrictions, particularly in the intellectual field. Most notably for intellectual and creative people, like writers and artists, these developments entailed disillusionment and the sensation of being deceived by the promises of society.

As a result, especially young people adopted a more skeptical position and were inspired to critical thinking. A crucial factor for an increasingly suspicious attitude toward society was the Vietnam War (cf. Duncan 147): Only a decade after the end of World War II, young men were once more drafted to risk their lives for ideals they did no longer believe in. Warfare as a reason for disagreement and consequently dropping out could already be examined with regard to the Lost Generation, but while its members were still attaching some meaning to joining the war, the members of the Beat Generation did not agree with this perspective. Due to their attitude, it can also be observed that the generational gap between young people and their parents’ generation, who had experienced the wars more consciously, widened even more (cf. Duncan 144). Apart from their own disagreement with the values of society, young people also felt misunderstood by the generation preceding them.

## **1.2. The act of dropping out: Resuming the pursuit of independence**

The dissatisfaction with the way society developed after World War II left many young people with a feeling of strangeness, as they could not identify with it anymore. As a result, they often decided to drop out and “walk away” from their community in search of a new perspective (cf. Holton 14). The act of dropping out was realized by a turn away from compliance and rules toward nonconformity, and can be regarded as an attempt at actively resuming the pursuit of independence. As such a process naturally involves isolation and also disrespect to some extent, it requires a certain amount of courage and determination: “It is easy to underestimate, decades later, the difficulty of this [breakout] and the desperation that propelled it” (Holton 17). The people who were willing to take the risk of loneliness and separation were, after some time, rewarded with the revelation that there were many others who shared their opinions and ideals.

The new community of “Beats” that developed on this common ground exhibited “a deep hunger for individual recognition, a desire to speak frankly and honestly about things that mattered, and, finally, a need for passionate personal involvement in major undertakings” (Cook 9f.). Their youthful enthusiasm and energy stood in sharp contrast to conformity and the lack of interest in the formation of individual opinions and debate that they criticized about society. The restoration of critical thinking as well as their ideals and values are expressed in the literature and art of the members of the Beat Generation, “who sought to create a new alternative culture that served as a

bohemian retreat from the dominant culture, as a critique of mainstream values and social structures, as a force for social change, and as a crucible for art” (Skerl 2). The culture they tried to establish served as an exile for them, a refuge from the impositions of society. As has been shown already with regard to the Lost Generation, the company of like-minded people can often function as a sanctuary from a reality that one is not satisfied with.

The process of making a new beginning, almost starting from scratch, in order to establish new values after old ones have been disappointed, is not only found in groups of outsiders. In fact, throughout history, a “recurring American impulse” can be observed “to found an identity on the bedrock of the naked self, free of compromising cultural and historical accretions, an Adamic desire for an experience of freedom, integrity, and authenticity generally unavailable within conventional culture” (Holton 17). Once more, this illustrates that nonconformity and freedom are distinctly American ideals, even though they sometimes seem to have fallen into oblivion.

### **1.3. Deliberate marginality as an expression of discontent**

Even though the Beats can principally be regarded as dropouts, deviant behavior and eccentricity were also a means for them to express their discontent with mainstream society (cf. chapter IV). Many members of the movement, among them Jack Kerouac, who is considered one of the most influential representatives of Beat literature, developed a keen interest in

marginalized groups of society, which served as an inspiration for the establishment of their own culture and way of life (cf. Holton 11f.). Apparently, the recent dropouts could identify better with the people stigmatized by society than with those who believed in homogeneity and conformism. There were various ways in which the Beats expressed and celebrated otherness and individuality. Apart from adapting a “studiously ragged” appearance that reflected their affinity for the outcasts of society (Hebdige 49), they also developed their own variety of language, inspired by African-American “jive” (cf. Holton 24f.). Distinctive characteristics concerning appearance and language are very common in social groups, as they support group identity and cohesion, but also distinguish the members from other people.

The most striking manifestation of deviant behavior in the “radical individualism” (Galán Lozano 62) practiced by the Beat Generation was their attitude toward the human psyche. According to the standards of conventional society, deviant behavior – whether it concerned looks, sexuality, or mental health – at the time was almost synonymous with insanity (cf. Tytell 10). Due to the propagation of conformism, eccentricity or any form of deviation from established ideals would often result in the marginalization of an individual. In this context it becomes evident that, even though dropping out as an active decision was involved in most cases, mainstream society may also have played a role in their marginalization.

The consequences of being labelled “mentally ill” to some extent involved for many members of the Beat Generation the admittance to reformatory, mental or even penitentiary institutions (cf. Tytell 10). However,

instead of being devastated by these experiences, or resigning, they developed a fascination for the human mind and what lay beyond the boundaries of sanity. In this context, a distinction must be made between actual mental illness and the “madness” referred to by the Beats, which basically meant opening up one’s mind to nonconformity and reviving the spirit of adventure. In their new conceptualization of madness, rather than being seen as a handicap or impairment, it was considered a possibility, a pathway out of and a refuge from conventional society. In order to be able to reach this new sanctuary, they had to stimulate their madness “with drugs, with criminal excess, and the pursuits of ecstasy. They used ‘madness’ – which they regarded as naturalness – as a breakthrough to clarity, as a proper perspective from which to see” (Tytell 11). While the members of the Lost Generation relied on alcohol and company for dropping out of reality, the Beats took to experimenting with drugs as a means of expanding the mind. This relatively new form of deviant behavior, which also emphasizes their open-mindedness and curiosity, can be considered another characteristic of the generation.

#### **1.4. Literature as a mouthpiece**

Art and literature played a significant role for the expression and distribution of the values and ideals of the Beat Generation; many of their works exhibit a “major departure in literary form as well as a courageous response to the dominating passivity of the age” (Tytell 12). Literature was a means for reaching out to like-minded people and to spread their philosophy.

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* can be considered one of the most influential books of the time, as many young people could identify with his characters and stories (cf. Cook 6f.). In literature, the essence of the newly established culture was portrayed and it served as a mouthpiece for the many dropouts and opponents of mainstream society and as a confirmation that their attitude and ideals were shared by others. However, the works of the Beat writers were not approved of by all recipients. On the part of mainstream society, the writers were "condemned and ridiculed by mass media journalists, the then-reigning public intellectuals, and by academic critics" (Skerl 1). Even though this may not have affected them personally, the criticism still meant that for Beat authors a literary profession would never be profitable (during that time). The reactions of conventional society also illustrate once more how they looked down on unconventional lifestyles and alternative perspectives.

The conceptualization of "madness" has already shown that the Beats were interested in the human mind, which is also manifested in their writing. They tried to establish new literary forms and ways of expression in order to emphasize "individual subjectivity," as can be seen in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg or Michael McClure (cf. Galán Lozano 62). Apart from highlighting the ideal of individuality, subjectivity also serves as a stimulus for interpretation and thus encourages critical thinking. Kerouac also believed in this concept and on its basis developed his own principles for successful writing, promoting the technique of writing "without consciousness," that is, trying to write down in an uninhibited way whatever comes to one's mind (qtd. in Galán Lozano 62). Due to their conceptualization of madness, this method – often also referred to as "stream of consciousness" technique – was appealing to Beat writers, as it represents the individual, unique performance of the

human mind. It implies independence of any formal rules or standards, giving new meaning to rudimentary thoughts and thus can be regarded as “unleashing the most elementary stratum of the self” (Galán Lozano 62). Consequently, writing was also a way of opening up and sharing one’s inner life with the reader. The results were very revealing, authentic accounts of the lives of the Beat Generation, which can be observed in *On the Road*.

With regard to subject matter, marginality and rejection from society seem to be recurring themes in Beat literature (cf. Galán Lozano 71). The reason for this is that, being part of the movement, the authors can be regarded as outsiders of mainstream society themselves. As mentioned above, after dropping out, they tended to identify with people who had already been marginalized by society. Apart from their disagreement with the values of society, some of them could also be regarded as existential outsiders: Kerouac, Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, three major representatives of the movement, all spent some time in a mental hospital; Burroughs and Ginsberg were both homosexual (cf. Campbell 3-10, *passim*). Kerouac’s French Canadian heritage and Ginsberg’s Jewishness can also be considered factors for existential outsiderdom.

## 2. Outsiders and Dropouts in Kerouac's *On the Road*

---

Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* was first published in 1957 and can be considered one of the most influential portrayals of the Beat Generation. Even though Kerouac had started to work on the novel several years earlier, it took some time until he managed to achieve publication due to his unwillingness to conform to the publishers' requests to change his text according to their expectations (cf. Tytell 29). The novel is an autobiographical account of "the story of my life on the road" (Kerouac qtd. in Campbell 106), in which many of the characters are based on important representatives of the Beat movement, such as Neal Cassady or Allen Ginsberg. It can therefore also be regarded as a roman à clef. Kerouac is said to have written the first version of *On the Road* in a "marathon typing session" in about three weeks' time (Campbell 106), applying his method of uninhibited writing. Even though the novel was edited several times, his use of the stream of consciousness technique is still a defining feature of the text. Kerouac uses it as a means of conveying the spirit of the time, providing the reader with insights into the protagonist's mind and the possibility to identify with the "beat" characters of his generation. Apart from giving an account of the central ideals, values, and experiences of the Beats, the characters in *On the Road* also exhibit the features of marginality and eccentricity that are regarded as distinctive for this generation.

## 2.1. Literary conceptualization of the Beat Generation

Throughout the novel, distinctive characteristics of the Beat Generation are pointed out to the reader. Like Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*, Sal Paradise also often takes on an observant position (cf. Skinazi 87). Although this is partly determined by his narrative position, he also expresses how he has always been following people who attract his interest, subsequently describing what inspires him about them:

[T]he only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’<sup>3</sup>

This statement refers to the madness admired by the Beats, which represents the youthful impulsivity that distinguishes them from conventional society<sup>4</sup>. It illustrates how the emphasis on eccentricity, on everything but the “commonplace,” is a means of expressing disagreement and nonconformity.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, 1957 (New York: Penguin, 1976) 5f. Hereafter abbreviated as OR with page numbers in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> In this context, Sal also indirectly refers to the German storm and stress movement (cf. OR 6).

Art, and especially literature, plays an important role for the members of the Beat Generation. This becomes evident, for instance, in Dean Moriarty's desire to learn how to write from Sal. He recognizes writing as a kind of outlet, a way to arrange his ideas. The creative process is described in the way Dean and Carlo Marx sit up all night, taking turns at stating random thoughts and discussing them (cf. OR 48f.). Their nightly ritual can be regarded as an illustration of the thought process involved in "uninhibited writing." Even though Sal tells them that they will go crazy at the end of the night, he seems to refer to the positive aspects of "madness" and expresses his admiration for their frantic exchange of ideas (cf. OR 50). The creativity involved in writing or stimulating ideas can also significantly affect the shaping of one's identity, as it facilitates critical engagement with one's problems. With regard to the establishment of identity, the role of language becomes evident in the concept of storytelling. Throughout the novel, the characters repeatedly tell stories from their lives, every time contributing to the overall image others have of them. Telling stories has become a popular way of passing the time, as, in a way, it keeps one's thoughts occupied – either by telling, or by listening. The fact that most of the stories are told from a person's own past also suggests the assumption that telling stories is a way of withdrawing from the present, due to discontent with the momentary situation.

Music is another form of art that was influential at the time of the Beat Generation. Through music, Sal, even though he is alone, feels connected to his friends who are scattered all over the country (cf. OR 12). In this context, another aspect of Beat identity is revealed. Sal and his friends, representative of their generation, like to listen to bop, a style of African American jazz. This kind of music, "with all the complex issues of race that inevitably shaped it,

became a central and frequently discussed element in the emerging white non-conformist identity” (Holton 22). It has already been mentioned that the Beats tended to identify with groups marginalized by society. Therefore, in addition to their interest in music, a general attraction to African American culture can be observed. This affinity for outsiders becomes most apparent when Sal walks through the streets of Denver one night,

wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. [...] I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned. All my life I’d had white ambitions [...]. (OR 179f.)

These thoughts reflect Sal’s feeling of being uprooted after having turned away from society. He holds his “white ambitions” responsible for the “sense of emptiness” (Holton 22), for everything he misses in his life, assuming that the outsiders of society are better off in this respect. Sal’s remarks represent the attitude of his generation, of the people who feel deprived of “ecstasy” by conformism and who aspire to find new meaning in their lives. Even though the Beats can also be regarded as outsiders, what distinguishes them from “established” outsiders is the question of identity. Sal’s desire to belong to one of the groups shows how he “idealizes the lives of visible minorities because he believes they know who they are, and they are comfortable with who they are – a comfort he has not quite found” (Skinazi 95). He feels that, despite being marginalized by society, the people he relates to have managed to make the best of their situation and found a new place in

society, as part of a new group. The Beats have yet to accomplish this task in order to overcome the restlessness that fuels their travels all across the country in search of their identity.

## **2.2. The aspect of travelling: Dropping out in search of a new meaning**

The restlessness that can be detected in the Beats may be rooted in the search for a new meaning. As already implied by the title of Kerouac's novel, travelling is an essential part of their lifestyle; the characters are constantly on the move. Sal comments on the effect of travelling quite aptly when they leave for New Orleans: "We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function in time, *move*" (OR 134; emphasis in original). Similar to Hemingway's Jake Barnes, Sal seems to be aware of the somewhat evasive behavior of his generation. While the members of the Lost Generation seemed to have the feeling of "waiting" for something to happen, the Beats are trying to pursue this "something" – referred to by Dean as "IT" (OR 207) – by travelling. "IT" designates an unknown quantity, the unspecified destination of their quest for freedom and new meaning, and thus the "essence of human existence" (Wilson 306). The inability to define "IT" also reveals the disorientation of the young people.

Travelling offers the "ecstasy" that Sal and his friends are missing in their lives; the adventures of being on the road satisfy their longing for

adventure and also provide the sensation of freedom and independence in the “purity of the road” (OR 135). However, the feeling of fulfillment never lasts long, so they have to keep moving. The closest Dean and Sal ever get to finding freedom, and “IT,” is on their trip to Mexico: “We had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic” (OR 276). This “magic land at the end of the road” at first appears to be “their El Dorado” (Ireland 480); it serves as a refuge, a place where they can forget their doubts and find hope once again. They finally experience acceptance again, and only in this context does it become clear that being disregarded by society has bothered them to some extent. Dean is impressed how the Mexicans “don’t *bother* with appearances” (OR 277; emphasis in original) and that “[t]here’s no *suspicion* here, nothing like that” (OR 278; emphasis in original), implying that these characteristics distinguish them from American society. It seems that they have finally found people who share their attitude, who see things the way they do, and who they feel comfortable with. However, even after apparently having reached their utopia, Dean feels the need to get moving once again. Sal, who is left behind, realizes that the “impossible complexity of his life” (OR 302) has caught up on him once more. The fact that Sal attributes Dean’s behavior to his way of life rather than regarding it as selfish or inconsiderate is very revealing with respect to the relationship of the two young men. On the one hand, Dean’s departure serves as a lesson Sal has to learn: In order to achieve self-fulfillment and to find one’s place, “the journey is in the end a focus on the *self* over the others” (Wilson 307; emphasis in original). Especially for Sal it is important to shift his attention from people like Dean, who fascinate him, more toward his own needs and goals. On the other hand, Dean’s behavior also most clearly

illustrates the restlessness involved in the search for identity, which can be regarded as “the novel’s main theme” (Ireland 480). It shows how difficult the unidentified “IT” indeed is to find for the disillusioned young people of the generation and also reflects the general atmosphere of discontent at the time (cf. Ireland 480).

As Brian Ireland observes, the restlessness displayed by the Beats is not a completely new phenomenon in American society, but “has been commented on almost since the first settlers arrived in the New World” (Ireland 474). As with the Beat Generation, the impulse to move and explore further and further can be assumed to be related to the search for identity – in this case “American identity” – in the early times of the nation. In this context, Frederick Jackson Turner’s theory of the frontier can also be considered relevant. Turner regards the American frontier as an important factor for the development of the “American character” and the urge to expand and to move the frontier westward as a source for restlessness and disquiet (cf. Billington qtd. in Ireland 474). The American Dream and the pursuit of happiness also play an important role with regard to the search for identity. A “feverish ardor” can be detected with which Americans try to reach well-being and prosperity, a certain pressure and thus restlessness arising from the feeling of not being able to pursue one’s goals in the shortest and most direct way (cf. Tocqueville 144). This “feverish ardor” can be regarded as a characteristic of the American character and is also displayed in *On the Road*, most notably in the character of Dean.

Due to the restlessness that is so inherent in his character, it can be stated that Dean Moriarty’s “defining quality is speed – in conversation, in a car, in his lifestyle. [...] This speed is reflected in an extraordinary

hyperactivity that determines the atmosphere of the novel” (Tytell 24). Dean’s agitation also reflects the spirit of the time and especially that of the generation he belongs to. As speed is such a crucial component of his life, he also attaches a lot of meaning to time. Repeatedly, he speaks about “knowing” time (cf. OR 127, *passim*), trying to communicate his own understanding of it. As time is important for him in order to be able to reconcile all his plans, activities, as well as his women, “[t]here was always a schedule in Dean’s life” (OR 42). Especially to Sal, this kind of “organization” in Dean’s life appears to be a source of meaning to some extent, which he almost seems to envy his friend for. However, the almost frantic habit of keeping on the move can also be regarded as a way of evading problems and concerns, and of keeping oneself occupied in order not to have to think about them. Especially for young people, as the experiences of Dean and Sal show, travelling and being on the road can be a form of pursuing new possibilities and adventures, but also of escaping reality (cf. Ireland 476f.).

### **2.3. Dean Moriarty: The epitome of “madness”**

In many respects, Dean Moriarty can be regarded as the “prototype” of his generation: “He was BEAT – the root, the soul of Beatific” (OR 195). He exhibits most of the characteristics considered typical of the Beats, including all kinds of deviant behavior as well as a certain amount of “madness”; he shares his philosophy, ideas, and experiences, and also has the ambition to process all this in writing. Dean’s character is presumably the most clearly

delineated in *On the Road*, as Sal constantly adds new features to his description. The reason for this may be a subliminal admiration that is revealed when he refers to Dean as a “sideburned hero of the snowy West” (OR 2), as “the holy con-man with the shining mind” (OR 5), or the “HOLY GOOF” (OR 194). The attribution of heroic or even saintly qualities implies that Dean serves as a role model to some extent. Despite the fact that also Dean’s negative features are mentioned, like being a conman or a “jailkid” (OR 3), they are always illustrated in a rather positive way, giving him the rebellious air often admired by others.

Dean does not really fit the definition of an outsider, as most of the time he seems to be content with his situation and his social position. These characteristics are more typical of a dropout, who lives on the margins of society due to his own decision. Dean’s attitude, apart from being a statement of nonconformity, is also very “active and affirmative, rather than static and pessimistic” (Schryer 134). In contrast to Sal, who tends to stay in the background, Dean has always been attracting attention, ever since adolescence. His rebelliousness and delinquency, due to which he already spent some time in prison (cf. OR 5, *passim*), can be regarded as an expression of individuality: “He steals cars, not as a criminal, but to exercise his right of the pursuit of happiness” (Skinazi 94). For him, and for many people of the generation he represents, activities like these are considered the only way to truly achieve freedom and independence.

Dean’s behavior can be regarded as an example of juvenile rebelliousness as referred to by David Matza (cf. chapter III). Due to his adventurous predisposition, he is constantly looking for the next “kick” that he

is rewarded with by daring activities like stealing cars. For Neal Cassady, the Beat representative this character is based on, these kicks also served as a means of filling the void that had developed from the feeling of growing up “in a world deprived of the concept of usefulness [...]. Living for the moment was his gift – and he cursed it” (Campbell 69). Like Cassady, his counterpart Dean has in a way perfected living for the moment and seems to be envied for this ability by others such as Sal; however, it shows that he does not really succeed in filling the void and has to keep moving on. His restlessness, combined with the search for new kicks, also affects Dean’s character and makes up his “madness.” As Old Bull Lee observes, “[h]e seems to me to be headed for his ideal fate, which is compulsive psychosis dashed with a jigger of psychopathic irresponsibility and violence” (OR 147). Even though most of his friends look up to Dean, they seem to be aware that his frantic behavior can be dangerous as a permanent condition.

As already mentioned above, Dean’s delinquency is not motivated by greed or acquisitiveness. The pursuit of kicks and adventures shows that he is interested in spiritual concepts like freedom and happiness rather than material goods and possessions. In contrast to the marginalized people admired by him and other members of his generation, he seems to cherish poverty and “the prospect of scrabbling for the basic necessities of life” (Schryer 134). For most of the Beats, living on the margins of society was a choice rather than predetermination. Against this background, it was possible for them to view outsiderdom as something positive and desirable and, most of all, as a pathway to freedom and independence. Dean celebrates the freedom of not having to worry about personal belongings, he “just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn’t care one way or the other” (OR 8). During these moments of

carelessness, he may be the one among his friends closest to truly achieving independence.

Throughout the novel, it is repeatedly shown how Dean is looked down on by members of mainstream society: Whether it is Sal's aunt who "took one look at Dean and decided that he was a madman" (OR 3) or a "mean cop" who stops their car on the way to New Orleans and "took an immediate dislike for Dean; he could smell jail all over him" (OR 136) – it becomes clear that his appearance immediately courts the resentment of persons of authority or conformist members of society. The character of Dean Moriarty is an example of an "antihero as hero," which Brian Ireland deems a typical feature of the "road genre" (cf. 477). This concept shows the significance of individualism and nonconformity for the dynamics of a group that may be referred to as a generation of outsiders. By telling his experiences in *On the Road*, Kerouac has provided the people of his generation with characters they can identify with. Role models like Dean serve as a confirmation for young people who share his attitude and beliefs that they are not alone but that there are others who are in the same situation. However, it should be noted that in the end, most of his friends, most notably Sal, have settled down and are ready to "grow up," and thus Dean finally has to come to terms with himself. It seems that, for the first time, he is left on his own when he "walked off alone" (OR 306) after having lost his most devoted admirer in Sal.

#### 2.4. Sal Paradise: The observant outsider

Sal Paradise, the character assumed to be a representation of Kerouac himself, often takes on the position of an observant bystander. To some extent, he is an outsider both “in the middle-class world of his family as well as among the group of bohemian friends whose characters would eventually shape the public’s sense of the Beat Generation” (Wilson 304). His journeys across the country can be regarded as a form of dropping out temporarily as well as a retreat from the expectations of his middle-class environment; however, he always “had [his] home to go to” (OR 107) and thus has never fully completed the withdrawal from society. It took him some time, “always vaguely planning and never taking off” (OR 1), before he was able to realize his dream of travelling and starting out to the West, inspired and fascinated primarily by the adventures of his friend Dean.

On the road, Sal’s position is that of a “chronicler” rather than that of an active partaker in events, and he always to some extent remains “hovering in [Dean’s] shadow” (Skinazi 87). Even though he is involved in most of the activities of the group, he exhibits a certain passivity and tends to stay in the background. He repeatedly expresses his interest in observing people and events in his surroundings, emphasizing that “I didn’t want to interfere, I just wanted to follow” (OR 132; cf. also Skinazi 97). The spectatorial attitude that could already be observed in the writers of the Lost Generation can also be found in Sal and can therefore partly be attributed to his literary profession. His inconspicuousness makes it possible for him to witness interactions like Dean and Carlo’s nightly brainstorming sessions almost unnoticed (cf. OR 50) and to

experience and consequently depict events in an authentic way. Considering that Sal's character is based on Kerouac, it can be assumed that *On the Road* also reflects the novel's production history and the author's own method of collecting impressions (cf. Skinazi 98).

From the point of view of the group, it has been shown that Dean can be regarded as an insider, almost as a pioneer of the movement, while Sal remains in the background and to some extent can be seen as an outsider. Sal contributes to this "insider / outsider paradigm" as he considers himself uninvolved most of the time and increasingly reveals how his own well-being is dependent on Dean (cf. Skinazi 96f.). The self-perception of the narrator shows how he, in a way, feels inferior to Dean and also other friends: "I was a lout compared [to Dean and Carlo], I couldn't keep up with them" (OR 5). All his ways and destinations are determined by Dean's activities, and the question of his whereabouts is a guiding theme of the novel (cf. Skinazi 90).

In contrast to Dean, Sal is not fully content with his situation and often seems to suffer from loneliness, a feeling commonly attributed to outsiderdom. When he travels alone, it shows that he is eager to make new friends, e.g. when he meets another hitchhiker on his first journey, who "would have bored me ordinarily, except that my senses were sharp for any kind of human friendship" (OR 16), or when he keeps offering cigarettes to Mississippi Gene and his charge because "I loved them so" (OR 28). This kind of behavior reveals how important human contact is to Sal and how he sometimes misses it. At times, he develops his own kind of restlessness, based on the apprehension to be missing out on anything while he is alone. In such moments, he decides not to sleep as "[t]here were so many other interesting things to do" (OR 47), or feels

the urge to abandon his job as a barracks guard in Mill City in order to “find out what everybody was doing all over the country” (OR 67). Both Sal’s eagerness for company and his fear of anything extraordinary happening in his absence illustrate a certain anxiety. These concerns constantly put pressure on him and ultimately “the endless celebrations, the pell-mell rushing from one scene to the next, create a hysteria that makes Sal want to withdraw from the world” (Tytell 24). Clearly, Sal is conflicted about his social position. On the one hand, he is an outsider aspiring to fully belong to the group of young men led by his hero, Dean, and tries to overcome his passivity to actively become a part of the action. On the other hand, it seems that the madness displayed by Dean often is too much for Sal, who, even though he is fascinated by it and admires Dean for his frantiness, is by nature a more calm and rational character. Sal’s conflict is manifested repeatedly in the underlying feeling that “[e]verything was collapsing”<sup>5</sup> (OR 99), which can be regarded as “a reminder of the effects of disorder, of Kerouac’s own vision of uncontained release, on himself” (Tytell 24). Often, Sal seems to be lost, both when he is travelling and when he is at home. Something always seems to be missing from his life, but he is not quite able to determine what he lacks. His only point of reference is Dean: “I was burning to know what was on his mind and what would happen now, for there was nothing behind me any more, all my bridges were gone and I didn’t give a damn about anything at all” (OR 182). It seems that everything Sal does and experiences is inspired and motivated in some way by Dean, and this is what holds his world together.

---

<sup>5</sup> This expression is actually a quotation from Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, where it was “used to signal the end of the fiesta” (Wilson 309).

Apart from his fascination with Dean, Sal also illustrates very clearly the identification with other people marginalized by society, which has been discussed already as a defining feature of the Beat Generation (cf. Holton 16). In Laredo, where they pass through on their way to Mexico, Sal observes how America's outsiders seem to be gathering in this town, which he refers to as "the bottom and dregs of America where all the heavy villains sink, where disoriented people have to go to be near a specific elsewhere they can slip into unnoticed" (OR 273). Even though this statement may sound deprecatory at first, it can be assumed that Sal counts himself and Dean among the "dregs" of America and therefore feels comfortable in this town.

Another point at which Sal's identification with other outsiders becomes evident is during his time with the Mexican girl Terry in Los Angeles. When he decides to join her on the bus it is because once again he is feeling "so lonely, so sad, so tired, so quivering, so broken, so beat" (OR 82) and therefore craving for company, especially that of a woman. Due to her ethnicity, Terry can also be regarded as a member of a marginalized group and this may be a reason why Sal feels even more attracted to her. During the two weeks in which they live together, Sal gains access to her world, to "a life among migrant farm workers, the outcast, the destitute" (Wilson 307f.). By entering into this world, and temporarily becoming a part of it, he identifies even more with these people marginalized by society. He even begins to regard himself as one of them, comparing himself to "an old Negro cotton-picker" (OR 97) and later including himself verbally by referring to the group as "*we* Mexicans" (OR 98; emphasis mine). For a while, Sal truly believes to be one of the "social outcasts," he regards himself as a Mexican and therefore as a member of the group (cf. Wilson 308). This illustrates how he is still trying to

find his place in society. He repeatedly tries to fit in with different groups, but in the end is never fully content with the result, which is the reason why, after some time, he always has to move on again.

Sal's identification with the Mexicans as a minority group is interesting also with regard to the fact that he himself actually is of Italian descent. In this detail, another parallel between the protagonist and the author Kerouac can be observed, who was of French Canadian heritage (cf. Skinazi 87). Due to their ethnicity, both can be regarded as existential outsiders to some extent. Even though Sal's origins are not often addressed in the novel, it can be argued that at times he "feels himself to be a mimic man – almost American, but not quite" (Skinazi 87). This is another aspect that adds to his occasional insecurity and may be a reason why he struggles with determining his place in society. On the other hand, his cultural background may also be used as a means to establish a connection with other outsiders and to create a bond based on this common experience and "shared fate." In other words, in cases like Sal's (and Kerouac's), one could speak of "an outsider who used his outsiderhood as his way in" (Skinazi 96). This process can be regarded as a possible factor for the development of generations of outsiders.

The members of the Beat Generation portrayed in *On the Road*, most notably Sal and Dean, illustrate how marginality can have a bonding effect on people. Due to their disagreement with the established rules and ideals, they feel more connected to people already marginalized by mainstream society. The identification with these outsiders leads to a form of deliberate marginality, which can be regarded as an expression of discontent. In this context, Dean's role for the group is significant. People like him, who often

become role models for their peers, can be regarded as an important factor for the development of new groups. (Anti)heroes like Dean serve as “living proof” that there are others who share the same attitude and ideals. In the novel, this effect can be observed with regard to Sal, who is encouraged by Dean’s adventures to become more active and realize his dreams of travelling. A similar effect can be assumed for the young Beat readers of the time. The awareness of not being alone in one’s disillusionment, that there are others who share this fate, can be regarded as the first and most important step toward the formation of a new group.

## VII. GENERATION X AND COUPLAND'S *GENERATION X*

### 1. Generation X

---

In contrast to the Lost and the Beat Generations, Generation X is less regarded as a movement, but rather refers to the general attitude exhibited by many young people toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to set a time frame for this generation it is often suggested that it refers to “those born between 1961 and 1981” (Heiman 274). The term “Generation X” first occurred as early as the 1950s, but reached its current understanding only when Douglas Coupland, borrowing from Paul Fussell, used it as the title for his first novel (cf. Porsche 4f.). Generation X is primarily defined by the contrast to the preceding generation of “Baby Boomers.” While the Baby Boomers are considered a very active generation, who took to the streets, joined protest marches, and were committed to fighting for their rights, “Xers” are often seen as rather passive. As Jonathon I. Oake observes, “spectatorship” can even be regarded as one of the defining features of this generation: “[T]he deviance of Xer subcultural subjectivity lies in its perverse privileging of ‘watching’ over ‘doing.’ [...] Xer identity is presided over by the trope of the ‘slacker’: the indolent, apathetic, couch-dwelling TV addict” (86f.). Especially the term “slacker,” which is often used to refer to members of Generation X, reflects the public opinion about these young people. In the eyes of adult society, the major problem seemed to be that “Gen Xers [...] rely excessively on what they watch rather than what they experience” (Oake 87). For the preceding generations, personal experiences always played a crucial role in the process of establishing

one's own identity as well as that of a group of like-minded people. The devaluation of individual experience shows a shift of ideals and suggests the preference of observing over partaking as the basic attitude of Xers.

### **1.1. The new role of the media**

Xers differ in many respects from the generations preceding them. As already implied with regard to spectatorship, one of these aspects is the significance of the media for the young people of the time. While for earlier generations literature was the primary means for expressing ideas and attitudes and a major source of inspiration, with Generation X, there was a shift of attention toward the newer forms of communication. Due to the increase in accessibility, especially visual media significantly gained in importance and status and soon became a means of identification for Xers (cf. Oake 83). Television served as a new source of inspiration with regard to ideals and role models, which particularly appealed to adolescence.

The factor of age is significant in this context, as during adolescence, young people are often concerned with the search for identity and their place in society. Thus, they are especially susceptible for the kind of input provided by visual media. Idolization may take place regardless of whether something is represented in a positive or in a negative way; "the media helps to generate and proliferate subcultural identity even as it appears to be subjugating and containing it" (Oake 84). Even though Generation X was often criticized by mass media, its members still valued it as a source of inspiration and also as a

means for the satisfaction of their spectatorial needs. On the downside, the new role of the media and the increasing and almost excessive supply of entertainment and stimulation may also be held responsible for a certain degree of stimulus satiation in young people. It could be argued that having become too indulged in this passive form of consumption also played a role with regard to the loss of perspective and the listlessness of this generation.

## **1.2. The factor of youth and the widening of the generational gap**

The factor of youth, as already mentioned above, also plays a significant role with regard to Generation X. In contrast to the generations preceding them, Xers “grew up during a relatively peaceful era in U.S. history” (Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28). They were the first generation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that was not directly affected by a major military conflict like World War II or the Vietnam War. As a result, they lack this sort of “unifying event” (Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28) that served as a common experience for the generations of their parents and grandparents. The sensation of a “shared fate” is what formed the basis for many (sub)cultural movements, such as the Lost and the Beat Generations, and can be regarded as an important component of group identity. The lack of this sort of community spirit and the corresponding motivation presumably accounts for the perceived passivity and listlessness of Generation X: In contrast to their predecessors, they do not really have a reason to take to the street and protest.

Even though Xers in some ways seemed to be better off than the generations before them, they had to deal with their own kinds of problems and sources of disillusionment. Due to the diverging attitudes and ideals of the Baby Boomers and their successors, a conflict developed between the generations (cf. Oake 85). The older generation, whose own ideals were characterized by active dedication to bringing about change, could not understand the lack of commitment in Generation X. Consequently, they lowered their expectations for their descendants and, in a way, deprived the young people even more of aspiration: “No other generation in living memory has come of age with such a sense of social distance – of adults doing so little for them and expecting so little from them” (Strauss and Howe 495f.). The generational conflict and the divergence of ideals and values can thus be regarded as a source of disillusionment for Generation X.

In this context, it becomes apparent that the acknowledgement of youth as a separate stage of life and also “as an autonomous social formation with shared meanings and representations” (Oake 85) was still in progress and not fully completed at this point. The incomplete acknowledgement implies that adolescents are in some respects not considered fully-fledged members of society and due to this fact can be regarded as a marginalized group. For adolescents, often still in search of their identity, the downscaling of society’s expectations of them can have a discouraging effect. Being treated as a “hopeless case” to some extent can affect an individual’s self-confidence, and accordingly many young Xers began to “agree with their elders that probably, they *are* a wasted bunch” (Strauss and Howe 495; emphasis in original). The “slacker” image thus for many came to represent a new ideal, something they aspired to. Adapting to this image should, however, not be understood only as

resignation; rather, it can also be regarded as a form of self-protection (cf. Giroux qtd. in Heiman 281). By confirming the opinion adult society had about them, they ironically satisfied the only “expectations” it still had. In a way, adhering to the slacker image can thus be regarded as a form of protest.

### **1.3. The slacker image and the role of society**

It has already been shown that the young people referred to as Generation X, more than any generation before them, were often subject to the judgment and the stereotypes of mainstream society. They were “deemed a bunch of slackers who were unwilling to work hard for anything” (Heiman 287) and their attitude was regarded as a threat to the moral and political values of society (cf. *ibid.* 274). However, there were also some aspects of social order that Xers were concerned and critical about. What was perceived by their elders as unwillingness to work was actually the result of their frustration with the economic situation of the time. At the time the young people of Generation X entered into professional life, labor policy in America was subject to an optimization that involved a dramatic reduction of jobs as well as cutting down on salaries in order to keep up with the requirements of a rapidly changing economy (cf. Tulgan 58). Obviously, these developments did not offer the best prospects for adolescents who were just trying to gain ground in working life and did not have any experiences or qualifications to show yet. As a consequence, the motivation of many young people was affected and they were left disillusioned and hopeless.

Xers held their predecessors responsible for their situation and developed a sensation of resentment, as they felt they had to pay for other people's mistakes, such as "a cumbersome national debt, America's declining global competitiveness, environmental issues, racial strife, homelessness, AIDS, and divided families" (Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28). The effects of these developments can be observed already in the early lives of the young people. Like no generation before them, Generation X was affected by increasing divorce rates among their parents, which entailed increasingly complex family constellations, and also a rising number of working mothers (cf. Strauss and Howe 496). These children presumably had to spend more time on their own than any other generation. On the positive side, this experience provided them with independence and self-reliance, which were essential for them in order to be able to handle the social problems they were confronted with (cf. Tulgan 56). These were also qualities valuable with regard to their future professional lives. The side effect of these characteristics was that their self-confident appearance often was perceived as arrogance by other members of society and thus fueled another stereotype (cf. Tulgan 56).

The doubtful prospects for work life and economy also had an influence on the ideals of this generation. Due to the bleak outlook, the American Dream of achieving wealth and prosperity if one only works hard enough seemed increasingly unattainable. In fact, it seems that "Generation X may be the first group in U.S. history unable to achieve a higher standard of living than their parents" (Miller qtd. in Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28). Instead of giving in to frustration and despair, Xers reconsidered the ideals they had grown up with. They developed a negative attitude toward money and amassing material goods, and a new appreciation of immaterial values: "One's work is viewed as

a vehicle to provide for leisure, family, lifestyle, or experiential learning” (Deutschmann qtd. in Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28). Work and money are thus considered not much more than means to an end, a certain amount of which is essential in life, but to which otherwise no special value is attached. This attitude also implies that the American Dream is not completely dead to Xers, they only focus more on the aspect of the pursuit of happiness.

In this context, it becomes apparent why some of them “view their role as the renovators of the American dream and values” (qtd. in Mitchell, McLean, and Turner 28). The turn away from materialism is a way of criticizing the ideals of mainstream society. Even though the members of Generation X may not have been as rebellious as their predecessors, they still expressed their resentment and discontent by corresponding to the slacker image mainstream society had of them. This kind of behavior can also be regarded as a form of dropping out of society, which is also confirmed by Coupland’s interpretation of the term “Generation X” as referring to young people “who wanted to hop off the merry-go-round of status, money, and social climbing that so often frames modern existence” (qtd. in Porsche 5). Breaking away from materialism and social status and thus rejecting the ideals of mainstream society is a way for Xers to achieve personal freedom and independence.

## 2. Outsiders and Dropouts in Coupland's *Generation X*

---

Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X* was first published in 1991. It is a collection of impressions, stories, and comments that illustrates the major characteristics of this generation on the basis of "a group of jaded twenty-somethings who dropped out of the rat race" (Tulgan 55). The novel can be regarded as a commentary on the situation of a generation – which Coupland can also be counted among – that had not been paid much attention before. While the public opinion about Generation X was rather negative, Coupland manages to provide his readers with the "slacker" point of view. Originally, the book was planned to become a nonfiction "lifestyle guide" (Porsche 6) that should appeal to the young people concerned; however, the author discovered his passion for writing and decided to add a plot to make his text a novel (cf. *ibid.*). The original intention can still be recognized in the footnotes of pseudo-dictionary entries, as well as the statistical table attached as appendix, which serve to provide an extra-textual frame for the story (cf. Porsche 9).

*Generation X* can be regarded as a critical appraisal of the social situation in the America of the 1980s and 1990s. It portrays the "confusions of a post-industrial age" through the stories the protagonists tell each other and the readers, in which they "repeatedly commemorate and mourn the last days of this putative golden age" (Greenberg 68). The characters of the book are accompanied by a sense of nostalgia, implying that everything was better in the old days, i.e., the days of their parents. The novel conveys the loss of perspective and the sensation of disillusionment and "conservative and middle-

class disappointment – a sense of entitlement gone sour” (Cohen 98) that affected many of the young people referred to as Generation X.

## 2.1. Literary conceptualization of Generation X

Like the novels of Hemingway and Kerouac, *Generation X* also provides the reader with a definition of the most significant characteristics of the generation concerned. The most accurate definition for the context of the novel is offered by the narrator Andy Palmer, telling his friends about an internship in Japan:

I felt I was being excommunicated from the *shin jin rui* – that’s what the Japanese newspapers call people like those kids in their twenties at the office – *new human beings*. It’s hard to explain. We have the same group over here and it’s just as large, but it doesn’t have a name – an X generation – purposefully hiding itself. There’s more space over here to hide in – to get lost in – to use as camouflage.<sup>6</sup>

In Japan, Andy was an outsider to the *shin jin rui*, but he realized that, back home, he was definitely an insider of the X generation described (cf. Porsche 8). He points out the reclusiveness of this social group, implying a

---

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, 1991 (London: Abacus, 1996) 63 (emphasis in original). Hereafter abbreviated as GX with page numbers in parentheses.

tendency to back away from the responsibility of growing up. This can also be observed in the three protagonists, who have withdrawn to the quiet of Palm Springs.

Andy's description of Palm Springs as a "small town where old people are trying to buy back their youth and a few rungs on the social ladder" (GX 12) reveals how the choice of this destination for their dropping out can already be regarded as a comment on the general social situation. In this novel, the active decision to drop out of society is portrayed most distinctly: "[T]he three of us *chose* to live here, for the town is undoubtedly a quiet sanctuary from the bulk of middle-class life" (GX 12; emphasis mine). Palm Springs is referred to as a refuge from mainstream society, and it is clear that Andy, Dag, and Claire, at least for a certain amount of time, do not want to be part of this society anymore. It can already be assumed that they disagree with the values and ideals they grew up with, and therefore decided to "live small lives on the periphery; we are marginalized and there's a great deal in which we choose not to participate. We wanted silence and we have that silence now" (GX 14). These three characters exhibit most clearly the central features of dropping out, repeatedly emphasizing that it was their own decision to withdraw to the margins of society in order to evade the influence of a system of values they no longer believe in.

Michael Porsche assumes that the major concerns of Andy and his friends, representative of their generation, are on the one hand the fundamental desire to revolutionize the American middle class as it was in the 1950s – the good old days – and on the other hand the feeling of "Heilssehnsucht" (cf. 8). The assumption that the prior generations were better off shows that Xers crave

for the supposedly settled living conditions of their parents. Even though Andy and his friends in a way envy their parents' generation for what they had, they also hold them responsible for the way society has developed and criticize them for being "neither able nor interested in understanding how marketers exploit them" (GX 76). They oppose materialism, as they consider it the main reason for the way the ideals and values of society have shifted. The way Xers see it, achieving wealth and success has become the main objective for their parents' generation, which is thus regarded as "reveling in material diversions rather than fostering family" (Curnutt 103). As already mentioned, Generation X was confronted with instability concerning both their domestic and the economic environment. It is therefore not surprising that they felt deprived of the possibilities they deemed their parents to have had and developed a common desire for consistency and security, as well as silence, all of which are found by the three protagonists in their refuge, Palm Springs.

## **2.2. Loss of perspective, disappointed expectations, and a "no-future" attitude**

The sense of disappointment with society and the way it has developed is perceptible almost constantly in *Generation X*. Andy often refers to the bleak prospects and deceived hopes of his generation, wondering "that all things seem to be from hell these days [...]. [M]aybe we were all promised heaven in our lifetimes, and what we ended up with can't help but suffer in comparison" (GX 8). Statements like this illustrate a certain feeling of indifference and

imply that young people like Andy and his friends have already lowered their expectations for life and the future. This also becomes apparent considering that all three of them are temporarily working “McJobs,” which are defined by promising “[l]ow pay, low prestige, low benefit, low future” (GX 5) and thus epitomize occupations with hardly any expectations involved. In this context, the generational conflict also plays a role. Boomers, like Andy’s and Dag’s boss, are often blamed for the bleak career prospects of Generation X, as they had the chance to gain valuable experiences and establish themselves in professional life before the economic situation worsened (cf. GX 26, Porsche 10). With the term “Boomer Envy,” Coupland has found a way to adequately define this phenomenon as the “[e]nvy of material wealth and long-range material security accrued by older members of the baby boom generation by virtue of fortunate births” (GX 26). Based on this disambiguation it can be assumed that Xers in a way felt aggrieved by society because of being born at the wrong time.

It turns out that Andy does not only envy his predecessors, but also feels irritated when confronted with the lightheartedness of people of his own generation. This can be observed when he speaks about the “perky” friends of his younger brother Tyler, who “live in bubbles,” and suddenly realizes that he is “jealous of how unafraid [they] are of the future” (GX 160). These aspects show that, to some extent, jealousy can be attributed to the passivity of Generation X. Even though they are discontent with their situation, they seem to think that they cannot change anything about it and thus arrive at the conclusion that “life’s not fair” (GX 89).

### 2.3. Storytelling as a way of dropping out

Instead of trying to actively change anything about their situation, Andy, Dag, and Claire have found a different way of dealing with reality. For them, the telling of “bedtime stories” (GX 16) is a ritual practiced on a regular basis, which can also be regarded as a form of dropping out (of reality). Andy’s inspiration to introduce this ritual to his friends were meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous that he attended, where he discovered that storytelling and listening to the stories of others could, to some extent, have a healing effect on oneself (cf. GX 15f.; Porsche 7f.). This effect can be compared to that of the feeling of a “shared fate” already discussed with regard to prior generations; the knowledge that there are other people who share the same experiences as oneself helps to create bonds. As Andy observes, storytelling can be a significant component in the search for identity: “[T]his is why the three of us left our lives behind us and came to the desert – to tell stories and to make our own lives worthwhile tales in the process” (GX 10). The stories each of them tells reveal desires, attitudes, and hopes, that they sometimes are not even aware of at the point of narrating.

Most of the bedtime stories are set in Texlahoma, “a mythic world we created [...]. It’s a sad Everyplace” (GX 45). This place is a fictional refuge for the three protagonists, where they can retreat from reality. It can be regarded as “an embodiment of the comforting regularity which is now lost to Andy and his friends” (Greenberg 71), which symbolizes a feeling of nostalgia and their generation’s desire for consistency. However, Texlahoma is not to be mistaken for a utopia in any way; its citizens struggle with the same problems as those of

real-life America, such as violence, unemployment, or drug addiction (cf. GX 45). This fictional place therefore can also be regarded as a critique of what went wrong with American society. Like the home of Andy's parents, where he observes that "[n]othing ever changes" as they also seem to be "terrified of the future" (GX 96), Texlahoma can also be seen as "a museum of fifteen years ago. It epitomises the dullness of Andy's parents' generation" (Greenberg 71). In a way, Texlahoma represents what Generation X considers to be the reasons for their own situation. Significantly, the temporal setting is also defined very precisely: "[T]he year is permanently 1974, the year after the oil shock and the year starting from which real wages in the U.S. never grew ever again" (GX 46). By specifically referring to these developments and choosing them as the setting for their stories, Andy and his friends point out what they deem to be the sources of their disillusionment.

The bedtime stories on the one hand illustrate what Coupland refers to as "Legislated Nostalgia: To force a body of people to have memories they do not actually possess" (GX 47). Even though they do not remember the "good old times," when everything seemed to be better, they have the desire to resurrect the living conditions of their parents, and this is where their discontent and criticism originates from (cf. Greenberg 71). On the other hand, even though Texlahoma may not be a utopia, it still serves as a way of escaping reality and as a form of dropping out. This fictional world for the three protagonists also offers a possibility to actually influence events and the outcome of their stories, something they may not experience very often in real life. Additionally, in contrast to the citizens of Texlahoma, who are trapped on the asteroid and in the year 1974 forever, Andy, Dag, and Claire are free to leave the place again and "get the hell out of there" (GX 46).

## 2.4. Andy Palmer: Nostalgia for a shared past

In Andy, the feeling of nostalgia and the resulting disillusionment attributed to Generation X is displayed most clearly. Due to his narrative position, like Jake Barnes and Sal Paradise, Andy is the character whose thoughts and concerns the reader gets to know best. For the stories he tells – both “bedtime stories” and other anecdotes only available to the reader – he often chooses real events or memories from his past. The novel opens with one of these memories, when Andy reminisces how he once flew to Manitoba to see a solar eclipse at the age of fifteen. In the course of the story, he talks about how he for the first time experienced “a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination” (GX 3f.) which has never really left him since. Even though he links this mood to the experience of the solar eclipse, he also compares it to his current state of mind, in which he feels “just as ambivalent” (GX 4). This story already conveys a nostalgic feeling about his youth, and also implies that he still in some respects feels the same way.

The most revealing aspect of his “mood” is inevitability, a feeling that he seems to be very familiar with and which can be assumed as one of his reasons for the decision to drop out of society. Like his friends, and other members of his generation, he feels that his future prospects are bleak and that there is nothing he can change about this fact. Andy’s ambivalent mood represents the “postmodern crisis of affectivity” of Generation X:

They seek to shed their skins and achieve a transitory moment of salvation and transcendence from some ‘authentic’ yet unnameable

force that will lift them out of everyday life, yet they can go no further than to divorce action and belief and are thus stranded between ironic distance and affective investment. (Moore qtd. in Curnutt 103)

The crisis of affectivity refers to the listlessness that has developed due to the young people's disillusionment, which is often perceived as passivity. As has already been observed in prior generations, there is also the feeling of "waiting for something to happen" and consequently a certain stagnation involved. In the case of Xers, this unnameable "something" may be assumed to be the desire for community and consistency, especially in the sense of family ties (cf. Curnutt 103).

The feeling of nostalgia becomes evident particularly when Andy talks about old photographs. He realizes how looking at pictures creates an impression of "how sweet and sad and innocent all moments of life are rendered by the tripping of a camera's shutter, for at that point the future is still unknown and has yet to hurt us, and also for that brief moment, our poses are accepted as honest" (GX 20). In this notion he expresses a longing for the ideal world as it often appears to be in pictures, even though he is aware that what he can see is not completely "honest." Andy idealizes the past depicted and tries to maintain the illusion of a "collective consciousness" (Greenberg 70). This process can also be regarded as an example of "Legislated Nostalgia," as it refers to a shared past that Generation X has not really experienced. The idealization of the past is revealed most clearly with regard to the Palmer family photo, which symbolizes the ideal family that all of them "spent the next fifteen years trying bravely to live up to" (GX 153). Andy observes that his whole family shares his nostalgia when thinking of the photo. For him

particularly, it represents “the last moment of [...] confident security” in his life, before he had to face “moral confusion, compulsion, dislocation, a lack of traditional faith, and the inevitable compromises involved in growing up” (Greenberg 71). The family portrait thus marks a point in Andy’s life shortly before he was disillusioned, before he realized that he would have to give up most of his hopes and dreams – the point when “the future is still unknown and has yet to hurt” him.

His obsession with the past, both his own and the shared past of his generation, implies that Andy feels that he has missed an opportunity in his life to change his future. As can be seen when he talks with his brother Tyler about Vietnam, which he hardly remembers anything about, the past is what defines him:

[T]hey *were* ugly times. But they were also the only times I’ll ever get – genuine capital *H* history times, before *history* was turned into a press release, a marketing strategy, a cynical campaign tool. And *hey*, it’s not as if I got to see so much real history, either [...]. But I saw enough, and today, in the bizarre absence of all time cues, I need a connection to a past of some importance, however wan the connection. (GX 175; emphasis in original)

Andy feels like there is something missing in his life due to the fact that he has not really witnessed any crucial part of history. In his eyes, such a shared memory is an important component of identity, and therefore there is a void in his life that needs to be filled. His dropping out implies that he has decided that this void cannot be filled by remaining a member of mainstream society, as he does not share its ideals anymore. The bedtime stories he

exchanges with his friends seem to be a way to temporarily make him feel better, even though they must be regarded also as a form of escapism. At one point, he notices that, “[c]reepy as it may be, dreary as it may be, repetitive as it may be, work keeps me level” (GX 125). As his friend Dag observes, Andy often thinks too much about things (cf. GX 199), which may be the reason why keeping himself occupied makes him feel better.

At the end of the novel, a change of mood can be observed in Andy. Even though, throughout the book, he has never stood out as making active decisions, he decides to follow Dag and Claire to Mexico, into the final withdrawal from (American) society. He realizes that, even if he does not really know “where or how, but I definitely made that choice. And lonely and awful as that choice can sometimes be, I have no regrets” (GX 201). With this statement, Andy starts to accept his position in society, and also his position in time, i.e., in the present. Following this insight, it seems that, already after crossing the border, things start getting better. He is given oranges by a farmer, and finally experiences a “crush of love” when being hugged by the group of disabled teenagers (GX 207). In this final scene, the craving for “unconditional acceptance” (Curnutt 103), which characterizes Andy and his friends, is finally satisfied.

## 2.5. Dag Bellinghausen: The epitome of a dropout

Dag can be regarded as the most radical representative of Generation X in the novel. He seems to be the most convinced about dropping out of society and repeatedly expresses his rejection of materialism. Like his friends, he dropped out of his former life due to the frustrations with his bleak future prospects (cf. Porsche 10). Except for the story about how he ended up in Palm Springs, there is not much information given about Dag's life prior to dropping out. Even from their refuge of Palm Springs, he has to withdraw from time to time, an action referred to by Andy as "Dagging out" (cf. GX 75). Dag appears to be a very headstrong person, who needs a lot of time for himself. This kind of behavior can be regarded as what Coupland refers to in a footnote as the "Cult of Aloneness: The need for autonomy at all costs, usually at the expense of long-term relationships. Often brought about by overly high expectations of others" (GX 77). This definition basically describes the process of dropping out quite aptly, which is often caused by disappointed expectations and consequently leads to the withdrawal from the source of disillusionment and the pursuit of independence.

Dag very precisely describes his own experience of disillusionment, referring to its climax as "Mid-twenties Breakdown" (GX 33) followed by dropping out. According to Andy, who retells his story, Dag used to work in marketing, representing everything he rejects today, and can even be regarded as a former "yuppie" (cf. Porsche 10). After some time in the office, however, he realized how he hated the environment he worked in and how hopeless his career prospects were. What followed was his first attempt at dropping out,

when he abandoned his job and “turned into a Basement Person,” as he describes it (GX 31). Dag defines being a Basement Person as a form of alternative lifestyle, which favors intellectualism and rejects mainstream ideals and consumer goods. The Basement lifestyle can thus be regarded as a subcultural movement (cf. GX 32), that attaches importance to everything they feel is neglected by conventional society.

Another aspect of this lifestyle that Dag takes up is “occupational slumming: taking jobs so beneath my abilities that people would have to look at me and say, ‘Well of course he could do *better*’” (GX 33; emphasis in original). This practice is very revealing with regard to the impression of inevitability and also illustrates indifference. The understatement of one’s own abilities and qualifications shows how the expectations of young people have already been lowered to almost nothing. For Dag, working unprofitable jobs beneath his qualifications also seems to have been an attempt at getting rid of the marks of materialism his yuppie job had left on him (cf. GX 33). However, in the end, he has to admit that he does not fit in with the Basement subculture and that his “life-style escape” has failed; the result of this insight ultimately is his “Mid-twenties Breakdown” (GX 33). This breakdown, often also referred to as quarter-life crisis, marks his transition to the final retreat from society. Dag falls into a depression, feeling that he has failed and “convinced that all of the people I’d ever gone to school with were headed for great things in life and that I wasn’t. They were having more fun; finding more meaning in life” (GX 35). Once more, the loss of perspective becomes apparent that is shared by all members of the generations discussed. The search for meaning, and especially uncertainty about how to regain it, is a recurring theme in the young people affected by disillusion.

During his new life on the margins of society, Dag develops a habit of vandalism. As already mentioned, the display of deviant behavior and the pursuit of “kicks” are common characteristics of outsiders and dropouts. The objects of Dag’s aggression seem to be exclusively cars with bumper stickers and messages that in some way insult him (cf. GX 133), such as “We’re spending our children’s inheritance” (GX 5). For him, the cars and especially the stickers seem to represent materialism and extravagance. When asked by Andy about his “destructive tendency,” Dag tells him that he is not sure “whether I feel more that I want to punish some aging crock for frittering away my world, or whether I’m just upset that the world has gotten too big” (GX 6). Again, a touch of “Boomer Envy” can be detected in this statement as well as the impression that life is unfair. Toward the end, after accidentally having burned the Aston Martin and then evaded prosecution, the decision to go to Mexico is the first indication of hope and a slight optimism that can be observed in Dag. At least for the moment, there seems to be the chance for him to finally find meaning again.

## **2.6. Claire Baxter: The female dropout**

As the only woman among the closer group of friends, Claire also plays a significant role as a representative of her generation. Like her friends, she has dropped out of society to the quiet of Palm Springs, leaving her old life behind “in the name of adventure” (GX 100). When he describes Claire’s character, Andy once again refers to the motivation behind the withdrawal of the three

friends as the “quest for a personal truth” (GX 100). This emphasizes that their retreat can be seen as a search for identity and meaning, as also Dag’s experience has shown. Andy mentions that he admires Claire for her decision to drop out, as he thinks that there is a lot of courage involved, as for women, this step is even harder to take than for men (cf. GX 100). Apart from Hemingway’s Brett Ashley, Claire is the only character in the novels discussed that provides an insight into a woman’s perspective on marginality.

While Andy’s family is basically in good order and his parents are still married, and there is not much known about Dag’s family background, Claire’s family represents the emerging phenomenon of the blending and increasingly complex family constellations that affected many members of Generation X. When Andy first meets her, he is impressed by her “incalculably numerous [...] siblings, half-siblings, step-siblings” (GX 37), while her father is sitting at a table with his fourth wife (cf. GX 38). From the way Andy describes the scene, it seems that Claire does not really seem to fit in with her family. They are all portrayed as rather shallow, carrying on superficial conversations and referring to Claire as a “spinster” (GX 41). To some extent, she seems to be an outsider to her own family. In contrast to Andy, she also has a very different idea of families, which she shares with him:

I really think that when God puts together families, he sticks his finger into the white pages and selects a group of people at random and then says to them all, ‘Hey! You’re going to spend the next seventy years together, even though you have nothing in common and don’t even *like* each other.’ (GX 41)

For Claire, her family constellation is a major source of disillusionment and apparently has also affected her understanding of harmony and relationships, which is also revealed in her “obsession” with Tobias (cf. GX 126, *passim*).

Still, like Andy, Claire exhibits a certain longing for the past and the “good old times.” Even though she has never really experienced a harmonious family life, she craves for the lives the preceding generation is assumed to have led. What Claire, and presumably also Andy, is most jealous of are “their upbringings that were so clean, so free of *futurelessness*. And I want to throttle them for blithely handing over the world to us like so much skid-marked underwear” (GX 98). In this statement, the central concerns of Generation X are emphasized once more. Apart from their biggest fear of “futurelessness,” it also implies the accusation that their predecessors have left behind the mess of everything that went wrong with society, ready for the young Xers to clean it up. This reproach also suggests an underlying feeling of overextension with the developments of society. It could be argued in this context that the confrontation with the economic situation of the time has in a way raised a fear of failure in the young people, who, already discouraged, have decided to resign.

The fears and concerns of Generation X are often depicted in some way in Claire’s bedtime stories. The Texlahoma story of the astronaut Buck and the three daughters of the Monroe family illustrates how the citizens of this mythic parallel world “are doomed to repeat history endlessly and content themselves with small, wistful and repressed dreams of escape from their insignificant orbit” (Greenberg 71). Even though Claire is able to leave Texlahoma any time

she wants, it seems that the feeling of being trapped is also familiar to the three dropouts with regard to mainstream society. The withdrawal from society is also a main subject of the story about Linda; however, this story focuses more on her motives for dropping out. Linda is a rich but unhappy young woman, who in a way epitomizes the downside of wealth: Even though she has everything with regard to material goods, there is something missing in her life, and so she remains “constantly searching for one person, one idea, or one place that could rescue her from her, well, her *life*” (GX 142; emphasis in original). Like the members of Generation X, Linda is also looking for a new meaning and consequently decides to drop out in the form of a period of silence, which, even though turning out fatal, provides her with a new understanding in the end.

Linda’s story can be regarded as an allusion to the situation of the three protagonists. The characters portrayed in *Generation X* most clearly illustrate how disillusionment can result in the decision to drop out and turn away from society. Andy, Dag, and Claire, like many others of their generation, feel that they have been deceived by the ideals and promises of a prosperous future that they grew up with. All of them have their own, individual reasons for rejecting materialism and the hypocrisy they often observe in others, but it is this common resentment that unites them as a group. Generation X may often appear to have been more passive than their predecessors, but they also found their ways of expressing disagreement with the values and ideals of conventional society, even if it was only by turning away from it.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to determine whether the various “generations” that emerged in American society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be regarded as “generations of outsiders.” For this purpose, different aspects and factors of marginality as well as the central ideals of the American Mind were taken into account. According to the theoretical findings, the central characters and the generations they represent were analyzed in the novels of Hemingway, Kerouac, and Coupland.

It has been shown that freedom and independence, along with self-reliance and individualism, can be regarded as the most important values that have emerged as the cornerstones of American identity. All of these ideals also play a significant role with regard to marginality, as they often form the basis both of the exclusion of an individual from society and of the decision to drop out of society. Self-reliance, as can be seen from the public image of the young people of Generation X, can be misunderstood as arrogance and consequently lead to stigmatization. The same holds true for individualism, especially with regard to appearance or behavior, or even mental illness, as the treatment of some of the writers of the Beat Generation reveals.

With regard to dropping out, the desire for freedom and independence can generally be regarded as major motives. But more importantly, dropping out also illustrates how the loss of ideals can actually bring about marginalization. As has been shown, the feeling of disillusionment is highly present in all of the generations discussed. The most prominent example in this

context are the writers of the Lost Generation, who, due to the disappointment caused by what they perceived to be the decay of the ideals and values of American society, even left their home country and went into self-exile in order to find new meaning and, eventually, new ideals. It can be argued at this point that, while there was a shift in priorities and the system of values seemed to decrease in importance, the generations of outsiders of 20<sup>th</sup>-century America to some extent strived to revive the original constituents of the American Mind.

Based on the novels examined in this thesis, an attempt was made to illustrate that the generations discussed had their origin in the regrouping of formerly marginalized individuals. Various factors have been determined that play a part in this process, most notably a similar attitude toward, or sometimes even resentment to, conventional society. Even though shared ideals and common interests are also important in the formation of a group, in the beginning, a common rejection can often serve as an even more uniting factor. This can be observed in the group of Andy, Dag, and Claire, who, even though they have become close friends in the meantime, have found common ground due to their withdrawal from mainstream society and their rejection of materialism. Another factor that has a uniting effect is the search for a new meaning due to prior disillusionment. While Sal and Dean practice this quest physically by travelling, and Jake and his friends patiently await inspiration while passing the time drinking and keeping themselves entertained, Andy and his friends look for it in the past. In contrast to the generations preceding them, they lack the feeling of a common experience, a “shared past” that truly unites them. The feeling of a shared past, like the experiences of the war for the Lost Generation, can be regarded as an important component of group identity. A

similar effect is observed in the sensation of a shared fate, of “being in this together,” which can also increase social cohesion.

The theory of generations of outsiders overlaps with many aspects of various existing approaches to American identity and social developments. However, especially with regard to the literary works examined, it is also an attempt at opening up a new perspective on the generations portrayed. The aspect of marginality has been very revealing in this context and to some extent, may even be considered to provide a basis that still offers many possibilities for future analyses of 20<sup>th</sup>-century American literature.

## Works Cited

### **Primary Sources**

Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. 1991.

London: Abacus, 1996.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*. 1927. London: Arrow, 2004.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. 1957. New York: Penguin, 1976.

### **Secondary Sources**

Aldridge, John W. *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars*. New York: Noonday, 1951.

---. "Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*." *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises*. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 109-129.

Becker, Howard S. *Außenseiter: Zur Soziologie abweichenden Verhaltens*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1973. (Orig.: *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free P of Glencoe, 1963/71.)

Buell, Lawrence. *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*. Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1973.

Campbell, James. *This is the Beat Generation: New York – San Francisco – Paris*. London: Vintage, 2000.

- Campbell, Neil, and Alasdair Kean. *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Cohen, Andrew. "Me and My Zeitgeist." *The Nation* 19 July 1993: 96-100. Web. 20 Nov 2014.
- Commager, Henry Steele. *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character since the 1880's*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1950.
- Cook, Bruce. *The Beat Generation*. New York: Scribner, 1971.
- Cowley, Malcolm. *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation*. New York: Viking, 1973.
- Craib, Ian. *Classical Social Theory: An Introduction to the Thought of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Curnutt, Kirk. "Teenage Wasteland: Coming-of-Age Novels in the 1980s and 1990s." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43.1 (2001): 93-111. Web. 20 Nov 2014.
- Davidson, Arnold E., and Cathy N. Davidson. "Decoding the Hemingway Hero in *The Sun Also Rises*." *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises*. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 83-107.
- Day, Martin S. *A Handbook of American Literature: A Comprehensive Study from Colonial Times to the Present Day*. St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1975.

“Dropout.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 23 Oct 2014.

Duncan, Russell. “The Summer of Love and Protest: Transatlantic Counterculture in the 1960s.” *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*. Ed. Grzegorz Kosc et al. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013. 144-173.

Elias, Norbert, and John L. Scotson. *Etablierte und Außenseiter*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990. (Orig.: *The Established and the Outsiders*, London: Frank Cass, 1965)

France, Alan. *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2007.

Galán Lozano, Pedro A. “Beatness Meets Marginality: San Francisco in Jack Kerouac's Literature.” *Ángulo Recto: Revista De Estudios Sobre La Ciudad Como Espacio Plural* 4.2 (2012): 59-73. Web. 3 Nov 2014.

“Generation.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.

Greenberg, Louis. “‘A Museum of Fifteen Years Ago’: Nostalgia in Three Novels by Douglas Coupland.” *Journal of Literary Studies* 29.1 (2013): 67-78. Web. 14 Nov 2014.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London and New York: Methuen, 1979.

Heiman, Rachel J. “The Ironic Contradictions in the Discourse on Generation X or How ‘Slackers’ are Saving Capitalism.” *Childhood* 8 (2001): 274-292. Web. 22 Oct 2014.

- Holton, Robert. "'The Sordid Hipsters of America': Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity." *Reconstructing the Beats*. Ed. Jennie Skerl. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 11-26.
- Ireland, Brian. "American Highways: Recurring Images and Themes of the Road Genre." *The Journal of American Culture* 26.4 (2003): 474-484. Web. 3 Nov 2014.
- Kaplan, Nathaniel, and Thomas Katsaros. *The Origins of American Transcendentalism in Philosophy and Mysticism*. New Haven: College & University P, 1975.
- Kern, Alexander. "The Rise of Transcendentalism: 1815-1860." *Transitions in American Literary History*. Ed. Harry Hayden Clark. New York: Octagon, 1975. 245-314.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.
- Matza, David. "Subterranean Traditions of Youth." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 338 (1961): 102-118. Web. 17 Oct 2014.
- Mayer, Hans. *Außenseiter*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975.
- Meyerson, Robert E. "Why Robert Cohn? An Analysis of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*." *Liberal and Fine Arts Review* 2.1 (1982): 57-68. Reprinted in *Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises*. Ed. James Nagel. New York: Hall, 1995: 95-105.

- Mitchell, Mark Andrew, Piper Mclean, and Gregory B. Turner. "Understanding Generation X... Boom or Bust Introduction." *Business Forum* 27.1 (2005): 26-30. Web. 22 Oct. 2014.
- Monk, Craig. *Writing the Lost Generation: Expatriate Autobiography and American Modernism*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2008.
- Oake, Jonathon I. "Reality Bites and Generation X as Spectator." *The Velvet Light Trap* 53 (2004): 83- 97. Web. 20 Nov 2014.
- "Outsider." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 23 Oct 2014.
- Porsche, Michael. *Alternative Nation? Die 'Generation X' in der amerikanischen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Paderborner Universitätsreden 59. Paderborn: Niesel, 1997.
- Reich, Charles A. *The Greening of America*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Savage, Jon. *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*. London: Pimlico, 2007.
- Schryer, Stephen. "Failed Faustians: Jack Kerouac and the Discourse of Delinquency." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 57.1 (2011): 123-148. Web. 3 Nov 2014.
- Skerl, Jennie. Introduction. *Reconstructing the Beats*. Ed. Jennie Skerl. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004: 1-7.
- Skinazi, Karen E. H. "Through Roots and Routes: *On the Road*'s Portrayal of an Outsider's Journey into the Meaning of America." *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue Canadienne d'Etudes Américaines* 39.1 (2009): 85-103. Web. 3 Nov 2014.

- Strauss, William, and Neil Howe. "Thirteenth Generation Born 1961-1981."  
*Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*. Ed. Jack Nachbar and Kevin  
Lause. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1992. 490-  
504.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Trans. Henry Reeve. Ed.  
Phillips Bradley. Vol. 2. New York: Vintage, 1954.
- Tulgan, Bruce. "Generation X: Slackers? Or the Workforce of the Future?"  
*Employment Relations Today* 24.2 (1997): 55-64. Web. 22 Oct 2014.
- Tytell, John. *Naked Angels: The Lives & Literature of the Beat Generation*.  
New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Tyyskä, Vappu. "Conceptualizing and Theorizing Youth: Global Perspectives."  
*Contemporary Youth Research: Local Expressions and Global  
Connections*. Ed. Helena Helve and Gunilla Holm. Aldershot: Ashgate,  
2005. 3-14.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda. Introduction. *New Essays on The Sun Also Rises*. Ed.  
Linda Wagner-Martin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 1-18.
- Wilson, Steve. "'Buddha Writing': The Author and the Search for Authenticity  
in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*." *The Midwest  
Quarterly* 40.3 (1999): 302-315. Web. 30 Oct 2014.

## **Lebenslauf**

### **Persönliche Daten:**

Mag. phil. Theresa Rass

Geboren am 11. März 1989 in Rum

### **Universitäre Ausbildung:**

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2015         | Abschluss des Diplomstudiums Anglistik und Amerikanistik  |
| Oktober 2014 | Abschluss des Diplomstudiums Deutsche Philologie  |
| Oktober 2007 | Beginn der Diplomstudien Deutsche Philologie und Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Innsbruck |

### **Schulbildung:**

- |           |                                  |
|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 1999-2007 | Akademisches Gymnasium Innsbruck |
| 1995-1999 | Volksschule Zirl                 |

### **Studienbezogene Auslandsaufenthalte:**

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| SS 2011      | Auslandssemester an der University of New Orleans in New Orleans, LA (USA)               |
| Februar 2010 | Austrian Student Program (ASP) an der University of New Orleans in New Orleans, LA (USA) |

## **Eidesstattliche Erklärung**

Ich erkläre hiermit an Eides Statt durch meine eigenhändige Unterschrift, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder inhaltlich den angegebenen Quellen entnommen wurden, sind als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Die vorliegende Arbeit wurde bisher in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form noch nicht als Magister-/Master-/Diplomarbeit/Dissertation eingereicht.

---

Datum

---

Unterschrift