

The Tyranny of Cool: Orthodoxy, Heresy & the 1960s Counterculture

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Structure

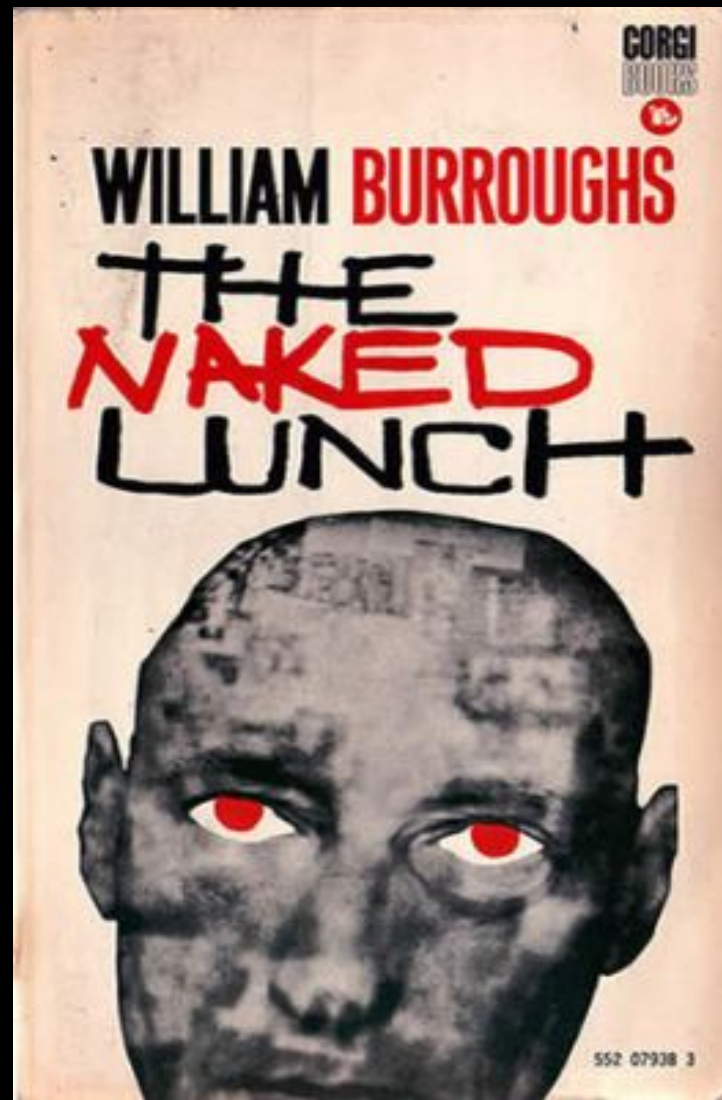
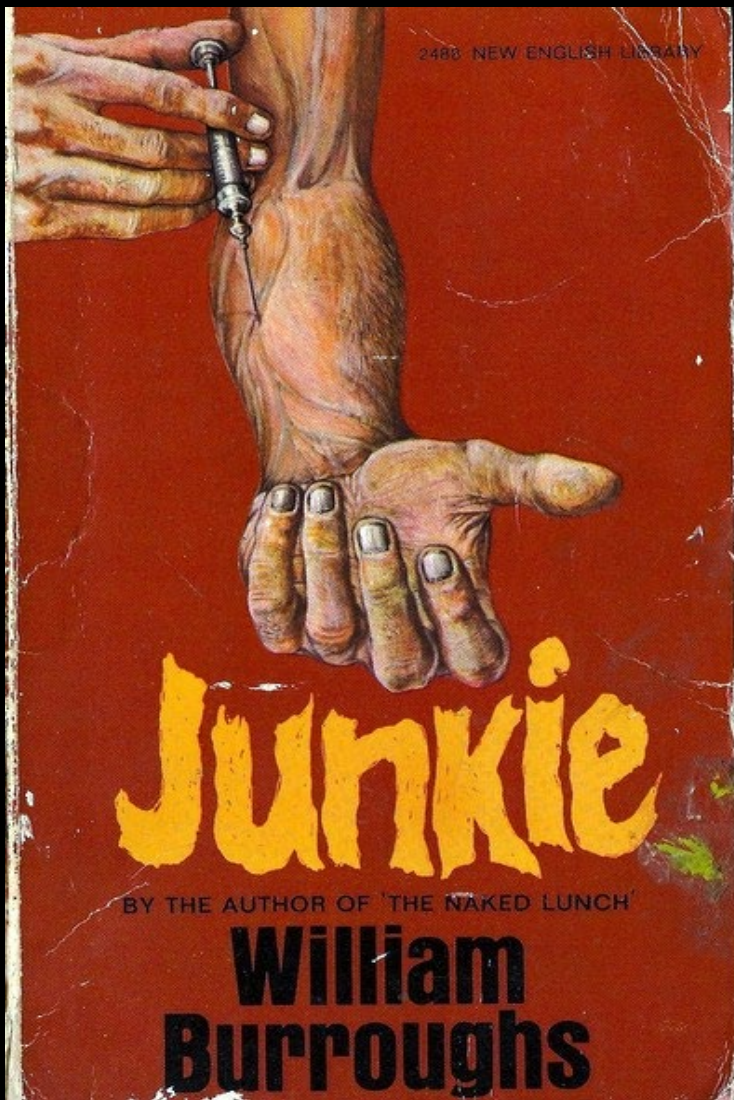
1. The Beats as cultural heretics
2. The transformation of their ideas into modern orthodoxies
3. The new countercultural backlash
4. What went wrong/ was wrong to cause this backlash?

1. Heresy

Rebelling against:

- American consumerism
- Cultural uniformity
- Bourgeois suppression of the individual's right to think, feel and behave freely (license rather than liberty?)

'The control machine. Simply the machinery – police, education, etc. - used by a group in power to keep itself in power and extend its power'





Forms of Rebellion:

- Itinerant Lifestyle
- Radically Formless Autobiographical Literature
- Sexual Permissiveness in life and Obscenity in literature
- Opening 'the Doors of Perception' through drugs, Eastern religion and philosophy (Zen Buddhism, Hare Krishna)



Blame these 4

THE outbreak of beatnik violence that wrecked Lord Montagu's jazz festival at Beaulieu last week must be blamed on the cult of despair preached by four strange men.

The four beatnik "prophets" do not themselves preach violence. But they do infect their followers with indifference or outright hostility to established codes of conduct.

Nothing matters to the beatnik save the "kicks" or thrills to be enjoyed by throwing off inhibitions. If you feel any urge, no matter how outrageous, indulge in it. If the beat of jazz whips up violent emotions, why not give way to them?

● Britain has been shocked by Peter Forbes's report on the great unwashed army of beatniks.

● Today he names the men whose rantings have mesmerised a large and impressionable section of young people throughout the world... men who have nothing to offer but despair.

That is how the teenage "disciples" of the four men who inspired the cult interpret their masters' teachings.

I know this to be so not only from what happened at Beaulieu. My investigations into the beatnik horror both here and in America lead me to the conclusion that violence and viciousness are the inevitable result of the beatnik "philosophy."

Let me introduce you to its four prophets so that you can see how their teachings, innocent though they may appear, nevertheless become the source of evil.

First, there is Jack Kerouac, the former American merchant seaman who



CORSO the crank poet

● *The only way to enter a modern city, he wrote, is "very tentatively with two suitcases filled with despair."*

became a talented writer. Unfortunately, he has devoted his great gifts to exalting the bums and jazz-maniacs of the New York five cellars.

'Corrupt'

Kerouac evolved a theory of a post-war generation "beat" by society, but becoming "beatnik" by turning their backs on a "corrupt civilisation."

Some of the younger, callow generation of Americans look that to mean that they could forget civilised morality, too.

They became rebels against society. They took to jazz or drugs as a means of escape from the ordinary world. They displeased work. They didn't wash.

All this because everything in the "corrupt" 20th century world evokes disgust. The disgust is certainly fed by the other American beatnik prophets.

William S. Burroughs, for example. He is in his middle forties, freely admits to have been a drug addict for 15 years. He is now cured, but he used to take "fixes" of drugs by hypodermic needle.

This is how he wrote recently of his drug taking:—

"I lived in one room in the native quarter of Tangier. I had not taken a bath in a year nor changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour in the fibrous grey wooden flesh..."

Allen Ginsberg is the third of the American beatnik prophets, whose despair has infected some teenagers. He is 34 years old and—in his own way—a gifted poet.

One of his poems begins: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,

Starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the Negro streets at dawn looking

For an angry fix..."

Lisa Burroughs and Kerouac he, too, in his writings, seems obsessed by drugs and drug addicts.

The fourth of the beatnik prophets is from America, Gregory Corso, wrote that the only sensible way to enter a modern city is "very tentatively, two suitcases filled with despair."

So far as this bizarre quartet of beatnik leaders

men for the Beatnik horror



BURROUGHS the ex-drug addict

THEIR CULT OF DESPAIR IS DRIVING THE TEENAGERS TO VIOLENCE

are concerned, disgust and revolt against ordinary values is confined to words. But their followers and disciples act....

The break-up of Lord Montagu's jazz festival is a warning of how beatniks over here can take to violence.

Fortunately there is no encouragement of beatnik behaviour by ordinary people in Britain.

That is why so many young British beatniks are going abroad, to France in particular. There, where the atmosphere is somewhat more lax, they can let themselves go.

They can and they do—as my next report will show.

NEXT WEEK: The British beatniks in Paris. The dentist's son who became a tramp. A London girl who repented.

He lived for a year in a room in Tangier without taking a bath or removing his clothes.

GINSBERG the hate merchant

At 34 this gifted poet's hate of society and modern life led him to write: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." Now the beatniks worship his philosophy.



How one section of the media saw the Beats --- an extract from an article in The People of Sunday, 7 August, 1960.



KEROUAC the hobos' prophet

An ex-seaman who became a talented writer, he prefers to devote his talents to exalting the bums and jazz maniacs of the New York five cellars.

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THE NEW NOVEL BY

**JACK
KEROUAC**

AUTHOR OF

ON THE ROAD

**THE
DHARMA
BUMS**

The sensational bestseller
about two reckless wanderers
out to scale the heights
of life...and love

A SIGNET BOOK COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

‘A great rucksack revolution, thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with their rucksacks, going up mountains to pray, making children laugh ... wild gangs of holy men getting together to drink and talk and pray ... to meditate and ignore society’



2. Orthodoxy

"Because in the end, you
won't remember the time you
spent working in the office
or mowing your lawn. Climb
that goddamn mountain." -
Jack Kerouac

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Kerouac wore khakis.



GAP
KHAHIS

Allen Ginsberg wore khakis.



GAP
KHAHIS

3. Backlash





4. What was/went wrong?

‘In this radical extension of the politics of the late 60s, difference and victimization are prized, ranked against the victimization of other groups. We crown our good with victimhood. While conservatives claim to speak in the name of a majority, the standard-bearers of identity politics cultivate their own marginality, practicing a separatism that incapacitates them for alliances and collective improvements’

In summary:

- We should understand the American literary and cultural renaissance of the 1950s & 60s in longer historical terms.
- It had a significant impact on the politics young people engaged in then: making the personal political in a way that brought individual identity to the fore.
- Modern identity politics are being contested today because of:
 - a.) problems with that original countercultural attitude
 - b.) the direction countercultural ideas have taken since the 60s.
- A movement for individual freedom from the tyranny of convention changed its stripes once it became the convention itself.
- From the Beats and the 1960s attitudes they inspired, we can learn 2 apparently contradictory but connected lessons about our new cultural-political world:
 1. to be more open minded and compassionate, and less righteous & pious in pursuit of a fairer society
 2. to be wary rather than outraged or dismissive of the current backlash against progressivism. Bearing in mind the power the 60s counterculture held over the young, it's crucial now to acknowledge the same potential power in the hands of new, politically opposite heretics