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TWO BEAT NOVEL ADAPTATIONS: "ON THE ROAD AND NAKED LUNCH"

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on my MA thesis which is entitled "Comparison of Two Novel Adaptations of Beat Generation: Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road' and William Burroughs 'Naked Lunch'". The main issues in this paper are: a) Beat Generation and Beat Novel b) Analysis of On the Road's Film Adaptation c) Analysis of Naked Lunch's Film Adaptation. Also, final section of this study intended to determine whether adapters of *On the Road* and *Naked Lunch* succeeded to create a new and original work of art or not. On the basis of the results of this article, it was concluded that "a restoration of the essence of the letter and the spirit" was the most efficient elements in adaptation of Beat Novels. The obvious finding to emerge from this study was that director Walter Salles' *On the Road* was defined as less successful adaptation than David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* in terms of loyalty to spirit of original work and creating visual equivalence of the letter. Even though *On the Road* was more faithful to its original, it failed to preserve spirit of novel and to create cinematic equivalence of the book.

Key words: Beat Generation, Jack Kerouac, Novel Adaptation, *Naked Lunch*, *On the Road*, William Burroughs

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article is a comparative analysis of two adaptations of Beat Novels; Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. Former was shot by respected Brazilian director Walter Salles in 2010's and the latter was shot by genius Canadian director David Cronenberg in 1990's. Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* is a successful adaptation example of "inadaptable text" in terms of both its capability of creating new kind of work of art and carrying the spirit of original work at the same time. On the other hand; even though it is more loyal to its original text, *On the Road* can be regarded less successful adaptation than Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* since it is not able to reflect the spirit of novel. Most of the film critics and scholars which mention

in this study claim that some books are naturally open to visual translation with their plot, characters and narration style. However, *On the Road* and *Naked Lunch* are not one of those books.

2. Plots of *On the Road* and *Naked Lunch*

The groundbreaking novel, *On the Road* which was published in September 1957, made its author, Jack Kerouac, famous just after Gilbert Millstein's review in *Times*. The evolution of *On the Road*; in other words, its writing process which dated back to the late 40's, its numerous revisions and becoming a "publishable novel" –according to norms of its time– could be regarded as another thesis topic in itself. Original scroll of *On the Road* was written between April 2 and April 22 in 1951 by Jack Kerouac in a delirium. Kerouac's notes of travels

throughout United States of America and Mexico with Neal Cassady dated back between 1947 and 1950. As a result of a collection of these materials, he revealed his novel project in August 1948. Kerouac wrote, "which I keep thinking about: [is] two guys hitch-hiking to California in search of something they do not really find, and losing themselves on the road, and coming all the way back hopeful of something else." (Cunnell p.3) However, it was not easy to start for him since he wanted to find his own narration style. On October 17, 1949, Kerouac was still thinking that it was difficult to initiate this novel. Kerouac informed us he actually began *On the Road* in October 1948 but throughout a year he could not make any progress. He claimed that the first year of the writing process was always slow and the novel would be "about to move". (Cunnell p.14)

On the Road's plot is very loose since Kerouac has tried to avoid linear mood of conventional novel. Therefore, the director should imply the same thing for the movie but this time it would be difficult to follow, especially for the audiences that have not read the novel. At this point, I would like mention *On the Road's* plot in brief.

Sal Paradise¹ who is narrator and protagonist of the novel meets with Dean Moriarty after the breakup of his first marriage in the winter of 1947. Dean instantly fascinates Sal with his charisma and free spirit. In spring, Sal decides take the road but troubles start from the beginning: he misses the day departure. A bus takes him Chicago and he goes on hitching rides. After his long journey, he arrives to Denver where he gathers his friends; Carlo and Dean². Meanwhile, Dean has relationships with two women; Camille³, his girlfriend and Marylou⁴, his young wife.

After Sal stays in Denver, he starts off again to accompany his friend, Remi in San Francisco. He begins working with Remi as a night watchman for a while. When Remi's girlfriend kicks Remi and Sal out

of her apartment, he pleasantly leaves from there and takes the road again. Then, he meets Terry who is beautiful Mexican girl on the bus to Los Angeles. They like each other and start living together in her hometown. They work together in cotton fields but when the colder weather comes Sal leaves her and crosses the country to reach his home.

Sal and Dean's next meeting coincides with Christmas. In December 1948, Dean and Marylou show up at Sal's brother's house in Virginia at Christmas dinner. Also, a couple of friends of Dean and Marylou come with them. (Dean has left his new wife Camille and newborn baby Amy to be with his ex-wife Marylou.)

In 1949, Dean, Marylou and Sal arrive in New Orleans; they stay in for a while with Old Bull Lee⁵. Then, they go back to road and head toward California. Dean immediately turns back to his wife Camille by leaving alone Marylou with Sal Paradise when they arrive to San Francisco. Next year, Sal goes back to Denver and works there. However, he does not feel happy since Dean is not there. Therefore, he heads to San Francisco to meet him. When they meet, he realizes that Dean has crippled his thumb. He works in railcars and lives with Camille. However, Dean's wife dissatisfies Sal's visit. One night, Dean and Sal have fun with the girls in the town. Camille throws Dean out and he goes to Denver with Sal to find his father but they fail to find the old man.

Following year, Sal sets off again to go Mexico by passing through Denver. All of a sudden, Dean appears and desires to drive and take him to Mexico City. They take a very long journey and stop in a town where they go a brothel. Finally, they arrive in Mexico but Sal becomes too sick to enjoy the city. Sadly, Dean leaves Sal alone in his sickbed and goes away. After Sal heals and goes to New York, he goes out for a concert with his friend Remi. That night is the last time Sal faces with Dean. Dean unexpectedly appears and Sal says good bye to him. They never see each other again.

Turning now our second Beat Novel *Naked Lunch*, it is based on autobiographical elements which are one of the main characteristics of Beat Generation works as well. To understand better how

¹Jack Kerouac in real life.

² Dean is identified with Neal Cassady and Carlo is identified with Allen Ginsberg in real life.

³Carolyn Cassady in real life.

⁴Luanne Henderson, first wife of Neal Cassady.

⁵William Burroughs in real life.

Naked Lunch is written, we should look at the ten years of Burroughs' life before the book exists. Readers of *Naked Lunch* can detect traces of his background in the South, his sexual orientation, his drug addiction –using and selling drugs in New York-, escaping from cops, killing his “de facto” wife Joan by accident, his journey from Mexico to Panama and his visit to South America and living in Tangier at last.

While Burroughs was writing *Naked Lunch*, he apparently aimed to shake the 1950's American Society, and shock western way of thinking and perception. Barry Miles and James Grauerholz who were editors of *Naked Lunch* 's restored text version, stated that this book evolved in nine years, which were the most turbulent years of William Burroughs' life. They informed us this novel had not have a plan in advance before it appeared. (Based on this information, one can conclude the features of another beat literature: “Spontaneity”.) *Naked Lunch* consisted of the texts which were written during the journeys of Burroughs which expanded almost ten years, on four continents. This situation also proves to us how mobility increases performance and creativity of Beat writers.

Burroughs' colleagues Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac revised *Naked Lunch* many times and supported him during its publication process. Also, there were many stories about the title of the book. However, Burroughs insistently stressed that the title of the book was given by Jack Kerouac. William Burroughs himself declared that Kerouac was eponym of his novel. After toilsome writing and the publication process, *Naked Lunch* was exposed to smear campaign and censorship.

Also, it is regarded as an inadaptable text to the screen for many critics and scholars like *On the Road*. Moreover, lack of plot in *Naked Lunch* made the possibility of adaptation more difficult than other Beat novels since *Naked Lunch* does not have a traditional plot and narrative style. *Naked Lunch*'s story is told by drug addict William Lee who both escapes police and puritanical culture of the United States. His escape starts from United States to Mexico and it reaches its beyond. Through this escape, he confronts his sexual orientation and finds a chance to feed his drug need in Tangier, Morocco.

Lee has encountered with the sadistic Dr. Benway in Ministry of Mental Hygiene and Prophylaxis for the first time. Dr. Benway is kind of antagonist of the novel. He appears in several chapters throughout the *Naked Lunch*. Journey of Lee takes places three fictional locations; Annexia, Freeland and Interzone. Annexia has a system a random bureaucracy which oppresses its people by fear and punishment. As for Freeland, it is like a parody location of Welfare Scandinavian states which is ruled by Dr. Benway. The last one, Interzone, is a drug-rich common market and also various sexual favors are on sale in the city.

Most of Lee's travels take places in these imaginary zones. Real events and imaginative descriptions/hallucinations emerge as if narrator of story was in under the influence of drug. However, homosexual behaviors/acts and repressed sexual orientation surpasses drug addiction in many points of the novel.

3. Analysis of On the Road's Adaptation

Jack Kerouac's iconic novel *On the Road* was finally adapted to screen by prominent Brazilian director Walter Salles in 2012. The cast of adaptation includes Garrett Hedlund, Sam Riley, Kristen Stewart, Kirsten Dunst, Viggo Mortensen, Amy Adams, Elisabeth Moss, Alice Braga, Tom Sturridge, Terrence Howard and Steve Buscemi. Before analyzing the adaptation of *On the Road*, I would like to mention the long adventure of the filming process of the novel. Even though there is some kind of consensus about inadaptability of *On the Road* among film critics and scholars because of its unique spontaneous writing style and loose plot, Regina Weinreich has been quite positive about the adaptation of *On the Road* in her article entitled “Can *On the Road* Go on Screen?” She has claimed that *On the Road* has already a plot which contains a persuasive journey on spectacular American landscape.

For over five decades, many filmmakers had attempted to turn the novel into a moving picture but it was not so easy a job to handle since the book became a cult and sacred book for millions of people around the world. To reflect Sal's and Neal's nomadic lives, their hunger for new experiences and describe unique people around them such as

William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg in a satisfying way in a nonstop physical and spiritual journey seemed impossible for many critics.

Jack Kerouac stated that he wrote *On the Road* in three weeks but it was known that it took almost seven years to complete it since materials had been collected throughout his journeys and then he made multiple revisions and changes on it. Similarly, it was not surprising that the film version of this unique novel passed from hand to hand of producers; also there were written many scripts for it but finally Walter Salles made it happen in 2011.

Over a period of 25 years, Coppola hired (and paid) a long succession of writers to try their hand at writing a film script of *On the Road* – the list included such distinguished names as Michael Herr, Russell Banks, Barry Gifford, and even his own son Roman Coppola. Every script that was turned in landed quickly in the garbage can, and by 2004 Coppola had pretty much concluded that *On the Road* could not be adapted to film. (Nicosia p.20)

Regina Weinreich asserts that Kerouac's characters Sal and particularly Dean represents the zeitgeist of the era in American society. Therefore, one can suppose that there would be rivalry among filmmakers to adapt *On the Road* to the screen. However, the reality is quite different. As Weinreich stressed, that movie version of *On the Road*, would be open to misinterpretations just as its novel. This issue was also Kerouac's one of worries about the adaptation. In his letter which was written to Carroll Brown in 1961, he stated that he was worried *On the Road* would be labeled as a hoodlum bluejacket story because of the scenes of criminality in the novel. This was a complete misinterpretation of the novel, which quite deviated from Kerouac's message to express:

In part 1, chapter 1, of the novel, he explains "criminality" as pertains to Dean: "not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying over burst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he

only stole cars for joy rides) (Weinreich p.192)

Weinreich was quite supportive and hopeful about adaptation of "inadaptable" before the movie existed. She asserted that novels had key scenes that were suitable for film structure such as moving American landscape, amusing moments in a jazz club and an interesting visit to Old Bull Lee's house.

In terms of a film, the key scenes on the road in a moving American landscape, in a jazz club, at Old Bull Lee's, would have to be made visual in an extended narrative. The novel resolved those aesthetic issues in its language, in its use of repetition, of key phrases triggering verbal riffs, in Kerouac's expansion of language as a storytelling medium. In film, viewers are accustomed to cuts, sometimes well-thought-out transitions, sometimes jarring and abrupt jumps. To use the genre of film as an exploration of storytelling possibilities, new idioms would have to be explored. (Weinreich p.195)

Weinreich stresses that we have readymade road motif for the movie. However, filmmakers have already successfully dealt with this motif: "Two guys against the world, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, two girls, Thelma and Louise, heading over the cliff in a shiny car, two guys on motorcycles silhouetted against the landscape: Easy Rider, Motorcycle Diaries." Weinreich also asks, can medium of film reach another level by film crew of *On the Road*. In other words, she asks that can narrative possibilities be expanded for literary fiction. (Weinreich p.195) Film critic Mick LaSalle informed us that scriptwriter, Jose Rivera, was fed from three main sources while he was writing the scenario to create authentic Beat atmosphere and increased the movie's persuasiveness:

The screenplay, by Jose Rivera, comes from three main sources. The principal one is Kerouac's original novel, published in 1957. The second is the unedited draft of "*On the Road*" - Kerouac's "original scroll" - which was published decades later. And the third source is the true history of Kerouac, Neal Cassady and LuAnne Henderson, the

prototypes of Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty and Marylou, respectively. In some places, the truth was even more extreme than anything Kerouac set down. (La Salle 2013)

Weinreich also tells us Jose Rivera also has declared that his script would be based on search for father before the film being shot:

Playwright Jose Rivera said he has based his script upon the search for the father, an idea derived from taped interviews the director Walter Salles conducted with key surviving Beat figures in researching his work. The script begins with "Papa Paradise" on his deathbed and ends with Sal Paradise, having returned from the road, visiting Papa's grave. (Weinreich p.189)

In the movie, content of the novel were reflected to a large extent. Moreover, the director and scriptwriter benefited from original the scroll and different Beat sources such as true histories of Kerouac, Neal Cassady, and LuAnne Henderson. Director Walter Salles stated that while he was doing preparation for the adaptation he noticed something important in the original scroll. In his interview with journalist Tom Hawker, he explained that he was struck by the fact that even the first line of the scroll started differently than the novel, which was published in 1957. The scroll started with this sentence: "I first met met Neal not long after my father died" On the other hand, the published novel started with this sentence: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up." Therefore, director Salles and screenwriter Rivera together decided to unite these two main characters, Sal and Dean, at the same point: "the missing father leitmotif." Tom Hawker asserts that the missing father theme was used as backbone for structure of the movie. "In the film, when [Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty] first meet they have a long conversation about their lost fathers. This is the common ground on which that friendship will be based."

In the opening of the movie, we see Sal Paradise walking and crooning on the road and hitchhiking. Then, a flashback scene comes which shows five months earlier. We see Sal, his mother, their friends and relatives in the funeral of "Papa

Paradise". Matthew Shaw claims that this scene makes authentic the movie version of *On the Road* since it serves spiritual notion of the novel:

Walter Salles' adaptation of *On the Road* is pretty authentic, cutting things out of necessity here and there; combining bits of the published novel with the unpublished scroll (such as the reinsertion of the death of Jack/Sal's father at the start of the film, replacing the split with his wife that opens the novel, and by so-doing, emphasizing the sense of loss and spiritual search of the novel. (Matthew Shaw 2012)

The problem of the movie is not related to content. It is related to inadequate interpretation of the spirit of the novel. The movie runs slowly and its characters' energy is very low in comparison with the novel. The novel, *On the Road* has exuberant characters that are burning like "Roman candle", spontaneous adventures which stress the mobility and resistance at the same time. Therefore, adaptation of the novel should have arisen an electrifying feeling and create a desire of taking the road in audiences. Film critic Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian*, asserts parallel arguments with mine in his review of *On the Road*: "*On the Road* was an explosion of literary energy, an intensely American grabbing of possibilities, but the movie insists too much on its elegiac past tense."

In addition, movie's storyline is more concentrated than the book and the characters are more spleenful and shallow. Adaptation of *On the Road* looks a like collection of the best parts of the novel instead of a coherent and riveting visual work of art. Important scenes perfunctory pass one by one and filmmakers squeeze the scenes from the novel as much as they can for the sake of fidelity to the novel. Therefore, the director cannot fully focus on any character and audiences cannot sympathize with characters.

In the novel, emphasis is on "movement" rather than "objective" or "result of mobility." However, in the movie, point of arrival at the end of the road is seen more important than the "road" or

"movement" itself. For example, Sal and Neal's meeting after a long time from their México trip. Sal is portrayed as a successful, promising young author who has settled down after wandering across the country with Neal. As for Neal, he is still on the roads, "dead beat" and in an exhausted condition. Being on the road is presented as a fad, juvenile mistake instead of a resistance or search for identity. The movie's last scene is more impressive and powerful than the road scenes. Criticizing the movie's weaknesses, film critic Simon Gallagher in his review of *On the Road* states that:

For a tale which so obviously values hedonism and free expression, *On The Road* is ultimately joyless and un-engaging, and for a self-discovering road movie to fudge the journey so much and lose almost all lasting meaning is downright criminal. Indeed, the speed of the narrative, and the way it jumps about gives sparse opportunity for any of the peripheral characters to jostle for focus, and as a result it is impossible to care about any of them. Crucially and rather fatally, Salles never invites the audience in: no characters are particularly engaging, so we journey on their adventure as removed voyeurs, as opposed to fellow travelers (which should have been the case) He seems far more concerned with congratulating himself on how well he is adapting the unadaptable, ironically unaware of how far from reality he is. (Gallagher 2012)

It is obvious that *On the Road* is not the novel of a bunch of regular adventurers who are only searching for their next kick. Also, Brad Brevet claims similar argument in his review. Kerouac's characters escape from mainstream society's norms and they search for a new identity. Especially, Sal looks for the bliss in life and he has a "beatific" state of mind. However, Salles and Rivera's version shows the Beat characters over the surface:

Ending of the movie presents an image of Sal, grown out of his wild and jealous ways, leaving those parts of his life behind him for a "normal" life something Marylou hinted at earlier in the film. He found an outlet for

his demons in his writing and that allowed him to find peace and normalcy in life. (Brevet 2012)

Another problem is rhythm of the movie. It is too slow to reflect Beat spirit. Film critic Peter Howell supports same argument with me about the rhythm of movie. He claims that *On the Road* has manic energy which is viable from page to screen in theory but Salles' adaptation fails in practice, especially in terms of reflecting the spirit of the book to the screen.

A moving picture of *On the Road* should theoretically be able to lift the manic energy from the page to the screen, yet it paradoxically fails to do so: "We hear some of Kerouac's famous phrases — such as the invocation that begins, "The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live" — but they only serve to make us want to return to the book, not to see the movie through to its anticlimactic ending." (Howell 2013)

Before the movie being shot, Regina Weinreich has been positive about the movie's visual narration and structure. She argues that this adaptation may bring us new visual vocabulary such as David Lynch's *Lost Highway* or *Inland Empire*. She also has stated that director Walter Salles' approach will be different from conventional Hollywood cinema since his aim is associated with indie-filmmaking. In contrast to Kerouac's vision, the director has a linear plot for the adaptation but Weinreich claims that "he distills from Kerouac's spontaneous prose episodes of sex and adventure more in keeping with the American western." Besides, while director Walter Salles was working on this adaptation he wrote that Road movies were also related with internal transformation of characters.

[...] he is forging a film grammar to incorporate Kerouac's spontaneity with his own assertion that "the most interesting road movies are those in which the identity crisis of the protagonist mirrors the identity crisis of the culture itself." (32) His filmic concerns bring his methodology close to Kerouac's aesthetic and the Beat political agenda for prophesy as exemplified by Beat

road literature, including Ginsberg's "Green Automobile" and "Wichita Vortex Sutra," at least in theory. (Weinreich p.199)

As a result of all these arguments, Weinreich raises these questions: Can the language of Kerouac be filmed? What kind of filmic language should be used / invented by filmmakers to convey internal journey and transformation feelings to the audiences? Weinreich claims that director Salles and scriptwriter Rivera would be loyal to Kerouac's intentions in the novel. To support her argument she states that "road starts with 'father' and leads back to 'father.'" (Weinreich p.199) Also, her final question about the upcoming adaptation was how authentic and metaphoric layers of the novel will be harmonized and visually translated. She was hopeful that the adaptation of the novel, *On the Road*, would have transcendent values as art just like its original source. After releasing the movie, answers of her questions were responded by many film critics. Film Journal International argued that director Salles fails to create visual equivalence of Kerouac's writing style:

On the Road feels overlong; how many ways can you show a car bombing down the highway? Though the film is an honorable, informed attempt to transcribe an American classic and capture youthful frenzy, Salles fails to find a visual correlative for Kerouac's poetry and celebration of the "purity of the road." This baggy monster overrides the mark. (Film Journal International 2012)

Besides, film critic Stephen Whitty made harsh criticism of the movie, especially in terms of the spirit of the book: "[...] there's no madness here, no burning, no desperate search for transcendence, no sense of characters on a heroic, continent-crossing quest. Just another sticky, stinky story of boys, being boys. And refusing to become men."

I assert that Salles and Rivera could not reach Bazin's good adaptation notion which defends that "good adaptation should restore of the essence of the letter and the spirit". Mazmanian supports my argument in his review of *On the Road*: "[...] But the breathless, immediate language of the novel does not translate as well as the setting. The result is

a film that, for all its sex, drugs and be-bop, is oddly labored."

Film critics at Cannes Film Festival in 2012, had the same arguments after screening of *On the Road*. For example; Richard Corliss has remarked that despite the strong cast, powerful soundtrack, and beautiful cinematography of the movie, filmmakers could not imply an equivalent visual technique for the adaptation:

Wouldn't you want to see a movie whose images and emotions matched that rush of words? See this film and keep wanting and waiting. [...] Though there's plenty of cool jazz in the background, the movie lacks the novel's exuberant syncopation — it misses the beat as well as the Beat. Someday someone may make a movie worthy of *On the Road*, but Salles wasn't the one to try. This trip goes nowhere. (Corliss 2012)

In brief; Salles and Rivera did great job in terms of cinematography. However; they failed at creating a cinematic equivalent of *On the Road* which had the original work's style and spirit. Even though expectation of audience is important for filmmakers in adaptation, the gist of a good adaptation depends on scriptwriter and director who perceived the spirit of original work and competent to create visual equivalence of written work. I argue that in adaptation the most vital element is to be loyal to the spirit of the book and at the same time saying new things to the audience of the movie. Therefore, adapters should avoid the blind obedience to source material and should be bold about his/her version. Film critic James Rocchi claims this situation in his review of *On the Road*: "The film's difficulty is that 'after a while the film feels like any other road trip' and by the end you will "find yourself wishing for a little less literary fidelity and a little more cinematic storytelling." As Bazin remarks that filmmakers should be both faithful to spirit of original work and at the same time he/she should use his/her genius to recreate new and authentic works of art.

4. Analysis of *Naked Lunch*'s Adaptation

Naked Lunch was categorized as an 'inadaptable' work of art to the screen by many critics just like other Beat Generation books such as *On the Road*, which was analyzed in the

previous section. However, Canadian film director David Cronenberg proved that these arguments were invalid, at least for *Naked Lunch*. It was filmed thirty one years after it had been published. In 1990, David Cronenberg directed the movie in cooperation with Japanese, British and Canadian producers. Peter Weller, Judy Davis, Ian Holm, and Roy Scheider were leading actors and actresses of the movie. In the movie, Peter Weller is William Lee who was main character of the movie and he represented "William Burroughs' himself. Roy Scheider was the quack doctor and drug dealer that we read him as Doctor Benway in the novel. Ian Holm and Julian Sands are inhabitants of Interzone where was an important intersection point of the movie.

Award winning actress Judy Davis plays both as wife of William Lee, "Joan Lee" and the mysterious woman writer in Interzone "Joan Frost". Film critic Roger Ebert stated that Peter Weller (Bill Lee) showed a notable performance and it was obvious that he studied on Burroughs and probably met him. His low, flat graveled voice; the dead eyes, and his clothing style perfectly matches with William Burroughs. Roger Ebert stated that he did not like the character but he admired "Weller's artistry in creating this portrait of the living dead".

As for the movie's structure; plot of the film, Cronenberg's narrative style and how he has adapted the "unfilmable text" will be considered. Regina Weinreich asserted that *Naked Lunch* was successfully adapted on screen in many aspects. From this point of view, we can detect Bazin's argument of "meeting two geniuses" to create successful adaptation in *Naked Lunch*:

William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* refashioned as David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1991) The tropes of *Naked Lunch* were simpatico with Cronenberg's own preoccupations. [...] Burroughs's idea of the body as a "soft machine," his fantastic drug-induced images, and the characters in his routines ignited the filmmaker's imagination. Cronenberg created humanoid Mugwumps, talking typewriters, even a talking asshole, giant centipedes (their meat made a heavy

hallucinogen)—all extrapolations of Burroughs's text. (Weinreich p.187)

In *Naked Lunch*, we could clearly observe Burroughs's annoyance from post-World War II American society's norms and conditions. To reflect this annoyance, he used satire which was difficult to understand by most of mainstream society's citizen. Also, his language was quite vulgar to raise awareness. Therefore, it had been considered as a "dangerous" work of art for many years. Since its lack of plot and "anti-novel" form, many scholars and critics assessed his book as an inadaptable text. *Naked Lunch* was considered as inadaptable book not only because of its structure, but also because of its content. It consists of many controversial issues such as sexuality, drug addiction and power of American government, which are still difficult to accept nowadays in many countries. To reflect *Naked Lunch* on screen required both cinematic qualification and a kind of courage which is inherent in real artists.

Fortunately, *Naked Lunch's* path has crossed with director Cronenberg and now we have a fruitful novel adaptation to analyze. Before analyzing the movie, I would like to mention the main difference between the novel and the movie of *Naked Lunch*. The novel does not have a fluent narration, whereas the film runs fluently. Since it has not a traditional plot and cohesive text; *Naked Lunch* has been considered as one of the most difficult books to read in American literature. However; in the movie, even though there are events between reality and illusion in a nightmarish atmosphere, there is a strong and cohesive plot to easily follow the movie. Weinreich explains how *Naked Lunch's* text changes into a coherent form and what the film adaptation of *Naked Lunch* about is:

Several key texts were optioned and employed by Cronenberg in crafting a coherent script: the novel itself, another Burroughs work, *Exterminator*, and the author's introduction to the first edition of Burroughs's *Queer*, written in 1951 but not published until 1986. This collection of texts gave Cronenberg the source material for the special amalgamation of *Naked Lunch* routines, characters, vignettes. "The film is

about writing," said the director. "Typewriters come to life and insist upon being heard. (Weinreich p.188)

We have witnessed that Cronenberg used physical horror components to reflect Lee's annoyance of his real sexual orientation. William Lee spends long period of time with alien-like creatures which are called "Mugwumps". They have phallic physical features on their body which reminds us of male genitalia. Also, they try to direct and manipulate William Lee. For example, a Mugwump talks with Lee in a bar and directs him to Doctor Benway: "I'd like you to meet a friend of mine," Bill is told upon encountering his first cigarette-smoking Mugwump on a bar stool in Interzone. He specializes in sexual ambivalence." Dialogs between Carl and Doctor Benway in "The Examination" part of novel turn into a dialog between William Lee and Doctor Benway in the movie. Similar to the novel, Doctor Benway in the movie tries to learn sexual orientation of his patient and irritatingly questions him.

In Interzone, agents seem aware of William Lee's sexual orientation and interestingly care about his "health" and "sexuality". As an audience, we have a feeling that the agents try to make him accept his own sexual orientation. In addition; William Lee kills his wife, Joan by accident and then he kills again doppelganger Joan at the end of movie. Enemy agent Tom points out this issue and claims that Lee gladly kills his wife in his subconscious. Then he repeats this action subconsciously to get rid of his borrowed straight identity.

Apart from sexual repression; state oppression and control mania of government are other two important elements of novel's content. However, in the movie, emphasis is not on these issues. Also, heroin addiction and most homosexual themes are erased in the movie. Instead of these two, there are heterosexual love story between Bill and Joan, and bug powder addiction of this couple which are safer to show on screen. Marjorie Baumgarten claimed that even though all these elements are not peculiar to Burroughs; these arrangements of director Cronenberg make the film commercially more viewable. For the movie, the important thing is what the director of the movie

wants to demonstrate in his movie and these are what Cronenberg wants to show in the movie version of *Naked Lunch*:

I started to think about what I didn't want to do with *Naked Lunch*. I didn't want it to be a movie about drugs... I wanted it to be about writing... I wanted the movie to have characters... I wanted a woman to have an important character... I wanted it to have narrative cohesiveness. (Zurbrugg p.102 quoted (Cronenberg, in Silverberg p.164-5)

The scene which reminds Burrough's addiction is Hank and Martin's⁶ showing up scene in Interzone. They come to Interzone to check on Lee, in other words, their mentor. When they find him he is unconsciously sleeping in dirt probably because of drugs. After Bill awakes from sleep, Martin asks that what is inside of the pillow case. In the previous scene, we have seen that there are pieces of Tom's typewriter's pieces. Lee says that "these are the remains of my last writing machine. It's been a big problem for me." However, when Hank and Martin take a look inside of pillar case, they see a wide array of pill bottles, drugs and syringes. This scene is the only scene where we see real drugs in the movie.

Writing can be seen as another type of addiction. Type-writers are directs and manipulates its writers. One can clearly conclude that typewriters are important "characters" in the movie such as "Clark nova" which frequently informs Bill Lee and gives advice to him.

Director Cronenberg says, "The typewriter is really the writer's unconscious. It's the writer talking to himself. It pushes him around. Your unconscious pushes you around, and aggravates, and provokes you."

[...] the homoerotic genesis turning into a typewriter before crashing almost needs to represent Lee's unconscious. He's exterminated all rational thought. Quickly after this scene there's an iconic shot of Lee's typing hands being reflected in his eyeglasses. It's notable because his fingers look as though they are almost peeling back

⁶They are Best friends of William Lee, they must be Kerouac and Ginsberg in real life.

the layers of his mind, his shattered unconscious. (Gill 2014)

Typewriters in the movie are so influential in the writing process that each writer has his own typewriter and they feel insecure as a writer without them. I claim that the obvious emphasis on typewriters demonstrates to us what really matters is the text, not the readers or author.

It is obvious that film version of *Naked Lunch* is fairer in terms of gender equality. Female characters are more dominant in the movie than in the book, and they are not two dimensional characters. Cronenberg has not limited female characters to certain behaviors. Two important female characters, Fadela and Joan surprise the audiences throughout the movie. For example, Fadela appears as a sinister housekeeper in the American literary couple Tom and Joan Frost's house and then we see her as a mystic character that was bewitching other women. Finally, we learn that she is not a woman. Fadela turns out to be sadistic Dr. Benway in the end.

Bill then visits Tom and exchanges the Mugwriter for his old Clark-Nova, which tells him that Fadela is based at Hans' old factory, which is a warehouse filled with chained-up Mugwumps. Bill finds Joan captive there as part of Fadela's lesbian work force, but Fadela herself turns out to be Dr. Benway in disguise. (Thompson 1992)

Even though, some critics claim that *Naked Lunch* has misogynous elements -which I have also argued it previously- David Cronenberg states that the book of *Naked Lunch* is not a misogynous work of art. He says "His work represents the essence of struggling with misogyny without fear of the dark side. The incident has represented in the film, as the occasion of Joan's death, is the central experience of his life, you see." Then Karen Jaehne asks the director in their interview on *Naked Lunch* why Bill kills Joan twice in the movie. Cronenberg explains that it is not related with misogyny. He has just wanted to highlight the most important event in Burroughs' life:

It was the central event of his life, and every-thing began from that point, again and again. There was no way to erase it or forget it or pay for it. He has to relive that

trauma repeatedly, and it's meant to be about his suffering, not about him getting rid of the woman in his life so he could be creative. It was only after he came to terms with her loss that he began to write seriously again. (Jaehne p.5)

Naked Lunch seemed impossible to adapt with its incoherent narrative, disconnected episodes, and bizarre creatures which were highly depending on Burroughs' imagination. Also, it was accepted that making adaptation of *Naked Lunch* was more difficult than other Beat novels because of its lack of plot. Therefore, most critics and scholars used the term of "adapting inadaptable" for *Naked Lunch* before it was shot by Cronenberg. Regina Weinreich informed us Cronenberg found the solution by throwing the book away:

"Considering the need in traditional films for plot, Cronenberg found an answer: "Throw the book away," he said and offered the following explanation: "A movie of the book *Naked Lunch* would cost 400 million dollars and would be banned in every country in the world." (Weinreich p.189) Cronenberg created a plot for his film by using Burroughs' other novels and his private life in the frame of *Naked Lunch*. Disconnected episodes of *Naked Lunch* and all other texts which I stated before such as exterminator story, and the William Tell incident presented to the audience in a logical order. Film critic Roger Ebert stated that Cronenberg eliminated most of pornographic scenes of *Naked Lunch* because of censorship concerns. However, he did not ruin content integrity and flow of the movie.

Due as much to censorship concerns as anything else, Cronenberg almost completely excises Burroughs' pornographic meanderings. He imposes a linear narrative of sorts, centered around Lee's mission (as instructed by a talking-insect typewriter) to locate Dr. Benway in Interzone. Many Burroughs conceits remain (most notoriously, the "talking asshole") (Egbert 1992)

Film critic Baumgarten remarked that *Naked Lunch* had a reputation as one of the great unfilmable projects for years, but Cronenberg overcame this prejudice.

For years, it's held a reputation as one of the great unfilmable projects never to be hatched. Enter Cronenberg, director of *The Brood*, *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, and *Dead Ringers*, a filmmaker whose fascination with science fiction, insects and visceral horror made him the candidate "most likely to succeed" at the project of filming the great unfilmable. Cronenberg's adaptation is not slavishly literal toward the letter of the book, but neither does it betray the spirit. (Baumgarten 1992)

Janet Maslin evaluated the adaptation of *Naked Lunch* as "remarkable meeting of the minds" which reminded us Andre Bazin's successful adaptation formula. She also asserted that Cronenberg achieved both creating his authentic monstrous movie and deeply internalize William Burroughs' monstrousness vision. According to Maslin, Cronenberg's skillful way of approach to source material coincided with William Burroughs' natural predisposition to grotesque:

Instead of attempting the impossible task of adapting "*Naked Lunch*" literally, Mr. Cronenberg has treated this disjointed, hallucinatory book as a secondary source. Concentrating instead on Mr. Burroughs himself, the drug experience that colors his writing and the agonies of the creative process, Mr. Cronenberg also devises purely metaphorical versions of the author's wild and violent sexual scenarios. The result, by turns bracing, brilliant and vile, is a screen style as audacious as Mr. Burroughs's is on the page. (Maslin 1991)

Taking into consideration all of these arguments, Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* proves that adaptation is a new kind of work of art instead of just imitation of source material. Cronenberg is not only faithful to the spirit of the novel but also he has added his characteristic cinematic components to the movie. As for the audience reactions, the critics and audiences comments are quite positive. As we have examined from prominent online cinema sites, most of the audiences have given high points and left positive comments for film. As of August 2015, *Naked Lunch* has been voted by 32,296 users and

got 7.1 on a ten point scale on imdb.com which is essential and the oldest website of online database for movies, television, and video games. Moreover, the movie has been deemed worthy to select release for Criterion Collection an organization which put onto the market high quality DVDs of prominent classics and contemporary movies. Also, the movie holds %71 rating on "Rotten Tomatoes". Similarly, on metacritic.com which launched in 1999 -and includes reviews of music albums, games, movies- *Naked Lunch* reached 67/100 score and had predominantly positive reviews based on 16 critics. Comparing the criticism and audiences' evaluation of two movies, it can be seen that *On the Road* which is more loyal to original source is behind of *Naked Lunch*. *On the Road* holds only %43 rating on "Rotten Tomatoes". Besides, on metacritic.com which *On the Road* has reached 56/100 score and has predominantly positive reviews base on 32 critics. As of August 2015, *On the Road* has been voted by 30,540 users and got 6 on a ten point scale on imdb.com.

5. Conclusion

Even though filmmakers have one book in their hands, there are millions of visual versions of the book in the readers' minds. As can be expected, it is not possible to satisfy each audience with an adapted work of art. For this reason, filmmakers start their works with this huge disadvantage. The results of this research support the idea that filmmakers should use their genius and creativity without the losing spirit of original text to compensate this disadvantage. As Bazin has stated, only meeting two equal minds and the loyalty to the spirit of the original work bring us a successful adaptation. In our case, we have two adaptations of Beat Generation novel; *On the Road* and *Naked Lunch*. According to the data that we have examined so far, *Naked Lunch* can be assessed as a successful adaptation of a beat novel. As for *On the Road*, one cannot conclude the same result because of its anxiety for fidelity. With the concern for the fidelity, filmmakers have tried to include everything in the book with a literal translation which creates a kind of chaos and makes the adaptation not completely successful.

Since Beat Novel adapters create new kind of work of art, artists should be free from the thoughts of others like Beat Generation members. It should not be forgotten that, Beat artists were independent from the society and they dared to challenge with the others. Also, their texts have not only one reading and open different assumptions. Filmmakers can read them in numerous different ways and aspects. Beat texts are alive forever. They move, evolve and transform in themselves and are very open to innovative and brave adaptations.

All in all, this study has shown that "keeping the spirit of novel" and "meeting two geniuses"⁷ are more efficient in creating successful film adaptations of Beat Novels than "desire of audiences" and "fidelity to the original text" as we have seen in Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*.

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⁷Filmmaker and writer of original text.

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