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THE CAPTIVE FLÂNEUR OF THE BEAT LITERATURE OR THE GIFT STRUGGLING TO EXIST IN THE AGE OF COMMODITIES: CINEPHILOSOPHY ON JIM JARMUSCH'S *PATERSON*

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Abstract

Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* (2016) focuses on the life of a bus driver and poet living in Paterson, New Jersey, which shares the same name with the city. The film is a rich text for fruitful philosophical examination when viewed through Baudelaire's concept of the flâneur, the central characteristics of American Beat literature, and the dichotomy between art as a gift and commodity exchange. This article aims to illuminate the philosophical foundations of Jarmusch's work by placing the film within this theoretical framework. Through

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a detailed cinephilosophical examination, it is aimed to gain insight into how *Paterson* reflects the philosophical, aesthetic, and cultural continuities extending from Continental Europe to America. This essay attempts to offer meditation on the nature of art, individual existence, and daily life, and it is demonstrated that the film's protagonist, Paterson, eventually manages to establish a balance between gift and commodity exchange.

Keywords: Flâneur, Beat Generation, gift, Paterson, Jim Jarmusch

BEAT EDEBİYATININ TUTSAK FLÂNEUR'Ü YA DA METALAR ÇAĞINDA VAR OLMAYA ÇABALAYAN ARMAĞAN: JIM JARMUSCH'UN *PATERSON*'U ÜZERİNE SİNEFİLOZOFİ

Öz

Jim Jarmusch'un *Paterson* (2016) filmi, New Jersey'deki Paterson şehrinde yaşayan ve şehirle aynı adı taşıyan bir otobüs şoförü ve şairin basit hayatına odaklanmaktadır. Film, özellikle Baudelaire'in flâneur kavramı, Amerikan Beat edebiyatının temel karakteristikleri ve bir hediye olarak sanat ile meta mübadelesi arasındaki zıtlık merceğinden bakıldığında, verimli bir felsefi inceleme için zengin bir metin olarak kristalleşmektedir. Bu makale, *Paterson*'u bu teorik çerçeveye yerleştirerek Jarmusch'un eserinin felsefi temellerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Paterson'un Kıta Avrupası'ndan Amerika'ya uzanan felsefi, estetik ve kültürel süreklilikleri nasıl yansıttığına dair içgörü, ayrıntılı bir sinefilozofik inceleme yoluyla elde edilecektir. Sanatın, bireysel varoluşun ve günlük rutin yaşamın doğası üzerine bir düşünüm mahiyetindeki çalışma, filmin kahramanı Paterson'un, sonunda, armağan olarak sanat ile meta değişimi arasında sağlam bir denge/köprü kurmayı başarabildiğini gösterecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Flâneur, Beat kuşağı, armağan, Paterson, Jim Jarmusch

Introduction

The relationship between cinema and literature can be seen as a reciprocal dialogue reflecting how narrative and thematic elements can transcend their boundaries. Auteur directors, in particular, often draw upon literature to shape their storytelling techniques and thematic concerns. This is not limited to the adaptation of literary texts to the screen, a director may incorporate certain literary movements and themes into their work as a philosophical backdrop. Jim Jarmusch, known for his reflective and intertextual approach to cinema, provides a notable and thought-provoking example of this dynamic interaction in his film Paterson (2016). Through the lens of the flâneur concept and the American Beat movement, Paterson reveals the concepts that connect cinema and literature. Jarmusch demonstrates how literature and cinema can relate to each other to create a multifaceted narrative experience by inspecting poetry and the quotidian world.

The protagonist Paterson (Adam Driver) is a municipal bus driver and poet whose life and works reflect the thoughtful and observant qualities of literary traditions. However, the film's relationship with literature extends beyond this. At the core of the film's thematic structure is the concept of the flâneur, a figure deeply rooted in literary theory and urban observation, while the Beat movement, characterized by its emphasis on spontaneity and personal freedom, is also prominently featured. An important aspect of Paterson is its successful portrayal of the nature of artistic creation and the tension between art as a gift and art as a commodity. As modern life is built on the exchange of commodities, every artist is compelled to circulate their work in the economic sphere, transforming it into a marketable product. In Paterson, this situation presents itself as a dilemma.

Methodology

This essay integrates philosophical inquiry and film analysis using the cinephilosophical method. Unlike film philosophy, which examines how cinema reflects philosophical ideas, cinephilosophy explores new interpretative horizons by thinking with and through cinematic images. It involves engaging with the images themselves to uncover deeper meanings and insights (Öztürk, 2016, pp. 31-32; Goodenough, 2005, pp. 1-3). Yet a film analysis cannot be completely devoid of a specific orientation. Thus, cinephilosophy requires a theoretical framework to guide interpretations and move beyond mere speculation. This article establishes such a framework through three theoretical sections. The first explores Charles Baudelaire's concept of the flâneur. The second provides an overview of American Beat literature and its key characteristics. The third distinguishes art as a gift exchange from commodity exchange. Last of all, the film's narrative and, to a very limited extent, its audiovisual themes are analyzed within this theoretical context. Since the purpose of this

article is to make a philosophical analysis, the analysis is concentrated on the content, largely excluding the examination of the film's stylistic or cinematographic elements.

Baudelaire and the Flâneur, the Idle Observer of the City

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), a key figure in 19th-century French literature, is renowned for his exploration of modernity through his groundbreaking style. His 1857 poetry collection, Les *Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil), delves into themes like sex, death, and addiction, marking a significant moment in the evolution of modern poetry and art (Rifat, 2016, p. 67). While it may not be entirely accurate to state this so definitively, it is undeniable that Baudelaire's contributions to modernist aesthetics are evident in his ideas about art's autonomy, the artist's alienation, and the shift from sentimental to intellectually profound poetry. His innovative and provocative works have profoundly influenced modern literature and aesthetics (Scholssman, 2005, pp. 175-176).

Baudelaire's writings were pivotal in defining the concept of the "flâneur" (Baudelaire, 2013a, p. 33) a term of particular relevance to this article. Arguably, Baudelaire himself was the first flâneur.[2] Derived from the French verb "flâner," meaning "to stroll," the flâneur is a wanderer who leisurely explores the modern city, reflecting on and acutely perceiving its rapid changes. For Baudelaire, the flâneur, though an "idle gentleman," is not a mere loafer but a researcher seeking to grasp the essence of modern urban life and its evolution. He represents a thinker bridging the past and present within himself (Benjamin, 2014, p. 129).

For the flâneur, time is experienced through the spaces and their changes within the city. Thus, the city's boulevards, streets, parks, and cafés serve as sites for the flâneur's observations (Grøtta, 2015, p. 3). The city transcends mere observation to become a reality that the modern poet, embodying the flâneur, reinterprets and creates through art (Mazlish, 2015). Thereby, in modern life, the city itself becomes a dramatic element in the work of art. The flâneur, astonished and admiring, incorporates the city's rapid pace, growing crowds, and ceaseless activity into his art.

This orientation is facilitated by an ontological withdrawal that separates the city from the self. The psycho-social mechanism at work is notable, as modern city dwellers must anchor their individuality in a rapidly changing urban environment (Kılıç, 2017, p. 11) -a task the flâneur exemplifies. Paradoxically, the flâneur remains anonymous in the crowd, which allows him a unique, independent, and solipsistic

[2] The first person to use the city as a form of artistic raw material was the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), with his short *The Man of the Crowd*. However, according to Walter Benjamin, Poe's protagonist is not a true flâneur because he fails to remain at ease in the modern city and instead develops a manic attitude. The emergence of the flâneur had to wait for Baudelaire (Benjamin, 2014, p. 221).

perspective. The balance between crowd and solitude defines the flâneur's spiritual and artistic strength. Baudelaire captures this dynamic: "The crowd, solitude: equal and interchangeable terms for the active and productive poet. He who does not know how to populate his solitude will not know how to be alone in a bustling crowd" (Baudelaire, 2013b, p. 22). This balance, seen as essential to preservation, makes getting lost in the city an aesthetic ideal for the flâneur, whose self merges with the city's flowing streets and bustling crowds (Chambers, 2015, p. 55).

However, this anonymity comes with a cost: melancholy. While dissolving his identity into the city enhances the sensitivity, objectivity, and comprehensiveness of his observations, it also makes him acutely aware of the loneliness, disenchantment, and meaninglessness of urban life. His melancholic perspective is a natural outcome of the alienation and complexity inherent in modern city life, adding a dark tone to his worldview and artistic expression. Though not unique to the flâneur, his melancholic style is distinctively expressed through his art.

The flâneur wanders the city, grappling with existential angst that informs his artistic and literary style (Kılıç, 2017). This concept links sociology and aesthetics, defining an artistic stance aligned with romantic expressionism. As Tester notes, the flâneur, like the poet or artist, transforms faces and objects to imbue them with meaning based on his significance (2015, p. 6). The aesthetic sensitivity shaped by the flâneur's emotional state exposes the fatigue imposed by the ever-growing, accelerating city. Thus, it is no coincidence that Baudelaire begins the poem "Spleen II" in *Les Fleurs du Mal* with the line, "More memories than if I'd lived a thousand years!" (Baudelaire, 1998, p. 147).

From Idle Gentlemen to Tough Guys: The American Beat Generation

Baudelaire's flâneur was described as a gentleman. Although at times he was "branded as a parasite" due to his idleness and regarded with suspicion (Chambers, 1991, p. 145), he ultimately emerges as a harmless and elegant wanderer. However, when this European gentleman, who painted a continental portrait of refinement, migrated to America nearly a century later, he was transformed by the spirit of this new place and time into a figure of much darker disposition, sometimes even a criminal, a tough guy who would become a member of the Beat generation, a Beatnik. Yet, in his shadow, within the overt darkness of his art, one can always discern the presence of French literature, especially Baudelaire and his flâneur (Lane, 2017; Holladay, 2007, p. 43).

The Beat Generation was a literary and cultural movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s. Among the principal figures of the Beat Generation are Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg,

William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr, Joan Volmer, and Neal Cassady (Gair, 2008, p. 25). The term "Beat Generation" was coined in 1948 by the writer Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), who was himself a member of this movement (Dittman, 2007, p. 27). The word "beat," which can be translated as "strike" or "hit" held multiple connotations for Kerouac and his contemporaries: it expressed a profound sense of discontent associated with feelings of defeat, exhaustion, and poverty.

The Beat movement, known for its rejection of post-World War II America's conformist and materialistic culture, embraced spontaneity and new forms of expression. Beat artists used a free-flowing, unstructured style to capture the immediacy of experience. Although brief as a literary movement, the Beat Generation left a lasting impact on American and global literature and culture, influencing the worldview of subsequent generations (Russel, 2002, p. 7). Their focus on personal freedom and spiritual exploration resonated with youth culture and extended to the music of bands like The Beatles and Pink Floyd, as well as the psychedelic hippie movement, the radical opposition of the '68 generation (Üzüm, 2020), and finally hip-hop.

World War II looms behind the restless spirit of the Beat Generation (Ryan & Kellner, 2010, p. 29). “When veterans returned [from war], they brought with them an unsettled energy, adding their own experiences to the mix; this energy soon became the foundation of the emerging youth movements of discontent” (Russel, 2002, p. 8). The Beat Generation, however, is marked not only by restlessness but also by a futile search for peace and harmony. Restlessness always comes with the effort to overcome it, as seen in the Beat movement. The term "beat," meaning "rhythm" or "tempo," also reflects this movement's expression of the individual's desire to align with a deeper, spiritual rhythm and find a sense of belonging or being at *home* (Hayes, 2012).

The Beat Generation, as a cultural movement, was deeply influenced by both Western and Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions. Firstly, many Beat writers drew inspiration from Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism. Buddhism’s focus on heightened self-awareness, direct experience, and rejection of materialism resonated with the Beats' quest for authenticity and spiritual fulfillment (Wills, 2007; Eroğlu, 2021). This Eastern influence underpinned the concept of harmony with a transcendent spiritual rhythm, as reflected in the term "beat." The Beat Generation's fascination with Eastern philosophy culminated in the journeys to the Far East undertaken by the '68 Generation.

Secondly, the Beat Generation can also be seen as an existential extension of Romanticism. Romanticism is marked by "an inner unrest in a world with which it cannot identify, a sense of insecurity and alienation, and a longing for new social unity while celebrating the individual's absolute uniqueness and subjectivity" (Fischer, 2012, p. 74). Existentialism shares these concerns, focusing on the struggle to find oneself in an alien world, the preservation of inner life, and a morally sincere approach to freedom and necessity (Akarsu, 1979, pp. 187-188). Existential themes are central to Beat literature, linking the Beat Generation to thinkers

like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus (Yüksel, 2017). Frankly, the 19th-century Romantic flâneur evolved into an existentialist in Europe and a Beatnik in America, reflecting the shared philosophical roots of both movements in phenomenology. Both existentialists and the Beats can be seen as romantics who, having abandoned idealism, sought a phenomenological connection with the world.[3]

While existentialist literature emphasizes subjective experience (Bakewell, 2017, pp. 43-44), the Beat Generation similarly bases its art on individual experiences, drawing from these philosophical foundations. Phenomenology's focus on describing the lifeworld -the realm of everyday, pre-reflective experience- aligns closely with Beat literature's existentially sensitive portrayal of life's ordinary and absurd aspects. The emphasis on subjectivity and the phenomenological exploration of the world through objects are key orientations in Beat literature (Charters, 2012, p. 145).

Gift and Commodity: Identical Siblings Who Don't Look Alike

So far, the emergence of the sensitive, wandering artist -an outcast, penniless romantic immersed in phenomenology- has been explored. Now, we turn to the atmosphere in which this artist lives and struggles to practice his art. This requires examining the systems of gift and commodity exchange and the contrast between them, to substantiate the argument that Paterson is a tragic hero caught in the tension between these ontologically distinct forms of exchange.

Exchange, in its broadest sense, involves the reciprocal transfer of goods, services, or information. In economics, for instance, exchange underpins market activities, facilitating the efficient allocation of resources. Since Adam Smith, modern economic theories have been built on examining how exchange dynamics shape markets and influence economic policies. However, exchange cannot be confined to economics alone; it gains broader and more enlightening insights through other disciplines. For instance, in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (2002), an anthropological perspective highlights the social and cultural dimensions of exchange. Mauss demonstrated that in traditional societies, exchanges are not merely economic transactions but are deeply intertwined with social relationships and obligations (Mauss, 2002, pp. 84-85). In pre-modern contexts, exchange involves the reciprocal giving of gifts, which fosters social bonds and reciprocity, thereby structuring the interactions between economy and culture on a moral foundation.

[3] Founded by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century, phenomenology is a philosophical methodology focused on describing the structures of experience as they appear to consciousness. Instead of relying on abstract theories, phenomenology aims to "return to the things themselves" by examining how individuals perceive and experience objects and events (Crowell, 2006, p. 9).

In every careful analysis, two distinct types of exchange emerge: gift exchange and commodity exchange. In essence, the difference between these two is not formal. Both are fundamental processes of exchange and share no formal distinction, being akin to *twins* in their similarity. However, the distinction between them is hidden in the intended effect of the exchange (Bell, 1991, p. 156). Gifts, like commodities, are never given or received without expectation of reciprocity. Unlike commodity exchange, which is based on the utility of items, gift exchange forges deep connections between the giver and receiver and creates a moral cycle. This is due to the gift's power to convey the giver's *spirit* to the recipient. Annette Weiner explores how gifts retain their connection to their original owners despite continuous exchange. She challenges the traditional view of exchange as mere property transfer and introduces the concept of inalienable goods, which carry significant social and cultural value and become inseparable from the giver's identity. While alienable properties are exchanged among each other, inalienable properties symbolize genealogies and historical events; their unique identities endow them with absolute value, placing them beyond exchange (Weiner, 1992, p. 33). Gifts constantly circulate but never fully transfer ownership due to their *spirit*, distinguishing them from commodities by fostering closer connections between people.

In contrast, commodity exchange is characterized by the transfer of goods or services based on market principles, lacking personal depth -at least expected to lack it. This form of exchange is driven by the modern economy's desire to maximize utility and is managed by supply and demand dynamics. The ultimate goal of commodity exchange is to keep goods or services with equivalent value in circulation, thereby facilitating economic efficiency and specialization (Marx, 2003, p. 97). Thus, commodity exchange does not bring individuals closer to one another or even to their labor: "The greatest difference between gift exchange and commodity exchange is that while a gift creates an emotional bond between two people, commodity sales do not entail such a necessary connection" (Hyde, 2008, p. 93). Commodity exchange can even estrange individuals from both others and themselves, as it reduces social relationships to mere economic transactions. Additionally, unlike gifts, commodities do not possess "permanence" (Evans, 2001).

There is an ontological distinction between the exchange of gifts and commodities. In his book *The Gift* (2008), Lewis Hyde not only discusses the inherent incompatibility of these two types of exchange systems but also attempts to delineate the position of art and the artist within this conflict, exploring the gift exchange from an aesthetic perspective. Hyde notes that the English word "talent" is related to the term "gift," suggesting that art fundamentally belongs to the gift exchange system. His argument is clear: there is an irreconcilable conflict between gift exchange and commodity exchange, and "every artist suffers from the ongoing tension between the gift realm of their work and the market society in which they live" (Hyde, 2008, p. 341). This tension is inevitable for everyone and is not the artist's fault, but the artists experience it as a continuous economic inadequacy.

This is because commodity exchange, which is fundamental to market society, is built upon inequality between the giver and the receiver, necessitating the accumulation of commodities in certain hands -and vice versa. Drawing inspiration from Weiner, we can say that commodities remain with certain individuals because they are transferable, resulting in disruptions in circulation. “Wealth may accumulate in clusters, but the number of people who can benefit from it steadily decreases” (Hyde, 2008, p. 51). In contrast, the flow of gifts continues seamlessly and generally within an egalitarian framework, creating fluidity.

The fluidity in question is much more evident when it comes to artworks. Firstly, artistic creation is a form of gift and is bestowed upon the artist without any material compensation. Whether it is called inspiration or talent, every artist's work has a foundational element that was not created by them and is presented without any payment. The artist’s conscious effort becomes visible in this initial gift. Since a gift cannot be kept for oneself, the resulting artwork becomes a gift that the artist offers to others. Indeed, it is essential for the artist to present their work to others to prevent the deterioration of their ability and the interruption of their inspiration. The logic of gift exchange operates on the principle that what is given will return more and stronger (Hyde, 2008, p. 198). In this sense, sharing the gift that comes to the artist with inspiration as a work with the public is considered a guarantee of productivity that guarantees the continuation of inspiration.

The contrast between gift and commodity exchange is not unique to our capitalist age. Throughout history, artists have been affected by the tension between freely expressing their talent and engaging in economic activities to sustain their livelihood. In other words, the talent bestowed upon the artist as a gift must, in one way or another, be converted into money or the fame that generates money (Hyde, 2008, p. 211). However, it is also true that in the modern era, the situation has become more challenging for artists; commodity exchange has become dominant, encroaching upon all other opportunities for exchange, thus forcing both the artist and the gift exchange to retreat into their shells.

Cinephilosophy: Art as Gift and Jarmusch's Captive Flâneur, Paterson the Elegant Beatnik

The film opens with a continuous sound; a piece of music that lacks a distinct rhythm. This sound becomes significant as an auditory marker that will be heard again during moments when Paterson enters a state of *flow* throughout the film, evolving into a theme that strengthens the harmony between the inner and phenomenal worlds. In fact, throughout the film, Jarmusch prefers to show the city with a realistic approach, while adopting a naturalistic attitude in shooting scales and angles. However, the director also manages to visually shape the fusion between the artist's inner world and the physical environment. To this

end, he methodically blurs the difference between the actual and the virtual by showing the spaces in the city with overlapping. The sensation of the tension between the inner and outer worlds, and the effort to overcome it, extends from 19th-century Romanticism through 20th-century Beat literature and reaches both the film's director Jarmusch (Suárez, 2007, p. 1) and its protagonist, Paterson.

The film is divided into days, creating a weekly cycle. The slow pace, marked by episodic divisions, is a distinctive feature of Jarmusch's cinema (Lombardo, 2014, pp. 121-122). In Paterson, the routine that manifests with a slow pace stands as a dramatic element in itself. Paterson's simple life involves repetitive events, and the narrative reaches its climax and resolution through the disruption of these familiar patterns. Our protagonist goes to work during the day, has dinner at home in the evening, and afterward takes his dog Marvin for a walk, stopping for a beer at the bar owned by Doc (Barry Shabaka Henley), an old-fashioned bartender who is resolute about not allowing television in his bar despite persistent requests. This routine, shared by everyone in our time, is central to the narrative, serving as a tribute to the simple life of the working class.

Paterson, a man who is very kind and loving towards those around him, presents an image of someone who has achieved an inner rhythm by waking up at the same time every day without the need for an alarm. Some of the images Jarmusch quickly presents at the film's opening help us form a more detailed profile of our protagonist. We see a photograph of Paterson with his chest adorned with medals, indicating that he is a former soldier. This detail can be interpreted both as a symbol of Paterson's bravery and heroism in having experienced intense combat and as a clear reference to the Beat literature that emerged after World War II.

One detail provides an additional clue that presents Paterson as a delicate Beatnik: when his wife Laura (Golshifteh Farahani) suggests he should share his poetry with the world, Paterson says that the word "world" frightens him. Given the violence and brutality, he might have witnessed during his service as a soldier, it is not surprising that Paterson fears the world. However, it can also be said that this uneasy, even fearful relationship with the world naturally makes Paterson a member of the Beat Generation. Indeed, it is evident that our protagonist is introspective; there is a constant discord between his spirituality and the external world, and the search for rhythm arises from this tension.

The old toy buses shown at the opening, which we can infer were from Paterson's childhood, are also significant. We cannot help but wonder, "Was being a bus driver Paterson's childhood dream?" Like the reason for his departure from the army, we will never know this for sure. Nonetheless, it is not important because the bus image signifies much more than just a childhood dream. In the film's universe, the name Paterson directly refers to three things: a city, a city bus (Number 23), and its driver, our protagonist.

Throughout the film, we witness the semantic equivalence of these three elements; the city and the bus are directly associated with Paterson's identity.

Laura is, quite literally, a dreamer. She is constantly narrating her dreams, and she is always in pursuit of transforming things and continuously alters objects in the house according to her whims. Her situation is quite ambivalent from Paterson's perspective. We experience a contrast between two types of individuality that can be distinguished as active and passive subjectivity between the couple.[4] Laura, who tends to dominate and often disrupts Paterson's creative process with economic concerns, also shows a sincere insistence on having him publish his poetry. Her tendency to convert things is also evident in her insistence on printing her husband's writings. Here, Laura should be seen as a symbol of economic order, specifically the system of commodity exchange. Commodity exchange is concerned not with the painful process of creation but with its result, trying to convert it into material gain. Laura's relationship with art reflects this precisely. For instance, her request for a guitar from her husband has no connection to art or talent; it aligns with the same capitalist logic as commodity exchange, she merely dreams of becoming a famous star, a wealthy country music singer.

Paterson is fundamentally a film about a world of contradictions that can only exist together, and in this respect, it is inherently tragic. Throughout the film, dichotomies are presented either explicitly or implicitly. A particularly simple and easily overlooked example: Paterson is in a profoundly happy marriage, yet the advertisement on the bus he drives reads, "Divorce, only $299!" This represents not just an ordinary contradiction, but an emphasis on a dichotomy -where there is no marriage, there can be no divorce. The twins seen throughout the film should also be viewed from this perspective. What makes the twins exceptional is that, without one, the other becomes an ordinary person like everyone else, while the existence of one transforms the meaning of the *other*, making it something entirely different.

The central dichotomy in the film's narrative is established between art and commodity, with everything from visual and auditory themes to characters being built upon this axis. The crux of the matter is establishing a solid bridge between gift and commodity. Laura's initial dream about twins is particularly noteworthy as it appears throughout the film. Paterson's reaction, "One for each of us" reveals the separation and unattainability of two different worlds, despite their similarities. Throughout the film, numerous twins appear, highlighting the division between art and talent on one side and economic activity and commodities on the other. The film's most elegant depiction of these two separate worlds is Paterson's favorite waterfall view. The steel bridge constructed between two massive rocks and the river flowing underneath... Jarmusch uses symbols with great skill here. The recurring use of river imagery while Paterson is in the flow of writing

[4] Whether Paterson even possesses subjectivity is debatable. The fact that he is the only character whose first name we do not know makes perfect sense from this perspective.

poetry accompanies the consciousness navigating between these two solipsistic worlds with Paterson's sincere art, which carries a romantic tone.

For an artist sincerity often requires a degree of privacy, even a demand for secrecy. This is why, despite his wife's insistence otherwise, Paterson wants to keep his poetry hidden. Allen Ginsberg, a member of the Beat Generation, stated that it can be disturbing for an artist to write only for himself and spontaneously. The solution to this, according to Ginsberg, is for the poet to write things that he will not publish or show to anyone. By writing in secret, the poet can express freely whatever he wants (Ginsberg, 1980, p. 111). This is precisely Paterson's cherished freedom. However, it seems that the price for freedom in artistic creation must be paid in the form of a kind of captivity. In other words, while the artist's refusal to circulate the product of their creation allows for creative freedom, it also economically ensnares them.

In this context, a character emerges: Marvin. This dog, who sleeps on a single father's chair under the light, possesses a peculiar charm despite his unattractive appearance and becomes a crucial element in the narrative. Marvin acts as a threshold guardian between the worlds of gift and commodity -akin to a sort of Cerberus. He protests against the *sealing* of an agreement to make copies of Paterson's poems by barking, thus rejecting the arrangement. Just as Laura represents commodity exchange, it is possible to view Marvin as a symbol of gift exchange. Marvin dislikes the gang members who suggest that a dog of his breed is valuable and should be kept tightly controlled, and he even destroys Paterson's notebook before the copies can be made. Marvin embodies the purity of the gift and its non-commercial nature, refusing to allow art to be consumed by commodity exchange, which is why he is depicted in Laura's paintings in such an unattractive manner.

Paterson's relationship with Marvin is, as expected, complex. Despite his dislike for Marvin, Paterson continues to care for him, reflecting the artist's troubled relationship with his talent, and his ambivalence about whether to convert it into money. While Paterson expresses his aversion to Marvin, his attitude is both sardonic and helpless. The theme of achieving freedom through a form of captivity is successfully inverted here. When they meet the rapper at the laundromat, he asks Marvin (referring to Paterson), "Is this your human fetters?" Indeed, Marvin dominates the relationship between them. Paterson's freedom seems to depend on either following Marvin or existing only in the space Marvin permits. This mirrors the relationship between artistic creation and the artist.

The torment of artistic creation is alleviated for the artist when the output is circulated as a gift. This gift exchange is evident in Paterson's interactions with the rapper at the laundromat and the young poet he encounters after work. The praise for poetry in exchange for art and admiration is particularly significant. Paterson is deeply affected by the young girl's poem. His response to the poem goes beyond mere thanks; he continues the exchange by giving the poem, a gift he received, to his wife. However, Paterson's life does

not solely revolve around gift exchange; instead, participating in economic transactions as a lower-middle-class individual is a necessity for him. Paterson's artistic creativity, which can be seen as a reflection of Marvin in the mirror, is continually disrupted by Donny's (Rizwan Manji) interference. Donny, skilled at undermining Paterson's inspiration and creative process, constantly speaks of his economic or familial difficulties, which impede Paterson's artistic endeavors.

We notice that Paterson's bus moves at a noticeably slow pace as he begins his shift. This transforms our protagonist into a flâneur wandering the city, yet he is also a captive wanderer of the capitalist world. While the flâneur continues to explore the city, he is now motorized and confined to a fixed route. Consequently, Paterson must rely not only on his eyes but also on his ears. He listens attentively to the stories shared by passengers on his bus about the city's collective memory, learning new things about the city or experiencing emotional responses through these narratives.[5]

In the bar frequented by Paterson, the "hall of fame" filled with photos of famous city residents indicates that the merging of city and identity extends beyond space to include time as well. Jarmusch succeeds in visualizing temporal amalgamations. By layering images, the director blurs the distinct lines between (internal) time and (external) space, mixing the actual with the virtual. A city life integrated with self and identity, along with its inner life and art… A city-nurtured and even city-formed identity inevitably contrasts with collective memory. Paterson's existence, distinguished by the collective memory emphasized through the city's celebrities and the poets he reads, is shown in continuity with the giants of literature. The books seen in Paterson's small workspace belong to significant figures in American literature, such as William Carlos Williams, David Foster Wallace, Kenneth Koch, Paul Auster, and Edgar Allan Poe. This scene economically provides much insight into the literary tradition to which the protagonist belongs.

In this passage, the focus is on the phenomenological aspect of Paterson's poetry and its connection to Beat literature. The interaction between Beat writers and phenomenology lies in their focus on subjective reality, lived experience, and the pursuit of authentic self-expression. Jack Kerouac's groundbreaking work *On the Road* (1957) serves as an example of phenomenological approach with its emphasis on stream-of-consciousness narration and spontaneous writing. Kerouac's method, referred to as "spontaneous prose," aims to capture experiences in their raw and unfiltered form, reflecting a commitment to preserving the immediacy of experience (Kerouac, 1957, p. 39). This form of creation is not unique to Kerouac but is shared by nearly all Beat Generation members, including Paterson. His poetry is derived from daily life and relies on observation and experience of ordinary things. As previously mentioned, the protagonist's artistic approach aligns with Edmund Husserl's concept of

[5] In one of these scenes, Jim Jarmusch presents a subtle example of intertextuality in cinema to the audience. Two teenagers discussing the anarchist Gaetano Bresci, who was from Paterson, refer to the characters Sam (Jared Gilman) and Suzy (Kara Hayward) from Wes Anderson's 2012 film *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). Now we see that the pair from childhood has grown up and come to New Jersey for college.

focusing on phenomenal experiences, where the goal is to describe things as they appear to consciousness. Paterson's attention to small details reflects a phenomenological attitude toward the present moment, and his poetry is grounded in this same attitude. Indeed, his first poem begins with thoughts about matches seen in the kitchen, or rather, with a depiction of the matchbox in all its nakedness.[6]

Paterson also employs a stream-of-consciousness style, which is visualized through the river that flows through the city. Mimicking the practices of the Beat Generation, particularly Kerouac's writing style, Paterson transfers his perceptions and thoughts directly onto paper without any filtering. His poetry, being a natural expression of his continuous and evolving interaction with his surroundings -much like consciousness itself- is fluid. Consequently, it is not surprising that a process beginning with the raw depiction of a simple matchbox eventually culminates in a poignant love poem. Paterson's writings are distinguished by their existential stance, emphasizing the importance of individual experience and being in the world. However, it is crucial to highlight that Paterson's world is confined to the city but rather limited to the specific route he must take on bus Number 23, the daily routine he follows, and a flâneuresque art that is based on this routine. More importantly, this familiar world is on the brink of disappearance.

It was previously noted that routine is an intrinsic element of the film. The film reaches its climax through a process that begins with the disruption of Paterson's routine. The events initiated by the disturbance of familiar patterns culminate in Paterson achieving a new consciousness. Initially, Laura, for the first time in the film, wakes up before her husband to prepare cupcakes to sell at the local market. She is once again pursuing success in the realm of commodity exchange. More significant, however, is the breakdown of Paterson's bus. Given the close relationship between the bus and Paterson's identity, this breakdown can be interpreted as an indicative of the transformation Paterson will soon be forced to undergo. On the same day, Paterson's first participation in commodity exchange by giving money to a homeless person and (contrary to his usual routine) his failure to fix the mailbox, which Marvin continuously distorts is also noteworthy.

These are simple yet significant indicators suggesting that commodity exchange will disrupt the gift exchange. Indeed, Laura returns on Saturday with modest but absolute success in the economic realm and transforms this into a gift by treating her husband to dinner and a movie. However, upon their return home, the tension between gift and commodity turns into an open conflict. We see that the gift is destroyed; Marvin has shredded the notebook in which Paterson wrote his poems. The destruction of the

[6] In the film, the poems written by Paterson are authored by Ron Padgett, an American poet born in 1942. Influenced by both Baudelaire and the Beat Generation, Padgett's poetry typically examines the ordinary elements of daily life with a direct and unadorned perspective. Padgett, who uses simple language, is also distinguished by his occasionally humorous style (Eshleman, 1997).

poems intended for publication signifies a punishment for the desire to transform the gift/talent from its pure artistic aesthetic realm into a commodity. It is also worth considering that, as a natural outcome of subjectivity and spontaneity, understanding that the notebook is Paterson himself is not difficult. Therefore, it can be said that this represents a symbolic death for Paterson. As a person, a vehicle, and an artistic creation, Paterson no longer exists -though thankfully, the city of Paterson continues to endure.

This represents an inevitable death for his rebirth, and as Ginsberg states, he must "steel himself" for the profound and necessary transformation within the self (1980, p. 112). Indeed, Paterson does so; he does not engage in reactive or destructive behavior beyond adopting a deeply melancholic state. On Sunday, Paterson, who is so sorrowful that he might die from grief, roams the city without his *setters* (without Marvin) or his bus, becoming a true flâneur: for the first time, he wanders around the city not for work or duty, but as a genuine flâneur, idly meandering.

Jarmusch's film concludes with Paterson watching the waterfall beneath the steel bridge between two rocks, accompanied by a Japanese poet (Masatoshi Nagase). This Eastern poet, emerging from Paterson's favorite place in the city, will perform the ritual of transition to Paterson's new consciousness and will act as a *prophetic* figure who will rescue him from his crisis. The nature of this crisis is not difficult to understand: the choice -or rather, the inability to choose- between producing art and succeeding in economic life. The Japanese poet will indirectly teach Paterson that it is possible for both worlds to coexist.

It is significant that the Japanese poet tells Paterson that even being a bus driver in the city is inherently poetic, and even suggests that this could very well be a poem by William Carlos Williams. This not only emphasizes the spontaneity of subjectivity but also implies that having a profession is a necessity. By reminding Paterson that the painter Jean Dubuffet was a meteorologist and the poet Carlos Williams was a doctor, the Japanese poet subtly suggests that contemporary artists inevitably need to work in the marketplace for compensation and transfer their earnings to their art (Hyde, 2008, p. 343). In other words, finding a reasonable way to transform the commodity into a gift and the gift back into a commodity is an essential challenge for all contemporary artists, and Paterson is not alone in this dilemma.

The gift exchange disrupted by Marvin must be re-established. To facilitate this, the Japanese poet gifts Paterson a new notebook, which serves as a transformative threshold gift. As Hyde notes, "threshold gifts" either indicate a time of personal transformation or act as the very agents of this transformation. In this sense, Paterson's symbolic rebirth occurs through an external influence, a gift given to him from "outside the self," similar to inspiration. A threshold gift pertains to "a person who is about to enter a new

phase of life and is equipped with gifts that signify their new identity" (2008, p. 76), and now that person is none other than Paterson himself. The film's protagonist will reach a different existential level crowned by a new consciousness and will rejoin the flow of gifts, this time in a much healthier manner.[7]

Through his spiritual transformation and the new mode of perception he attains, Paterson's initial gift, namely his talent, falls into its rightful place and for the first time, reaches its true value. Paterson could not understand that artistic creation, though a significant burden, is also a blessing without receiving the threshold gift. Lewis Hyde argues that a gift cannot be fully appreciated at the moment it is first given, as initially, the person lacks the spiritual power to both accept the gift and pass it on to others. A spiritual threshold must be crossed to understand the value of the gift and share it with others (2008, p. 84). As soon as Paterson receives the threshold gift, he also reclaims his initial gift (the inspiration that is the source of his artistic creation) and begins to abandon his disillusionment with life, resuming his poetry. Although the film does not provide an explicit signifier for this, it is not difficult to infer that a new Paterson, unafraid to open his poetry to the world, has emerged.

Conclusion

Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* presents a thematically rich narrative by weaving together the concept of the flâneur with the American Beat literary tradition and the idea of art as a gift. Through the protagonist Paterson, Jarmusch explores the essence of the flâneur: an observer who traverses the city with a sharp sensitivity to the impact of ordinary life, withdrawn from the world of daily living. However, Paterson is a flâneur constrained by the economic necessities of his time. As a member of the working class living on a tight budget, he is compelled to navigate the city with a specific economic purpose, at set times, and along fixed routes.

Thus, the film's protagonist reflects the spirit of American Beat literature, which is both rebellious and seeking harmony. Like Beat writers who highlight the immediacy and authenticity of experience, Paterson's poetry emerges from his daily encounters and interactions, flowing with a phenomenological approach that underscores the deep connection between his inner and outer landscapes. His literary lineage positions Paterson not only as a solitary artist but also as a representative of a broader tradition that seeks meaning in everyday life, within a romantic-existential framework.

Finally, Jarmusch's treatment of art as a gift emphasizes the notion that artistic expression is both a personal and a social presentation. While art is profoundly personal, it does not remain so; it is shared with

[7] There is a special verbal indicator in the film for Paterson's realization that he can reach a new state of consciousness and unite two seemingly irreconcilable worlds: the word "A-ha!", was first spoken by the Japanese poet and then repeated by Paterson. Rather than a simple exclamation of surprise, this becomes the first syllable, even a mantra, of beginning to see the world with new eyes.

others. Artistic talent enriches not only its possessor but also the lives of others. By presenting art as a form of generosity and connection, Jarmusch strengthens the thematic emphasis of the film on how creative acts transcend individual experiences to nourish a shared sense of humanity. However, the central axis of the film is defined by the contrast between art's inherent inclusion in gift exchange and the incongruence it finds with commodity exchange. Paterson emerges as a tragic hero caught in this dichotomy.

Paterson's spiritual transformation and the divine figure aiding him illustrate the possibility of bridging these seemingly irreconcilable worlds. The film concludes with themes supporting this resolution. The poem Paterson reads at the end, memorable for its line “Or would you rather be a fish?” echoes an existential sentiment, suggesting that the freedom gained through being human also entails the obligation to assume responsibility. In this sense, Paterson has come to recognize the fundamental dilemma of our existence. He is now more courageous in shouldering the burden of existence and expressing his individuality. Additionally, by returning to Monday, the film closes with a cyclical notion of time, where Paterson and Laura are seen for the first time facing each other and holding hands while sleeping. This symbolically potent scene indicates that a reasonable and solid bridge which has been established between the two opposing forces; art and commodity exchange.

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