

CALL FOR PAPERS

THE BEATS, RADICALISM, AND THE BIPOLAR WORLD

European Beat Studies Network 13th Annual Conference
University of Hildesheim
September 15-17, 2025

Organizers: Heike Mlakar, Florian Zappe, Tomasz Stompor, Alexander Greiffenstern

Location: University of Hildesheim, Germany (Department of English Language and Literature)

Located at the geographical heart of Germany and framed by the history of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hildesheim offers a unique blend of academic pursuit and cultural heritage. Just 30 km from Hanover, Hildesheim provides excellent connectivity to larger metropolises such as Hamburg and Berlin. Home to approximately 9,000 students, the University of Hildesheim stands out as one of the country's more intimate higher education institutions. This smaller scale fosters a welcoming and personal atmosphere, where students are encouraged to form strong bonds with peers and faculty alike.

Call for Papers:

The radical ethos of the Beat movement, whether defined in aesthetic, political, or cultural terms, is deeply rooted in the specific historical situation in which it emerged: the binary-coded world of the Cold War. During this era, the ideological polarization of global politics combined with the domestic imperatives of social and political conformism led—on both sides of the Iron Curtain—to the phenomenon that Herbert Marcuse described as the "one-dimensional society" defined by "a pattern of [...] thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe." (Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 14). The tension between dominant materialist values and spiritual seeking was central to Beat thought and literature, revealing a profound resistance to the encroaching uniformity of the age.

Especially in Germany, where the annual conference of the EBSN will take place in 2025, the ideological polarization became manifest as a geopolitical division that sliced the country into two political entities with opposing systems. In reaction to government restrictions and repression by an official state ideology in the East and a hegemonic cultural conservatism in the West, countercultural movements still developed on the fringes of both societies. At the heart of this geopolitical flashpoint, the international dimensions of political and cultural conflict were observable in a crystallized form that took on various other facets around the globe.

While it may be a truism that the emergence of Beat culture in the mid-twentieth century was a reaction to the “one-dimensionality” of the era, it is vital to understand its significance for the radicalism of the phenomenon’s ethos. The Beats’ revitalization and expansion of the old Modernist battle cry “Make it New!” was an assault on the political and cultural foundations of Cold War-era “one-dimensionality” on a global scale. Originating in the United States, their radical approaches to art and life generated similar movements in many other countries, where artists and intellectuals felt stifled by the political climate.

Although the Cold War ended 35 years ago, today's social divisions follow similarly polarized fault lines, where issues of free speech feel ever-present; discussions of sexuality, critiques of war, and advocacy of human rights seem under threat in ways that mirror past dangers. This invites us to revisit and discuss the unbroken topicality of the radical aesthetico-political approaches of Beat culture in the light of current events.

Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The Beats and the Cold War
- Materialism vs. spiritual quest within Beat literature and art
- Influence and connections of civil rights movements and the Beats
- Avant-garde movements and their aesthetic connection to Beat writing
- Responses in Eastern European countries to the Beats
- The Beats behind the Iron Curtain (*szamizdat* culture, illegal readings, etc.)
- Beat related artistic developments in countries directly involved in the Cold War (Germany, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Turkey...)
- Cultural radicalism vs. political radicalism
- The Beats and/as a form of “Radical Chic”
- Beat expressions of "Schizoculture" and their impact on cultural production
- The role of Beat writing in today's artistic or political movements

We invite you to submit proposals on these topics, or on other aspects of the Beat Generation. Individual papers will be limited to 20 minutes. As well as paper presentations, we also invite submissions for panels, roundtables, workshops, artistic performances, or other creative endeavours.

Please submit an abstract (250 words) that clearly outlines your proposal, and a short bio note, to conference administrator Raven See at rsee11@elmira.edu before **October 15, 2024**. We will respond by the end of December 2024.

For more information, please visit: <https://ebsn.eu/>