

Eros, Thanatos, and the Beat Generation

The struggle between life and death instincts in the film
Kill Your Darlings

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And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be simply described as the struggle for life of the human species. And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven.

-Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930)

Allen Ginsberg. Jack Kerouac. William S. Burroughs. These are lauded as pillars of the Beat Generation. The 1950's saw the rise of a radically new literary movement, diverging from the conventions and conformity of the past decades, with foundational works such as Ginsberg's *Howl*, Kerouac's *On The Road*, and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. Beyond challenging the literary norms, the Beats espoused experimentation with drugs, alternative sexualities, exploration of other religions and non-religion, a rejection of materialism and capitalism, and a frank portrayal of the human condition. Thus, the movement not only had its effect in academic circles, but influenced Western culture itself, becoming the underpinnings for the 1960's counterculture and other modern radicalism. The Beats did not spontaneously appear in the 1950s. The gestation period for the movement was not easy, risking miscarriage along the way. It needed to digest the end of the second World War and all the horrors then revealed, and contend with McCarthy-era tyranny which cloaked itself in the post war idealism of the American way of life.

Lucien Carr. While respected in his own right in journalistic circles, primarily as an editor with United Press International for most of his life, his name is not among the writers and poets of the Beats. His story, however, is intimately woven into the origins of the new movement, part of The New Vision. He was not only an observer for as Ginsberg once stated, "Lou was the glue." The murder of David Kammerer shook the entire group and certainly claimed more than one victim.

There are numerous accounts of the murder of David Kammerer and the time around the event. Kerouac and Burroughs in 1945 cowrote their first novel, *And The Hippos Were Boiled In Their Tanks*, a thinly veiled account withheld from publication until 2008, after Carr's death; Kerouac did fictionalize it again in his novel *The Town And The City*, published in 1950. The film *Kill Your Darlings* is also a fictionalized account of the New Vision and the murder of David Kammerer, but obviously linked to very real people and events. I do make note here the challenge of analyzing people who are not only characters in a compelling narrative; there is a real history that cannot be ignored. But I do emphasize that my analysis is rooted in the film – I do not pretend to offer an accurate analysis of the actual people.

In Freud's earlier writings he laid out, among other things, his initial discoveries regarding our instinctual life in terms of libido and the predominance of the pleasure principle. The primary psychic aim was the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of unpleasure, bound only by the limitations of the reality principle. Through this theory much could be attributed regarding conscious and unconscious life, about neurosis, anxiety and the formation of symptoms. But not everything could be explained, particularly vexing being the compulsion to repeat, so vivid after the first World War with war neurosis (in modern terms, post-traumatic stress disorder) and its symptom of the relived traumatic experience in dreams and waking life. By 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud was postulating another basic instinct, the death instinct, a drive to return to an earlier state, ultimately an inorganic state – death. Other analytic theorists had already anticipated his new inquiries as they struggled to understand human aggression and destructiveness. Moving beyond Freud, particularly into Object Relations, much attention was given

to aggression as a drive, to fusion vs. diffusion experiences, to anger and hate. And with this new dimension to our instinctual life, with these new theories, came a recognition of the importance of the relationship, when our minds meet.

Early in the film, *Kill Your Darlings*, when Allen [Ginsberg] and Lou [Carr] meet each other the first time, Lou introduces Allen to Yeats' *A Vision*. Yeats describes us as in an endless circle of living and dying, essentially trapped, until someone breaks it, and the whole world gets wider. This image is crucial in understanding the individual characters as well as the birth of the new form of art that would follow this story. The image also echoes the instinctual life, the circle of Eros and Thanatos, and as such may provide some thoughts about the relationship between creativity and madness.

We are first introduced to Allen at his family home in Patterson, New Jersey in 1943. The radio is sounding a newscast of events of the war but Allen changes it to a station playing big-band jazz, though Allen's father, Louis Ginsberg, turns this down. Almost immediately the father-son image is interrupted as Allen runs to his mother; she is clearly disturbed, likely psychotic. Allen soothes her, dances with her, and she tells him to never leave her, as his father looks on. Soon after, father and son together again, Allen's father quotes one of his own poems which Allen incorrectly completes. Allen's father corrects him, reminding him of the rule of consonance in poetry. Providing a glimpse of Allen's potential rebellion, he responds with "assonance" (a vowel rhyme that may have only a partial agreement of sound). Allen is psychically trapped, beholden to his father with whom he seeks to identify but cannot, and in a role-reversal, caretaker to his psychotic mother. Allen is inhibited in his instincts, he is paralyzed, trapped. Yet it is Allen's father who provides encouragement and hope as he hands Allen the acceptance letter and states, "Why don't you go, write your own."

At Columbia, as Allen traces the path to the West Village on a map, his new roommate warns "You don't want to go down there. It's the land of the faeries. You head there, you never come back." On a manifest level this speaks social pressure for conformity that Allen, as a homosexual, faces. Being homosexual is seen as bad, as a moral failing, a mental disorder. Allen's roommate also references his Jewish heritage, belonging to another group that faces discrimination and thus further aspects of the self that must be suppressed. But on a latent level it is a foreshadowing of Allen's potential salvation. While on the manifest level "faeries" is a derogatory term for homosexual men, it also can be interpreted as a magical place with magical creatures, where the rules of conventional reality no longer apply; a place where a different way of thinking can take hold and forever change you.

Lucien Carr first makes his appearance as Allen tours the "church" of the Southhall Library with its sacraments of lauded, appropriate, literature. Lou interrupts with dramatic vulgarity, quoting the restricted words of Henry Miller; as he is escorted away by security, in another moment of foreshadowing, he screams "Tell them Lucien Carr is innocent!". We see Alan is quite enjoying the experience.

Lou is also present, observing from the back corner, when Professor Steeves is lecturing about the sonnet and the important conventions of poetry. Allen seeks to escape the shackles of convention in verse when he raises the poetry of Walt Whitman, who broke from rhyme and meter. But Professor Steeves seeks to keep the shackles in place; he recognizes Allen's father and advocates the conventions that Allen retorts are "easy"; Steeves emphasizes how the university is built on tradition. He advocates that creation must be preceded by imitation. Professor Steeves

is the voice of Allen's inhibition. I argue that this is not an example of the death instinct, rather it is repression of libido. One dare not challenge the formal structure, there shall be no defiance of the rule of law, the rule of the father. Anything new and different risks excitement, vulgarity, and is not to be tolerated.

Having previously observed each other, Allen and Lou actually meet in the next scene. Immediately there is an electricity between them, we get the sense that they are strongly drawn to each other. Lou introduces Allen to Yeats' writing and both know they are the "other", for each other, that has the potential to make their circles, their worlds, wider. In the moment the situation is clearer in terms of Allen, as we have been witness to his trap, his repressed life instinct seeking release. When Allen admits that he has not written anything Lou speaks a truth, "You're not anything, yet.". Lou recognizes the repression by which Allen is bound and is offering to release him, though the motive is unclear. We only sense that Lou needs something from Allen, that his motive is unlikely altruistic.

The next sequence of scenes represents the turning point for Allen, his potential liberation from his inhibitions, his trap. Allen gets a call from his mother begging him to come home; it is the pull of the repetition compulsion, to stay in his never ending circle of serving his mother's psychotic dependency where he does not have to face his libidinous urges such as his latent homosexuality which risks ostracizing him from a restrictively moralizing society. But Lou's pull is strong and Allen follows him down the rabbit hole to the West Village. "Allen in Wonderland", the introduction to a new world, with new rules, and an altered perception; the land of the faeries. Allen meets William Burroughs, Bill, who is sitting in a tub breathing in nitrous oxide and smoking marijuana; Lou declares him an artist whose "...medium is himself". We are also introduced to David Kammerer, again hearing the ideas of Yeats. In this scene and then at the jazz club later we experience the tension between Lou and David with a hint of the obsession of the latter for the former.

In the jazz club the group spots Ogden Nash, a know poet of the time. In attacking Nash's conventional poetry Lou states "I'll kill him." and Bill retorts "Aim for the throat.". Then Lou pauses and states, "No, we're not going to kill him. We're going to make sure nobody remembers him.". Here the death instinct is symbolically revealed. While we may die physically, we can live on in the minds of others, but Lou is seeking a total annihilation, advocating a psychic murder. We will better realize later that this is the projection of Lou's draw to self-annihilation, but for the moment it is well contained within the group, it's energy harnessed as they discuss the fascism in the poetry of the day with it's guards like Professor Steeves. The group are inspired to let the prisoners come out and play – self-referential, of course – to seek new words and rhymes, and The New Vision is inspired.

Allen has met with the death instinct and experienced a taste of a freedom for which he longs, but now must face some consequences. He is guilt ridden that he had forgotten about his mother and is now compelled to go to her, to return to his complicated repetition; Lou notes how he loves "complicated". At the Ginsberg household Allen's mother is being taken to a mental institution. What are clearly familiar dynamics are quickly repeated as Allen's mother evokes and plays on his guilt. Allen tries to displace, a defense against his guilt, blaming his father and declaring the decision is for his father's best, denying the severity of his mother's illness. Allen's mother again attacks him stating "This is your fault." in a timbre of cold vengefulness. As an important aside, we see a sad compassion in Lou's expression as he witnesses the events. Outside afterwards Carr notes that at least Allen has his family despite

the complexity, and reveals how Lou's own father left when he was four years old. Allen voices a realization that he must escape his repression to flourish, and to escape, to be reborn, first a death is required.

In the hanging scene the death instinct is manically embraced. There is briefly the risk of actual death before the pipe from which Allen and Lou are hanging breaks. In this play they symbolically die and are reborn.

From this follows a chaotic montage where the manifesto for The New Vision is declared. The tenets include: the death of morality; the expression of the self in a true, uninhibited, uncensored fashion; the derangement of the senses; the duty, as extraordinary men, to break the law and thus make the world wider. Included are scenes where these tenets are acted out, with the taking of drugs, missing class, attacking and destroying the classics of literature and using the fragments to make an insane collage of words. The montage culminates in an hallucination within the jazz bar where time is stopped and anarchy is arranged; and in an intense mix of death and sexuality Allen and Lou cut themselves and share their blood. David Kammerer ends the montage as he walks into his apartment and sees only madness. When Bill states that they are exploring the avenues of Allen's mind, David shows his envy of Allen when he retorts, "Dimly lit, I'm sure.". In his erotic obsession to fuse with Lou, he wishes to destroy all others.

I mention one more scene which reflects Allen's evolution at this stage, back in the classroom with Professor Steeves as he tells his students to "Kill your darlings". He is actually advocating his students to give up their conventions as he assigns what is to be their final project, a work of fiction. Ironically, when he reads Allen's words on The New Vision it is too much of a challenge to him, he only wants his students to be conventionally unconventional. Allen, partially freed from his repression, openly defies the law of the father, declaring more life in his words than the sonnets they have studied in class. Professor Steeves is driven to get rid of the challenge to the law when he suggests Allen go to war.

Thus far the focus has been on Allen. While I have touched on the presence of and dynamics of the death instinct, one could still rightfully interpret Allen's situation and metamorphosis in terms of a single mind psychology, with repression of his creative libido within oedipal conflicts related to his father, and to his still mostly latent homosexuality. However, to do so would be to ignore the more subtle forces at play, and to ignore the other significant figures of this story. And it would provide only little insight into as to what happened that allowed a stinking original artistic movement to be born.

While the perspective of the film stays close to Allen, more is revealed of Lucien Carr and his relationship with David Kammerer. We learn that David is writing Lou's assignments. David wishes to fuse with Lou, to have Lou all to himself; there can be no rivals. This is not the tension of an oedipal triad, but rather the psychotic wish to have no boundaries with the object. It is the reality of other objects, like Allen, like the New Vision, that must be destroyed in order to maintain the delusion. David traps Lou, and Lou resents David's hold on him. Lou has a wish to be a creative force but he is too consumed by his destructiveness to access anything within that could bring life. He is reliant on others to contain him, to release something libidinal, even admitting to Allen that he relies on Allen's creativity to manifest the New Vision.

When Allen confronts Lou about his lack of creativity and his reliance on David, some of Lou's history is revealed. David was Lou's professor at a previous school and became erotically fixated on him; it is suggested in the film that they had intimate relations with each other. By the end of the film even more is revealed, that in Chicago

Lou tried to commit suicide, probably when he was with David, and David was there to sign the admission form to a psychiatric institution. It is known from the real history on which this film is based that David was Lou's teacher at a preparatory school, and after an incident in Chicago, Lou attended a series of schools and universities, David showing up in every city and re-insinuating himself in Lou's life every time. Allen metaphorically suggests getting rid of David, unwittingly bringing Lou closer to his destructive instincts. Lou reaches out to Allen to be contained, asking Allen to write something beautiful, and providing Allen a direction for his libido.

Allen's creativity is unleashed, is surges – with a little help from Bill's new drug whose side effects include “a severe decline in moral standards” - and he writes. Rushing into Lou's room with his creation, Allen finds David instead. As the tension between Allen and David grows they also recognize similarities in each other, though the underlying dynamics are quite different in the individuals. David recognizes Allen's desire for Lou and tries to destroy it by evoking Allen's jealousy in noting Lou is out with a handsome football player, Jack. But Allen is already stronger and he posits that David's hold over Lou is weakening. But Allen is demoralized, and when Lou returns much later Allen hides his creation.

Jack, of course, is Jack Kerouac. While he is quintessential in the founding of the Beat Generation, and certainly an important character in the film, the limits of this paper allow for only a few words directly about him. In this narrative Jack represents a balance between the life and death instincts; while he can be destructive, he is well contained, with little repression to inhibit his creativity. One would certainly not say that Kerouac is free of issues, but in terms of creativity he is further along than the other characters in this story, even if he is also a complication for any of the other individuals.

Allen is jealous of Jack, seeing Lou's admiration for Jack as an impediment to his romantic desire. But Jack is not the same threat as David because he is excited to be part of a group, not annihilate all others as Davis would. The three companions steal the boat, and while Allen must endure Jack's advice on becoming a writer, to write from experience rather than ideals, Allen has the opportunity to present his creation. Both Lou and Jack are struck by the beauty of the poem, and Allen voices that Lou was his inspiration.

The unpleasant reality of being arrested on the water confronts Allen with his father's mistress, a betrayal of his mother, and a betrayal he also feels within. He is not yet separated from her hold on him. Allen is no longer willing to be submissive to his father and his law, and he protects Lou by taking responsibility for stealing the boat, and declares “...it was tremendous!”. Afterwards with Lou, Allen recognizes his liberation from his father, noting “I've never not cared.”, and again echoing how he needs Lou who has started something within him.

In a lighter part of the film the members of the New Vision break into the library to replace the “sacraments” of classical literature with material from the restricted literature. Ominous behind the fun is David informing the campus police, which he could only do in stalking Lou. David also interrupts the celebration; he is becoming increasingly desperate and is trying to claim ownership of Lou. Allen identifies David's betrayal at the library and David tries to ignore this by telling Lou he is losing control; of course, this is a projection as it is David who is losing control, less and less able to sustain the psychotic fantasy of an eventual fusion with Lou. This is re-enforced as Lou more definitively shows disregard for David, “You'd be boring if it weren't for me.”. David's desperation and destructiveness are peaking when he breaks into Jack's and puts the cat in the gas oven.

Lou is turning away from David, certainly a healthy decision. Unfortunately he cannot break from his own compulsion to repeat rather than find a new direction through the relationships with his friends. When a kiss is shared, Lou rejects Allen by relegating him to the role previously held by David. Lou asks Allen to write a class assignment, and when he says "I'd be lost without you.", it is a manipulative and destructive statement rather than affectionate and libidinal acknowledgment. Allen does write the paper, but already Lou has already veered course, seeking to join the merchant marines with Jack from which Allen is excluded. Allen declares Lou a phony for getting others to manifest the vision that he cannot do himself, and Lou strikes back by noting how he has changed Allen from ordinary to extraordinary, echoing the earlier insult to David as being boring. Allen encounters David on the street who states, "I know who you are. We're the ones he needs but never wants. It hurts, doesn't it?".

In the consulting room, working with some patients, analysts, within their counter-transference may experience strong feelings, and sometimes to act in ways contrary to their personality. While the analyst must ensure their personal conflicts are not at play, we know that at times the analyst is reacting to a strong unconscious communication by the patient. There is something similar in the relationships Lou has with Allen and David. The latter two are quite different in their characters and unconscious makeup, but they are both vulnerable, each for their own reasons, to Lou's unconscious demands of them. And it is within that dynamic that they end up playing similar roles. Allen, on some level recognizing this, is hurt by Lou's rejection and informs David of Lou's whereabouts.

Here we reach the climax of the film, namely the events around the murder of David Kammerer. Lou is trying to flee from his inner turmoil as much as he is trying to flee from David. He cannot escape his circle, his trap, his repetition compulsion. At first he has let Allen into his inner life, seeking life to balance his instinct towards self-destruction, possibly a fantasy to fuse with the object. But faced with the reality of the object, Allen as a separate person with his own needs and desires, he is overwhelmed by the closeness and must push away. It is not enough to reject the other. He seeks to yet again relocate, in his fantasy that a new place will be the solution to his desperation.

When David shows up yet again, this time with two passes for Lou and the clear message that he will forever be following, Lou falls into despair and gives in to his destructiveness. Lou goes for a walk with David to Riverside Park where the murder occurs. By the end of the film we have witnessed several accounts of the actual event, the truth of what has actually happened as vague as in reality. However, this climax of despair is not only Lou's experience. The murder scene is cut with images from the lives of the rest of the group. Allen in his rejection seeks out a man who looks like Lou and has an anonymous sexual encounter. Bill falls deeper into his addiction. And Jack receives a message from a close friend in the war that is essentially a death notice.

In the fallout from the murder, Lou, Jack, and Bill are arrested. Allen, feeling guilt for having told David where Lou was, visits Lou in jail. Allen agrees to write the deposition that the district attorney has demanded, and begins to look into the crime. He struggles when he looks up the law of the time, an "honour slaying", which allows a heterosexual man to use lethal force fending off the advances of a homosexual man. In speaking with Lou's mother, Allen is again cast in a role in Lou's circle, described as Lou's guardian angel, just as David had been. In talking to Bill, details suggest the murder was not in self-defence. In David's apartment Allen finds an admitting form signed by David when Lou was admitted to an institution after a suicide attempt, and a photo of Lou and David looking happy with the note: The Perfect Day; these are all reminders of a close relationship between David and Lou, one which he

had hoped for himself.

As Allen writes the deposition, he struggles not only with the uncertainty of the facts of the event, but also with his own thoughts and feelings about his own relationship with Lou. He is able to imagine both Lou's and David's perspective, the latter certainly a reflection of his own. He recognizes that David loved Lou, and that these feelings were at one time reciprocated, that Lou needed David, and later Allen, as much as they needed Lou. And out of love, as perverted or misguided as it may have been, David saved Lou's life, much as Allen attempts to do now. This is a realization that Lou has been unable to tolerate for when his need for the other begins to become conscious he pushes away. As Allen reimagines the death scene it sustains the ambiguity as it could be a suicide as much as it could be a murder. Victim and perpetrator merge such that there is no distinction between the two, all boundaries lost as the two fuse in the culmination of Thanatos. The final words of the piece are also the words that began the film:

Some things, once you've loved them, become your's forever. And if you try and let them go, they only circle back and return to you. They become part of who you are. Or they destroy you.

Lou reads the last words of Allen's creation and is devastated. While the facts of the event remain obscure, Allen has revealed the emotional truth that Lou has so long sought to repress, the truth that is too much to bear and that he then seeks to reject. Once Allen leaves, Lou tries to kill himself but fails. Rather than submit his creation as a deposition to the DA, Allen uses it as his final paper for Professor Steeves. Again, the work is initially experienced as too much an attack on convention and in the counter-attack it is declared smutty and absurd. The dean insists Allen withdraw the work or be expelled; Allen chooses the latter.

As Allen faces the aftermath of the murder, investigating the events and writing the piece that could serve as Lou's deposition, he is in the trenches, so to speak. He is no longer working in the realm of ideology and pranks, but facing directly his own reality spanning from the external events to the depths of his psyche. It is a working through, something Lou and David were unable to achieve. When Allen last sees Bill, Bill declares "The libertine circle has come to an end. Go back to the beginning.", the announcement that the New Vision is over and that Allen must be reborn out of its death.

Allen also visits his mother in the asylum, where she is much improved and receives him warmly. She has insight that her living at home was unsustainable, that she would have died. She holds no animosity towards Allen's father and even declares that to institutionalize her was an important thing. She is opening the door for Allen to have a reconciliation with his father. More importantly she is releasing Allen from her grip. And after his expulsion from Columbia Allen does return to his father's home; symbolically, the radio broadcast is announcing the liberation of Paris and an end to war in Europe, reflecting Allen's own liberation. He receives a package containing his creation, including encouraging words from Professor Steeves to keep writing. And finally, Allen again leaves his father's home; we see him writing in a bar and in the voiceover Allen declares "I am a poet.". He has found himself.

Having highlighted the instinctual lives of the characters and the dynamic between them based on the material presented in the narrative of the film, I now hope to present a formulation that speaks to the interplay between the life and death instincts, Eros and Thanatos, within some of the characters and within the group. Ultimately this may speak to an aspect of our theme this season of Creativity and Madness. Creativity may be easier to define than madness; simply put, it is the bringing forth of something new, something unique, at least in certain ways. This may take the

form of an idea, a work of art, or on a grander scale, something that shifts our culture. It is something that breaks our circle and makes our world wider. The more perplexing question is how is creativity realized? Defining madness is trickier. Certainly we can point to obvious madness of psychiatric illness. But psychoanalysis concerns itself with a much broader definition for we all have some level of madness within, rooted in our instinctual life, shaped by our development, and played out in our relationships and daily lives. It is important when one discusses the life and death instincts to not assume a moral judgement of good or bad, rather to acknowledge that both exist within us; it is their co-existence that matters.

Lucien Carr – Lou – has a desire to create something new, seeking a life that will nourish him. But he is overwhelmed by the death instinct which ultimately seeks a state of nothingness. While Lou may appear enlivened, it does not take much to see beneath that surface to his attacks and aggression both inward and outward. We have hints as to the origins of his troubles, at four years old his father leaving him to an idealizing yet austere mother, complicated by the trauma of the inappropriate sexual advances and erotic fixation of David Kammerer. Lou longs for a connection to fill the void left from his childhood, a longing so strong that he is indiscriminate when he has a chance for closeness with somebody. And yet, when that closeness becomes real he becomes overwhelmed, probably fearing a complete loss of self, and he must push away in the only way he knows how, by destroying, which returns him to that lonely void and despair. This exists not only in his relationships, but also within, never able to nurture himself, destroying any self-love. There is no balance to his death instinct.

David Kammerer is the most ill of the characters and there is nothing in the film that can speak to the origins of his psychosis, though one can comment on aspects of his pathology which are pivotal to the relationships in the film and to the narrative. Clearly David seeks to fuse with Lou, a state of no boundaries with the object that also denies all others. While this is a developmentally normal fantasy in early infancy, it can be deeply pathological in an adult, and forms the core of David's eroticized fixation. David is not seeking romance with Lou, he is seeking to consume him, maybe simultaneously be consumed by Lou. Obviously this would be tremendously confusing for Lou as a young man, uncertain about his sexuality, having a strong longing for affection, and without the ego-strength to discriminate healthy from unhealthy. It would be easy in this scenario to mistake David's advances for a genuine love, the aggression of it not apparent until Lou sought some distance to be his own person.

David's fixation is also ruled by the death instinct. It is inherently destructive in its need to be rid of all boundaries between the self and other in order to achieve a fusional state. And that aggression is quickly externalized against any threats to the fantasy, in this case mostly towards Allen. We also see it directed at Jack, the cat put into the oven, when Jack is willing to take Lou along in shipping out with the merchant marines, to take him away from David. David has no access to a libidinal counter-force; we see that he is oblivious to the creative experimentation of the other characters which he meets with disdainful comments.

As noted previously, Allen and David do seem to share some similarities, both strongly drawn by Lou's charisma and good looks, and probably also responding to his need. But the similarity is more a product of Lou's influence as opposed to similar internal conflicts. In fact, Allen and David are very different. David seeks to destroy any obstacle to his desire, to wipe out any trace, any memory of the other. Allen wishes to be rid of David as a rival, to be chosen by Lou, which does not require the obliteration of the other; far more neurotic than psychotic.

Allen is inhibited in all of his instincts as the narrative begins; he certainly has longings, but he suffers from numerous conflicts and their repressions. He struggles with his psychotic mother who, within her illness, has a tremendous need that she looks to Allen to satisfy; because of his desire to fulfill her need, to have her be well again, he is particularly susceptible to Lou's longing. He is also more resilient to being spurned by Lou because he has faced the same in his mother's psychosis. One might easily imagine the need to repress aggression, the anger at being pushed away so harshly, murderous or abandoning impulses repressed leaving only the guilt to be consciously experienced. Allen's father is a figure to emulate, Allen too wishes to be a poet; but not as a carbon copy of his father, rather as an individual in his own right, with his own aesthetic which is allowed to be unique. But given his homosexuality in a particularly restrictive and vilifying era in history, his creative libido must also be repressed.

In befriending Lou, Allen enters a relationship that provides a new perspective, one that can alter his own dynamics. His first glimpse of Lou in the library is exciting as he sees someone else who wants to break away from the conventions of the time, who is ready to stand up to the rule of the father; it is the notion that one's super-ego may be subverted. Allen at first vicariously experiences more of an instinctual life, one to which he is invited. And while Lou has a tremendous need much like Allen's mother, Lou seems to also serve as a love object for Allen. Lou's instinctual energies are used to erode Allen's defenses, a destruction, eventually allowing Allen greater access to his own libido and aggression. Without the old defenses to inhibit him, Allen may now direct the newly released impulses into the creation of something unique, not only the libidinous act of writing but also in aggressively standing up to the social and academic conventions that would insist on suppressing him. Lou is the one who breaks Allen's circle and makes his world wider.

The film makes clear that this is a very painful process, and reflects what is often experienced in the analyst's office. The analysand is typically trapped by their defenses in their circle of repetition compulsion. They require the analytic relationship. And as the defenses erode, the analysand must face the pain of what has been previously repressed; in doing so he or she has greater access to the instinctual life that can now be redirected elsewhere. Allen must bear the indictments of societal norms and academic leaders. He must face the hate of a rival, David, who wishes to annihilate him. He must face the rejection of Lou, who is unable to escape his own circle and return Allen's affections. And ultimately he must resolve the original conflicts and find his own place in the new, wider world.

Finally, Allen's personal journey speaks to the foundation of a movement in which he is considered a pillar, the Beat Generation. The movement could not only be a creative impulse. To bring something unique it first had to tear down the strongly held artistic and social conventions of the time, and it did so with such force that it risked self-destruction. But with the death of the New Vision, finally finding a balance between Eros and Thanatos, the Beats could be born. And our world became a little wider.

Thank you.