



**The White hip on Black shoulders: Reconciling the Hipster Generation's mythologization of African-American cultural signifiers through bebop jazz and the external realities of African-American bebop musicians 1945-1960**

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Dissertation submitted to The University of Warwick for the Degree of History and Politics

Module: From the Blues to Hip Hop (AM434)

**WORD COUNT: 8976**



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## INTRODUCTION

Incremental increases in sociocultural agency for African-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century brought with it the inevitable ascension of distinctly African-American artistic innovation. From the Delta Blues of Mississippi in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s New York scene, American musicology was indisputably centralised around African-American artistic abstractions. By the culmination of the Second World War, when this particularly novel musical phenomenon was beginning to gain a semblance of mainstream traction, there was still no consensus from the players or the media publication regarding what to christen it; some called it “bebop” or “bop”, others just “modern jazz”, or for some reactionary traditionalists such as bandleader Cab Calloway, it was undanceable “Chinese music”.<sup>1</sup> It was however essentially impossible to refute the artistic sophistication that it developed and the level of African-American capacity that it represented. Music Scholar Jason John Squinobal maintains that “the start of the bebop era was indeed a continuation of the Harlem Renaissance movement”<sup>2</sup> and the parallels between the two movements are clear. Both constructed ground-breaking artistic conceptualisations burgeoning habitually out of the New York after-hours scenes; both featured markedly African-American creativity. However seminal bop Trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie retrospectively defined a constitutive transition between the two asserting how “the older musicians did what they had to do. But in the age that we came up in we didn't have to do those things, you know? We just figured, we felt like we were liberated people, and we acted like liberated people”<sup>3</sup>; while the Musicians of the Harlem Renaissance and the Dixieland predecessors such as Louis Armstrong entertained the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, H. and Waters, K. (2014). *Essential jazz*. Australia: Schirmer/Cengage Learning, p.121.

<sup>2</sup> Squinobal, J. (2009). *West African Music in the Music of Art Blakey, Yusef Lateef, and Randy Weston*. Ph.D. University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie, quoted in DeVeaux, S. (2000). *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*. London: Picador, p.167.

white gaze for economic emancipation, bebop musicians felt able to free themselves from the constraints of whitewashed commercialism, instigating a process of intellectual emancipation.

While there is a perennial debate surrounding bop fashioning out of a musical evolution or social revolution that will be discussed in this dissertation, it was these revolutionary aspects of nonconformism and societal rejection that enticed an alienated sect of white-middle class Americans known as hipsters to the allure of bebop. This dissertation will essentially act as a literature appraisal, presenting a deconstruction of the literature surrounding this new cultural phenomenon, repudiating the mythologised narratives of African-American primitivism and hyper-sexualisation present in the hipster cognition, epitomised by Norman Mailer's essay *The White Negro* (1957). David Hopkins asserts how "The association of *On The Road* and bebop is so strong that almost all critics today approach the novel by discussing its style and structure in terms of what is generally understood to be the bebop style"<sup>4</sup>, and in accordance with this notion this dissertation will present an analysis of the Beat's and especially Kerouac's veneration of the bop music, juxtaposed against the racial essentialisms congruently present in his writing. These hipster conceptualisations of bebop culture will be analogised against the external realities of racial discrimination endured by these musicians epitomised by Baldwin's short story *Sonny's Blues*, ultimately concluding that the white middle class discourse pervading the bebop scene demonstrated the little understanding had of the racialised struggles underpinning every facet of this musical development.

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<sup>4</sup> Hopkins, D. (2005). To Be or Not to Bop: Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* and the culture of bebop and rhythm 'n' blues. *Popular Music*, 24(2), 279-286.

## **CHAPER 1: Conceptual Evolution or Esoteric Revolution: How bebop made jazz avant-garde**

On the evening of June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945, situated at the Town Hall venue at the heart of New York City, two disparate young jazz cats performed a template of technical virtuosity that would position themselves at the pioneering forefront of developments in musical history. They were backed by drummer Max Roach, bassist Curley Russell, and pianist Al Haig, all unquestionably pioneers in their own right, yet it was the from the almost manic erraticism in the frenetically paced improvisational and innately individualistic showcases by 24 year old saxophonist Charlie Parker and 27 year old Trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie that would apotheosise everything that was and indeed could be possible for musical innovation in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the eponymously titled song *Bebop*, to the technical prowess of Gillespie in *A Night in Tunisia*, a performance ensued that epitomised a post-war capitulation of African-American jazz musicians to a distinctly modern new form of musicality.<sup>5</sup> However to class this performance as the definitive pivotal moment for the development of bebop would be ahistorical; indeed to place a point upon a particular moment in which this cultural transition into bebop occurred is ultimately as futile as attempting to categorise the moment that this form of jazz first introduced itself. Music Historian Tommy Turner acknowledges how, “with little documentation beyond personal memories, the beginnings of bebop are therefore notoriously hard to unearth”;<sup>6</sup> narratively speaking, however, the ascendancy of this musical conception coincided with a linear decline of swing Jazz as a result of the Second World War. Swing Music was the predominant form of Jazz and dance music in the 1930s, fronted by seminal bandleaders such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Barry Goodman, the latter whose concert at Carnegie

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<sup>5</sup> Full performance found at "Town Hall, New York City, June 22, 1945" w/ Max Roach & Sidney Catlett (FULL ALBUM). (2017). [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciFjhdeEa5A>

<sup>6</sup> Turner, T. (2008). Being bop: how the press shaped the cult of bebop. *Jazz Research Journal*, 1(2), p.207.

Hall in New York City on January 16, 1938 was described by critic Bruce Eder as "the single most important jazz or popular music concert in history: jazz's 'coming out' party to the world of 'respectable' music."<sup>7</sup>

However, the difficulties surrounding The War rendered the big band swing model inherently unsustainable. From logistical terms, Economic and social implications of the War meant that, due to complications such as wartime restrictions on travel coinciding with mounting expenses, the big bands were becoming financially harder to maintain for the nationally renowned bandleaders. As Bakridges concurs "even the 'territory bands' in the Midwest and Southwest, whose overhead expenses were far lower than the national touring orchestras, were surviving hand to-mouth",<sup>8</sup> and this logistical impediment was complimented by a nationwide banning of Recording in 1942. Here, in the longest and perhaps the most infamous entertainment wage strike in history, the American Federation of Musicians, under the leadership of union president James Petrillo, instigated a ban on recording until record labels agreed to effectively finance royalties to working musicians.

This halting of recording until the last labels agreed to new contract terms in November 1944 had a profound detrimental effect on the continuation of traditional big band swing's popularity, with labels and musicians subsequently favouring to propagate smaller vocalist fronted proto-R&B ensembles<sup>9</sup>, however it would be erroneous to assert that Bebop as a musical and cultural concept began in an inevitable linear fashion taking over from the ostensible expiration of the big swing band. Conversely, the process burgeoned out of a discursive and dialectical reconstitution of the intellectual boundaries of jazz than evolved in the After-Hours clubs of Minton's Playhouse and Monroe's in Harlem from the turn of the

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<sup>7</sup> Eder, B. (2019). Live at Carnegie Hall: 1938 Complete - Benny Goodman | Songs, Reviews, Credits | AllMusic. [online] AllMusic. Available at: <https://www.allmusic.com/album/live-at-carnegie-hall-1938-complete-mw0000671550>

<sup>8</sup> Bakridges, C. (2001). African American Musical Avant-Gardism. Ph.D. York University, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

1940s. During this time, New York City's 52nd Street was ablaze with jazz, but it was Uptown in Harlem where bebop was on the rise. At these two after-hour clubs, now revered cultural artefacts in American musical historiography, both Parker and Gillespie played their freshly minted solos at a blistering pace, a palpable challenge to the swing-oriented 52nd Street sound. At Minton's, the two friends formed a house band with pianist Thelonious Monk and drummer Kenny Clarke. As jazz historian Stanley Crouch says, "[they] were really trying to find a way to play that was interesting to them"<sup>10</sup>.

Dizzy Gillespie wrote of jam sessions in the bebop era in terms of camaraderie and unity, stating how:

*“Amongst musicians when I came up we had a very close feeling of camaraderie. ... We had to be as sensitive to each other as brothers in order to express ourselves completely, maintain our individuality, yet play as one. Jam sessions, such as those wonderfully exciting ones held at Minton's Playhouse, were seedbeds for our new, modern style of music”<sup>11</sup>*

Katherine Waller in her article *Cut, Carved, and Served: Competitive Jamming in the 1930s and 1940s* maintains that Gillespie's emphasis on intimacy and dialogue “problematizes the mainstream image of jam session culture as battle-oriented”,<sup>12</sup> and while the legitimacy of retrospective commentary from these musicians can potentially be denounced as romanticising these experiences through a corruption of memory due to nostalgia, there is an undeniably expansive level of biographical legitimacy that supports a clear prevailing consensus among these musicians of the cooperative and harmonious nature underpinning these after-hours jam sessions. Through this emphasis on fraternity and a unified collective created a conscious effort of these disaffected young proto-bebop musicians through the dialectical elements of the jam

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<sup>10</sup> Crouch, S. (2013). *Kansas City Lightning: The Rise and Times of Charlie Parker*. Harper Collins.

<sup>11</sup> Gillespie, D, quoted in Van der Bliek, R. (2001). *Thelonious Monk Reader*. Oxford University Press, p.19.

<sup>12</sup> Walker, K (2010). *Cut, Carved, and Served: Competitive Jamming in the 1930s and 1940s*, *Jazz Perspectives*, 4:2, 183-208, DOI: 10.1080/17494060.2010.506032

sessions and the cutting contests to evolve and redefine the constitutional boundaries of African-American music in a distinctly modernist fashion. Pioneering drummer Kenny Clarke remembered how in the crucial formative jam sessions, “The music wasn’t called bop at Minton’s. In fact, we had no name for the music. We called ourselves modern”,<sup>13</sup> and this evolutionary element of musical innovation burgeoned out of a reactionary repudiation of the artistic limitations present in Bebop’s predecessors of Swing and Dixieland jazz.

DeVeaux asserts how “Bop was the twin child of optimism and frustration”<sup>14</sup>, and this dichotomised narrative can be epitomised through juxtaposing the aforementioned Gillespie comment upon his positivity towards the Jam sessions at the Minton Playhouse, with that of his disdain for the confinements of swing and Dixieland, typified through his venomous attack of Sidney Bechet’s ‘Gone Away Blues’ in *Metronome*:

*“What is that? ... That must have been made in 1900... No harmonic structure here; two beats; bad rhythm, nothing happening; just utter simplicity, but how simple can you get? You can get a little boy eight years old to play that simple”*<sup>15</sup>

Mark S. Harvey hypothesises that “Bebop was the first authentically modern phase in jazz Experiment”<sup>16</sup>, and the vitriolic discourse from pioneering bop musicians such as Gillespie towards the ostensible lack of creativity of bop’s musical predecessors cannot be overestimated as it elucidates how this movement fashioned itself fundamentally out of a desire for a modernist conceptual reality that could recontextualise the aesthetic boundaries of melodic instrumentation. Miles Davis, who migrated to New York straight out of Lincoln High School in a paradigmatic fashion in September 1944, told Quincy Troupe how *“if you got up on the*

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<sup>13</sup> Stewart, J. (2011). No Boundary Line to Art: “Bebop” as Afro-Modernist Discourse. *American Music*, 29(3), 332-352. doi:10.5406/americanmusic.29.3.0332

<sup>14</sup> Op cit. DeVeaux, S. (2000)., p.27.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Yardbird Flies Home’. *Metronome*, August 1947, 14, 43–44.

<sup>16</sup> Mark S. Harvey, “Jazz and Modernism: Changing Conceptions of Innovation and Tradition,” in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, ed. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland (1991), Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p.136.



*bandstand at Minton's and couldn't play ... you were not only going to be embarrassed by people ignoring you or booing you, you might get your ass kicked"*<sup>17</sup>. This quote might appear *prima facie* contradictory to the aforementioned narrative of comradery and cooperation enjoyed by these musicians performing at the club jam sessions, however for the musicians the process of cooperation came from a desire to break the enforced linkages of older fashions of jazz, bringing out an evolved musical intellect through discursive methods. As drummer Kenny Clarke explains, "*The idea was to wake up, look around you, there's something to do. . . . There was a message in our music. Whatever you go into, go into it intelligently. As simple as that*"<sup>18</sup>, and this notion of searching for a higher musical intelligence explicates Dizzy Gillespie's motivation for inventing complex harmonic variations to "*scare away the no-talent guys*";<sup>19</sup> Jazz historian Scott DeVeaux, adamant that bebop existed less as a political phenomenon than as a thoroughly modernist movement, asserted how bebop "was no longer a music tied to the mundane realities of social dance or popular song, "but an abstract music of bristling complexity and dazzling virtuosity",<sup>20</sup> and through removing the lacking musicians and pedestalling the virtuosos, bebop transcended functioning musical boundaries.

What then were the technical elements that legitimised the bebop experimentation as a microcosm of African-American avant-gardism? The initial bebop recordings predominantly followed a common compositional procedure of building a melodic improvisational counterpoint around chord structures of pre-existent popular swing or Dixieland songs. A formative example of this being Gillespie's *Woody 'n' You*, first recorded with Coleman Hawkins in 1944. This is a 32 measures long piece with The A section consisting of three two-measure sequences on ii-V chords, ending on the tonic (Db); the harmonic sequence is:

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, M. and Troupe, Q. (1990). *Miles, the autobiography*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, p.54.

<sup>18</sup> Clarke, K. quoted in Gillespie, D. (2009). *To Be, Or Not-- to Bop*. U of Minnesota Press, p.142.

<sup>19</sup> Francon, M. and Winckel, F. (1966). *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz as Told by the Men who Made it*. Courier Corporation, p.337.

<sup>20</sup> Deveaux, S. (2005). *Core and Boundaries*. *Jazz Research Journal*, 2(1), p.16.

Gm7(b5) – C7(#9) – Fm7(b5) – Bb7(#9) – Ebm7(b5) – Ab7(#9) – Dbmaj9

While the A section seems tonally to conclude in a model ii-V-i fashion, Thomas Owens comments on how the alteration here between the half-diminished ii chords and the dominant seventh-raised ninth V chords creates “a pungent mix of dissonances that appealed to young modernists”,<sup>21</sup> and such modernist experimental dissonances became a common feature of Gillespie’s repertoire, such as his recording of *A Night in Tunisia* with Boyd Raeburn’s Big Band, which displays a constant use of the ii-I harmonic relationship (Eb13-Dmi), a discordant tritone substitution around a classic aaba form.

This is the substantiating argument that supports the premise of bebop burgeoning out of an evolutionary discourse rather than revolution; that most of the melodic and other technical innovations of bebop can be seen as patterns of abstraction and conceptual reifications of pre-existing changes from songs predicated upon Tin Pan Alley traditions. Gillespie’s *Salt Peanuts* for example demonstrates a melodic contrafact based on the chords of *I got Rhythm*; Thelonious Monk’s *Evidence* a piece based on the chord changes to the Klages and Greer standard *Just You, Just Me*;<sup>22</sup> Parker’s *Ornithology* a complex melodic counteract with the “A” section themed around *How High the Moon*, and *Koko*, Parker’s first recorded masterpiece, was a harmonic reification of Noble’s *Cherokee*.

Jesse Stewart concurs with this notion of abstraction, further repudiating Eric Porter’s suggestion that bebop musicians rejected the blues “as a symbol of the limitations placed on them as musicians and as African Americans.”, given how many of the complex chord substations and melodic progressions prevalent in bop engaged with the simple blues harmonic

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<sup>21</sup> Owens, T. (1995). *Bebop*. Oxford University Press, p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Op cit. Stewart, J. (2011), p.336.

structure of I, IV, and V chords.<sup>23</sup>, with Stewart presenting the truism that , “virtually all of bebop’s progenitors wrote and recorded pieces based on blues form”.<sup>24</sup>

However there is a legitimate interpretation of these artists seeking to create a revolutionary musical esotericism to additionally reject the legacy of the minstrel mask by emphasizing African-American artistry over whitewashed commercial aesthetics. Turner notes how Bebop’s “refusal to kowtow to white society ... conflicted with an older generation who had worked within the expectations of white society”<sup>25</sup>, and indeed Louis Armstrong's "plantation image," as Dizzy Gillespie called it, with a "handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism"<sup>26</sup> was a presentation of presumed subservience that harked back to images of slavery that the new generation of musicians repudiated. James Lincoln Collier writes how “A new militant spirit began to be felt by African-Americans, particularly jazz musicians, who by 1940 were hearing from critics that they were artists worthy of respect”,<sup>27</sup> and due to this acknowledgement of the lack of appreciation for their intellectual value, some music historians such as Russell surmise that bop became “a music of revolt; revolt against big bands, arrangers, vertical harmonies - against commercial music in general”<sup>28</sup>.

As with any revolution there was inevitable reactionary backlash from traditionalists; swing Bandleader Tommy Dorsey stated how "bebop has set music back 20 years", and Louis Armstrong, bemoaned bop's "weird chords", arguing bop "no melody to remember and no beat to dance to"<sup>29</sup>. The Press outlets of *Down Beat* and *Metronome* did much to shape narratives of polarisation between the Dixieland traditionalists and the new boppers, with many critics relieved when both Roy Eldridge and Louis Armstrong, two leading jazz musicians of the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Op cit. Turner, T. (2008). P.212

<sup>26</sup> Yaffe, D. (2009). *Fascinating Rhythm : Reading Jazz in American Writing*. Princeton University Press, p.69.

<sup>27</sup> Collier, J, quoted in Squinobal, J. (2009), p.117.

<sup>28</sup> Lopes, P. (2002). *The Rise of a Jazz Art World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.209.

<sup>29</sup> Fordham, J. (2009). 50 great moments in jazz: The emergence of bebop. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2009/jul/06/50-moments-jazz-bebop>

period, went on record disapproving bebop.<sup>30</sup> Lott notes how “By mid-1947 polemics raged in Down Beat over which was the "real jazz,"<sup>31</sup> bebop or Dixieland (a recent reactionary reinvention) and well-known critics battered each others' sectarianism” and ultimately bop’s revolutionary aspects lie in the controversy it caused in the Jazz scene, either “commit{ed] to the music that was pre-Charlie Parker or to the music he was playing”<sup>32</sup>, and it is the perpetuation of this revolutionary anti-commercialism narrative that ultimately appealed to the hip nonconformists.

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<sup>30</sup>Op cit. Bakridges, C. (2001).

<sup>31</sup> Lott, E. (1988). Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style. *Callaloo*, (36), 597-605. (p.603) doi:10.2307/2931544

<sup>32</sup>Green, B, quoted in Tirro, Frank. “The Silent Theme Tradition in Jazz.” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1967, pp. 313–334. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/740973](http://www.jstor.org/stable/740973).

## CHAPTER 2: Sexualised Primitivism and “The White Negro”: Bebop culture in the Hipster Imagination

In February 1957 an article named *Born 1930: The Unlost Generation* was published in women’s fashion magazine *Harper Bazaar* by Caroline Bird giving a comprehensive while polemical commentary upon a conspicuously white, masculine and middle-class countercultural movement that had been cultivated in the New York underground after-hours establishments in the decade prior from the conclusion of the Second World War. These “rebels”, referred to by this point as “hipsters”, represented to Bird “the only extreme nonconformist of his generation”, a collection of “infantile” marijuana users who were supposedly impossible to interview “because his main goal is to keep out of a society, which, he thinks, is trying to make everyone over in its own image”<sup>33</sup>, deeming anyone who chose to be moulded by institutional conformity and the conservative post-war status-quo as “square”. Bird here offers an implication of a role jazz plays in the cultural abstraction of this movement<sup>34</sup>, however it fails to address the complete predication of this movement upon the mythologization of the symbolic abstractions of their perception of African-American avant-gardism through their fascination with bebop jazz and their romanticising adulation of the players. Jazz historian Phil Ford in *Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture* presents a deconstruction of certain archetypes present in this hip culture, commenting upon the cultish formation of the movement around the seemingly “elitist” and alienating forces of the multifaceted and discursive musical aesthetics present in bebop songs such as Parker’s *Koko*, asserting how this mythology idealizes the listener as a member of an elite group, “a nearly

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<sup>33</sup> Bird, C, quoted in Mailer, N. (1957). *The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the White Hipster*. University of Warwick: found at:

[https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/en304/syllabus2015-16/norman\\_mailer\\_-\\_the\\_white\\_negro.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/en304/syllabus2015-16/norman_mailer_-_the_white_negro.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

closed society of voyagers” drifting from one late-night club to another”.<sup>35</sup> A quintessential paradigm of these self-alienated after-hours drifters is offered in Becker’s observation of the ‘X–Avenue Boys’, “a clique of extreme jazzmen who reject the American culture in total.”<sup>36</sup> These solely upper middle-class white men associated almost exclusively “with other musicians and girls who sang or danced in the night clubs...and had little or no contact with the conventional world”<sup>37</sup>. Their politics concentrated around the notion of social iconoclasm, essentialised as that ‘They hate this form of government anyway and think it’s real bad’<sup>38</sup>. The allure of this faction to bebop, a barely-impenetrable bastion of post-war innovation, was an ostensibly natural occurrence, given how “in art and symphonic music they were interested in the most esoteric developments”<sup>39</sup>.

In his discourse surrounding the topic Robert Holton notes how in the early days of Bebop, the fascination from white social deviants such as Hipsters burgeoned from how “it flaunted its divergence from the fundamental conventions of popular music and consequently attracted much smaller audiences, very few of whom were white”<sup>40</sup>. Through the complex abstruse musicality featured in bebop, the distinctly African-American aspects of the culture surrounding the music, and the eccentric personalities found at the after-hours establishments, bebop appeared to “refuse to charm mainstream audiences and consciously to resist popularization”, and this supposed rejection of the status quo prevalent gave estranged white musicians and bebop fans with a propensity for dissidence an alternative means to participate in societal disquiet. Seminal music critic Amiri Baraka notes how these white beboppers “were as removed from the society as Negroes, but as a matter of choice. The important idea here is

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<sup>35</sup> Phil Ford (2008) Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture, *Jazz Perspectives*, 2:2, 121-163, DOI: 10.1080/17494060802373382

<sup>36</sup> Becker, H. (2008). *Outsiders*. Simon and Schuster, p.97.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> Holton R. (2004) “The Sordid Hipsters of America”: Beat Culture and the Folds of Heterogeneity. In: Skerl J. (eds) *Reconstructing the Beats*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

that the white musicians and other young whites who associated themselves with this Negro music identified the Negro with this separation, this nonconformity, though, of course, the Negro himself had no choice.”<sup>41</sup> these hipsters indeed comprised of self-alienated affluent white men who made the migration to the cultural ‘mecca’ of Harlem in a deliberate attempt to distance themselves from their own symbolic whiteness, apotheosizing the great icons such as Gillespie, emulating such archetypal aesthetic choices as horn-rimmed glasses and "ridiculously draped suits in the manner of the zoot suit,"<sup>42</sup>

Ingrid Monson asserts how “The attitude of the bebop musician as an "anti-assimilationist" social critic became embodied in and visualized through various sonic, visual, linguistic, and ideological markers”<sup>43</sup>, and through a deconstruction of the multiplicity of appropriation methods established by these emerging white aficionados of bebop culture, underlying narratives of reductionism of African-Americanism to primitivism and phallogocentric hypersexualisation are made explicit, problematising the legitimacy of a cohesive social network of romanticising white followers and black leading musicians with the psychological realities of the ascriptive taxonomy of the American racial system.

The vital section of the aforementioned *Harper Bazaar* article is epigraphed in Norman Miller’s infamously controversial 9000 word essay *The White Negro (1957)*, a commentary on the psychological phenomenon of hipster existentialism and the consequent association with marginalised black sociocultural narratives that embodies the pathological misconceptions ascribed by these hipsters upon African-American bebop musicians. He posits that the “psychic havoc” created by the horrors of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb brought upon an existential dilemma for the hipster attempting to reconcile the constant condition of “instant

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<sup>41</sup> Bakara, A, quoted in Monson, I. (1995). The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 48(3), 396-422. doi:10.2307/3519833

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

death by atomic bomb"<sup>44</sup> with a slow intellectual death through mass conformity and "collective failure of nerve"<sup>45</sup>. This psychological paradox Mailer argues manifested into the hipster's absorption of "the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro"<sup>46</sup>. While Mailer presents a potential psychological axiom of the external realities of the constructed African-American psyche, that "any negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experiences can ever be casual to him",<sup>47</sup> Mailer's demonstrative reductionist ontology of the symbolic "Negro", that to mitigate this daily racial paranoia he consciously decides to live a life of "humility", and his clear homogenisation of the lived experiences of African-Americans to monothetic black atavism through his assertion that "The negro could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilisation, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive ... relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the obligatory pleasures of his body"<sup>48</sup>, all serve to illustrate his exoticized equation of African-American cultural anxieties with moral primitivism and romanticised abjection aligning with Edward Said's concept of colonialist Orientalism.

With this problematic delineation of supposed African-American primitivism, his pseudo-negritudism is coupled with an assertion that "as in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm"<sup>49</sup>. Through his statement that "jazz is orgasm"<sup>50</sup>, juxtaposed with his use of asyndetic parallelism of plosive sexualised syntax from the words "lust" to "scream", Mailer posits a baseless dissemination of jazz as a signifier for the sexual expression of "the wise primitive in a giant jungle".<sup>51</sup> The voyeuristic sexual

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<sup>44</sup> Op cit. Mailer, N. (1957).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> ibid

<sup>51</sup> ibid



objectification of the black male and the problematic equivalence of the “hip” and the “primitive” is indeed such a pervasive exhibition in this essay that it provoked James Baldwin, seminal African-American writer and surprisingly close friend of Mailer, to present a nuanced repudiation of Mailer’s espoused notions in an essay written for *Esquire* in 1961 named *The Black Boy Looks At The White Boy Norman Mailer*. Here he criticised Mailer’s obsession with perceiving the black male as a “walking phallic symbol”, asserting how:

*“It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship, therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing”*<sup>52</sup>

The complexity of this diametric relationship between white and black males is embodied by Baldwin through his relationship with Mailer. While Baldwin makes no attempt to justify his friend’s damaging racial misconceptions, stating his confusion that a supposedly talented writer would debase himself to the level of Kerouac and the Beats, who Baldwin perceived as unintellectual, he however reconciles Mailer’s fallacies through illustrating the constitutive importance of the opposing social conditions of the two men, Baldwin growing up a “black boy from the Harlem streets” Mailer as a “middle-class Jew”,<sup>53</sup> in explaining the inevitable “great gap between Norman's state and my own”<sup>54</sup>. This gap for Baldwin made it impossible for any sufficient understanding of Mailer and other “hip” white men like him to the African-American male condition, as with any white male attempt at reconstituting the black psychological cognition would inevitably become connected “with that myth of the sexuality of Negroes with Norman, like so may others, refuses to give up”.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Baldwin, J. (1961). *The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy Norman Mailer*. [online] *Esquire*. Available at: <https://classic.esquire.com/article/1961/5/1/the-black-boy-looks-at-the-white-boy-norman-mailer>.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

Historical institutionalism legitimises the bleak inevitability of this myth. Gilman postulates how blackness “has been linked with concupiscence as far back as the twelfth century” and by the eighteenth century blackness had become “an icon for deviant sexuality in general.”<sup>56</sup> Griffin posits how, “During slavery, Black males were ideologically fixed as animalistic, dangerous, and hypersexual”<sup>57</sup>, and while the established institutional slavocracy in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Antebellum South arguably negated any tangible requirement for white male sexual anxiety, due to a reconstitution of the racial taxonomy resulting from the post-civil war reconstruction Era, Martha Hodes notes that “black male sexuality first became a major theme in white Southern politics, thereby commencing an era of terrorism and lynching”.<sup>58</sup> The prominence of the rape myth used to legitimise the racialised violence committed against African-American men was legitimised through the perpetuation of narratives of black male sexual depravity. Ultimately due to these myths, propagated by films such as D.W. Griffith’s 1915 gratuitous film *The Birth Of A Nation* “the “pathology” of the person of color was presumed to be part of his essential nature”<sup>59</sup>, and this pathology of black male hypersexuality naturally led into the psychological perceptions of black male virility deconstructed by Baldwin, a notion corroborated by seminal French writer Franz Fanon through his somewhat overlooked psychoanalysis in his pivotal work *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Here, he presents a quote from journalist and screenwriter Michel Cournot, who asserts that

*“the black mans sword is a sword. When he has thrust it into your wife, she has really felt something ... Four negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral”*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Grffin, quoted in op cit, Monson, I. (1995).

<sup>57</sup> <sup>57</sup> Griffin, R. (2012). The Disgrace of Commodification and Shameful Convenience: A Critical Race Critique of the NBA. *Journal of Black Studies*, 43(2), 161-185. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23215205>

<sup>58</sup> Hodes, M. (1993). The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3(3), 402-417. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704014>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto, p.130.

This violent anatomic association with the penis and knife, reinforced with the hyperbolic narrative of the supposed augmented size of the black man's penis, is evidence used by Fanon to substantiate his psychoanalytic description of the sexualisation of black men in the white mind, predicated upon a subconscious fear of "the raping negro" claiming that "the white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast ... if it is not the length of his penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him".<sup>61</sup> Fanon provides empirical basis to legitimise his claims; Over three or four years he conducted 500 associational tests, questioning "some 500 members of the white race—French, German, English, Italian"<sup>62</sup> inserting the word Negro into the questions, with his analysis concluding how: "Almost 60 per cent of the replies took this form: Negro brought forth biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent...".<sup>63</sup> His body on work on this narrative led psychoanalyst Derick Hook to conclude that, for the white male, "[fanon believes] there is a certain concealed respect and/or jealousy at work here" a "rapturous admiration of black ... prowess"<sup>64</sup>.

I would further argue that this can be attributed somewhat to what 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalyst, Lacan termed "phallic lack"<sup>65</sup>, however while this doctrine deals with how the feminine subject presents "the masquerade of being the phallus"<sup>66</sup> to mitigate this "signifier of lack", this theory can be reappropriated for deconstructing the proverbial white male fascination of black male

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.128.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Hook, Derek (2004). Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism. London: LSE Research Online. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2567>. P.131.

<sup>65</sup> Here, Lacan theorises that "a young child transitions from a peaceful Imaginary Stage in their subconscious development, into the Symbolic—the stage of language with its phallogocentric values." This marks the child's introduction to the "Name of The Father and the authority of the phallus" (Lacan 2006: 230)—which, to the child, is the imaginary object of the mother's desire that the child believes the father possesses and the child lacks. It thus becomes "a signifier of lack" for the child (Homer 2005:95). To regain the sense of autonomy after entering the Symbolic order and accepting the law of the father, which forbids the former imaginary oneness with the mother, the subject has two options, which "turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have' . . . the phallus" and in turn decide its sexuality (Lacan 2001b: 221). The masculine subject pretends that he possesses the phallus, while the feminine subject presents "the *masquerade* of being the phallus" (Homer 2005: 95). Since the Symbolic Order denies women their own desire they are forced to ascribe to the Phallic jouissance, covering up their phallus lack by attempting to be better mirrors, to present better specular images to men.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

sexuality; Robin D.G. Kelley asserts that black men in the 1950s ‘offered an alternative model of masculinity in the age of the gray flannel suit, suburbia, and other emasculating forces’<sup>67</sup> these clear signifiers of sexual “lack” and emasculation prevalent as a result of the conservative constitution of American 1950s status-quo led subversive white men such as hipsters to attempt to ameliorate this subconscious “phallic lack”, and the way in which they perceived this possible was through the appropriation of distinctly African-American cultural signifiers such as Bebop, to relate themselves with a demographic that for centuries had been associated with hypersexuality and sexual exoticism. In his analysis of the life of a New York jazz musician named LC (a pseudonym), Peter Hollerbach asserts how this “alternative model of masculinity”<sup>68</sup> influenced the attitudes expressed by LC; indeed, for LC, ‘jazz’, in his view, ‘is a “dick thing”, and only the strong survive’.<sup>69</sup> His jazz aesthetic stressed masculine attributes as ‘toughness’, ‘virility’, and ‘balls’,<sup>70</sup> “all expressed within an unequivocal context of symbolic phallic display”. Hollerbach situates these expressions within the racialised interpretations of jazz, asserting how “to play the music is to play it according to ‘a white idea about blacks’, one rooted in the myth of African American sexual prowess”,<sup>71</sup> and ultimately in LC’s white male imagination, “a thorough knowledge and command of bebop performativity is tantamount to the normative qualities of a conventionally coded masculinity”.<sup>72</sup> This homogenisation of masculinity and black music is epitomised by LC’s assertion that at the so-called ‘black clubs’ he became accustomed to when relocating to a large mid-Atlantic city:

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<sup>67</sup> Kelley, R. 1999. 'New monastery: Monk and the jazz avant-garde', *Black Music Research Journal*, 19/2, pp. 135-68 (p.139.)

<sup>68</sup> Hollerbach, P. (2004). (Re)voicing Tradition: Improvising Aesthetics and Identity on Local Jazz Scenes. *Popular Music*, 23(2), 155-171. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877485>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

*“I could ‘play black’, that grits-and-gravy thing. You had to in those places. If you played ‘white and polite’, you were gone!”<sup>73</sup>*

This performativity of the symbolic “black”, attached to the associations of “white” with “polite”, harks back to Lacan’s “masquerade of being the phallus”; here LC performs blackness in a hypermasculine sense, effectively performing the act of being the phallus.

This narrative has been a perennial point of analysis for Critical Race Theorists such as bell hooks, who questions:

*“should we not be suspicious of the way in which white culture’s fascination with black masculinity manifests itself? The very images of phallogentric black masculinity that are glorified and celebrated in rap music, videos and movies are the representations that are evoked when white supremacists ... support for genocidal assaults on black men, particularly youth”<sup>74</sup>*

Essentially the black male sexuality that is glorified by white male appropriators of rap/hip-hop, an ostensibly masculine genre of music, is the same conception that was used by white supremacists to inflict anti-black violence/lynching. This notion lies accordance with bell hooks’ notion of appropriating a new identity through “eating the other” in which she posits how “[a] current trend in producing colourful ethnicity for the White consumer appetite that makes it possible for Blackness to be commodified in unprecedented ways, and for Whites to appropriate Black culture without interrogating Whiteness or showing concern for the displeasure of Blacks”.<sup>75</sup> A cultural manifestation of this “eating the other” theory can be found in the racialised interactions pertinent within the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. White Americans here used the Harlem movement to consume and commodify black music and intellectual culture without having to confront the uncomfortable signifiers of their own

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid*

<sup>74</sup> hooks, b. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press, p.9.

<sup>75</sup> *Op cit.* hooks, b (1992).

privilege, and resultantly the Harlem Renaissance became “a culturally elitist movement ... due to its flourish within the sponsorship of wealthy white Americans”.<sup>76</sup> Contemporaneously to the hipster’s fascination with black creativity in the post-war bebop era, The Harlem renaissance introduced a chronicle of White consumption of a “fashionable” new black intellectualism while concurrently ostracising the black creators of this content. These white patrons were coined as “Negrotarians” by Zora Neale Hurston, a Harlem author, to “describe their own demands and expectations from black artists”,<sup>77</sup> and their demands cantered around the sole consumption of blackness in a fashion that gratified their white gaze while negating any appreciation of the realities of the African-American creating the experience. This narrative was visibly illustrated in Harlem's renowned Cotton Club, where infamous swing concessioner Duke Ellington and other artists performed black entertainment for exclusively white audiences. Ellington remembered how at Cotton Club, "no one was allowed to talk during the shows ... I'll never forget, some guy would be juiced, and talking, and the waiter would come round...and then the next thing, the guy would just disappear!"; this fashioned etiquette of silence at this club resonates with the aforementioned LC and his experience of playing ‘white and polite’ at white-centric establishments. The dichotomies of “white” and “black” combined against “polite” and narratively “impolite”, joined with LC’s excitement as performing “black”, indicates how, conversely to the white participants of the Harlem Renaissance complete rejection of blackness, for white patrons and musicians of the bebop clubs such as Mintons and Monroe’s, gratification for white bop musicians and spectators came from participating in a masquerade of an essentialised conception of blackness predicated on a mythologised narrative of hypermasculinity.

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<sup>76</sup> Yayla, A. (2012). [online] Harlem Renaissance and its Discontents. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/3029842/Harlem\\_Renaissance\\_and\\_its\\_Discontents](https://www.academia.edu/3029842/Harlem_Renaissance_and_its_Discontents)

<sup>77</sup> Carreiro, A. (1999). Ghosts of the Harlem Renaissance: "Negrotarians" in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. *The Journal of Negro History*, 84(3), 247-259. doi:10.2307/2649004

Baldwin noted how "the Negro jazz musicians ... who really liked Norman, did not for an instant consider him as being even remotely "hip""<sup>78</sup>, indicative of how the hipster movement's efforts to reconstruct their own identity to align with the imagined "black hip" was considered fraudulent by the African-American musician community. Squinobal posits how with the turn of bebop, "It is at this point that many African American artists no longer accepted the notion of a primitive and savage Africa"<sup>79</sup>, and the stereotypes of primitivism and societal transgression placed upon bebop by voyeuristic white hipsters were repudiated by the focal African-American musicians. Dizzy Gillespie recounted on the subject that while he was grateful for the publicity garnered through such stereotypes, he was disturbed about the nature and origination of these narratives:

*"Around 1946, jive-ass stories about "beboppers" circulated and began popping up in the news. Generally, I felt happy for the publicity, but I found it disturbing to have modern jazz musicians and their followers characterized in a way that was often sinister and downright vicious. This image wasn't altogether the fault of the press because many followers, trying to be "in," were actually doing some of the things the press accused beboppers of-and worse. I wondered whether all the "weird" publicity actually drew some of these way-out elements to us and did the music more harm than good"*<sup>80</sup>

While Gillespie felt it was time for white audiences to accommodate themselves to African-American culture, asserting how: "People who wished to communicate with us had to consider our manner of speech, and sometimes they adopted it", the accoupling adoption of false stereotypes from this growing white audience was clearly not what he had intended. Monson

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<sup>78</sup> Op cit. Baldwin, J. (1961).

<sup>79</sup> Squinobal, J. (2009)

<sup>80</sup> Op cit, Gillespie, D. (2009), p.278.

notes now “The fact that Charlie Parker was known among his peers as an avid reader who liked to talk about politics and philosophy was less interesting to the press and his imitators than his drug abuse” and through the perpetuation of such negative associations, hip white bohemians became further drawn to the seemingly transgressive typographies prevalent in bop culture.

Charles Mingus was significantly critical of these white hipster bebop jazz appropriators, once shouting at them from a bandstand how: You haven't been told before that you're phonies. You're here because jazz has publicity, jazz is popular . . . and you like to associate yourself with this sort of thing. But it doesn't make you a connoisseur of the art because you follow it around”. For Mingus, adoption of the visual and verbal style of musicians could never compensate for an inability to comprehend the implications-musical, social, and political-of the modernist musical argument; synonymous to how the black Jazz musicians who befriended Mailer could never fully recognise him as inherently one of them, Mingus’ vitriolic rejection of the hipsters here derives ultimately from frustration of the stereotypes and mythologies that brought this new crowd to spectate. Despite efforts of notably wholesome family-man Gillespie and other bop pioneers to dispel the negative connotations attached to their craft, “The writings of academics in the 1950s and 1960s nevertheless had bebop in mind when they articulated the themes of social nonconformity, deviance, drug usage, and sexual excess”,<sup>81</sup> and through the perpetuation of these associations through the media and the popularisation of writings such as Mailer’s, the hipster’s imagination of a caricatured primitive and hypersexualised bebop ultimately became the prevailing discourse.

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<sup>81</sup> Op cit Monson, I. (1995), p.413.



### CHAPER 3: Romantic Existentialism: Bebop in Kerouac and the Beats Imagination

*"It was several years ago, when the face was harder to recognize, but he has a sharp, sympathetic eye, and one day he said, "You know, this is really a beat generation"”<sup>82</sup>*

The above epitaphed quote derives from Beat novelist John Clellon Holmes when referring to how his friend and fellow novelist Jack Kerouac came up with the term “Beat Generation” while in a drunken conversation with him in 1948. This mythologised happening described here is written in an article Holmes published in *The New York Times Magazine* on November 16, 1952 titled *This Is The Beat Generation*. Through this article Holmes presents a recapitulation of this burgeoning literary movement for a nationwide audience, attempting to deconstruct some of the misconceptions bestowed upon them by the previous generation, maintaining that “the shock that older people feel at the sight of this Beat Generation is, at its deepest level, not so much repugnance at the facts, as it is distress at the attitudes which move it”.<sup>83</sup> He outlines a perennial comparison made between this post-war generation and The Lost Generation of post-WWI, describing the abject disaffection pervading this Lost Generation, whose members were “discovered in a roadster, laughing hysterically because nothing meant anything anymore”.<sup>84</sup> In his description of this generation Holmes mentions T.S. Eliot's desolate poem *The Waste Land* (1922), and the citing here of such a defining modernist poem is crucial for understanding the fundamental differences between the prevailing modernist literary philosophies of the post-WWI generation and that of their Beat successors. Indeed, while modernist poetry such as *The Waste Land* employed a disjointed narrative combined with nihilistic imagery to create what contemporary journalist F.J Lucas described as a " wild revolt

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<sup>82</sup> Holmes, J. (1952). This is the Beat Generation. [online] Literary Kicks. Available at: <https://www.litkicks.com/ThisIsTheBeatGeneration>

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*

a from the abomination of desolation which is human life”,<sup>85</sup> and modernist novelists such as Virginia Woolf employed intricate narrative techniques of free indirect discourse through the consciousness of sympathetic unstable characters such as Septimus in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) to highlight the supposed insufficiencies of modern existence, “caught up in the romance of disillusionment”,<sup>86</sup> for Holmes this new Beat literary generation had transcended apocalyptic nihilism and societal disillusionment to reach a point in which “they are not lost”. Conversely, while systemically more hedonistic and uninhabited than their predecessors, for Holmes “their excursions into drugs or promiscuity come out of curiosity, not disillusionment”.<sup>87</sup>

Through spending formative years shrouded in the cultural anxieties brought upon by The Great Depression and WWII, this hip intellectual yearned for a new form of escapism, one that “eludes” societal conventions rather than deconstructs them, and which allows for an exploration of optimistic nihilism. Holmes assesses how “Their own lust for freedom, and the ability to live at a pace that kills (to which the war had adjusted them), led to black markets, bebop, narcotics, sexual promiscuity, hucksterism, and Jean-Paul Sartre”,<sup>88</sup> and indeed this existential acknowledgment of the innate freedom of man became the fundamental justification for the various explorations of disengagement with conventional society as illustrated in Beat classics such as *On the Road* and Alan Ginsberg’s epic poem *Howl* (1956), and the seemingly isolationist avant-gardism of bebop became the inevitable soundtrack for this lifestyle.

Homes later revises this allusion to Sartre’s influence in a 1958 article for *Esquire*, conversely positing that, while the conventional hipster lifestyle may align with existential pessimism akin to Sartre’s doctrines, “To be beat is to be the bottom of your personality, looking up; to be

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<sup>85</sup> Lucas, F. (1923). Review of *The Waste Land*. [online] *The New Statesman*. Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/review-of-the-waste-land-by-f-l-lucas-from-the-new-statesman>

<sup>86</sup> Op cit, Holmes, J. (1952).

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*

existential in the Kierkegaard, rather than the Jean-Paul Sartre, sense”;<sup>89</sup> this interpretation seems more applicable. Through his axiom outlined his philosophical magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* (1943) that “Nothingness haunts being”<sup>90</sup>, predicated on the ontological assumption that “Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.”<sup>91</sup>, Sartre’s brand of French existentialism popularised in this post-war period was often interpreted as dystopian and introspective, and certainly lacking any spiritual sentiment.

A central element of Beat philosophy however surrounded around romantic spiritualism, and the religious implications and positive existentialism denoting Kierkegaard’s ideation, affirming the unique freedom of man rather than being “condemned” by it, were delineations that resonated especially with the mindset of Kerouac. According to Gerald Nicosia, Kerouac passed the time on his freighter to Tangiers not just reading but “studying Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*”<sup>92</sup> and engaging with works of such teleological anguish led Kerouac to a desire to elude the conventional societal experience by seeking a higher consciousness through spiritual engagement. Indeed Kerouac once maintained that that Beat “never meant juvenile delinquents, it meant characters of a special spirituality who didn’t gang up but were solitary Bartlebies staring out the dead wall window of our civilization”,<sup>93</sup> however the polysemic connotations that can derive from the word “beat” are relevant; the word importantly evoked for Kerouac the world of bebop jazz - “a fabulous beat”,<sup>94</sup> a musical form of expression that he believed epitomised the state of spiritual consciousness and American transcendentalism that the Beats came to represent. Jazz poet Ted Joans once remarked that Kerouac “knew more

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<sup>89</sup> Dalzell, T. (2015). The origins of 'beat' and 'beatnik' | OxfordWords blog. [online] OxfordWords blog. Available at: <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/03/11/beat-beatnik-jack-kerouac/>.

<sup>90</sup> Sartre, J. (1992). *Being and Nothingness*. Simon and Schuster, p.44.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Mortenson, E. (2010). *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence*. SIU Press, p.25.

<sup>93</sup> Kerouac, J, quoted in Charters, A. (2001). *Beat down to your soul: what was the Beat generation?*. New York: Penguin Books, p.xxix.

<sup>94</sup> Kerouac, J, quoted in Foley, J. (1998). *Beat. Discourse*, 20(1/2), 182-197. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41389882>

about the old jazz haunts than I did"<sup>95</sup> and through his fascination for the African-American avant-garde, it is effectively impossible to begin any discussion regarding Kerouac's spirituality in his prose and artistic technicalities without a direct link to bebop jazz and in particular Charlie Parker's music. as Quinn concurs "Only a year-and-a-half younger than Bird, Kerouac found in the musician a spiritual and aesthetic model as influential as any writer living or dead". Kerouac once stated: "I would rather be regarded as a Jazz poet, blowing a long piece of blues in an afternoon jazz session",<sup>96</sup> and his desire to follow the aesthetic practices of Harlem jazz poets such as Langston Hughes led him to produce his debut "spontaneous bop prosody" LP *Poetry for the Beat Generation* with Steve Allen's smooth jazz piano accompaniment (1959), In which the opening song narrates a tribute to the late Parker. He here apotheosised Parker to that of the Buddha, as well as describing him "musically as important as Beethoven yet not regarded as such".<sup>97</sup> This divine comparison becomes crucial when related to Kerouac's spiritual devotion to Buddhism. Kerouac's 1958 novel *The Dharma Bums* through an expressionist combined narrative of prose-poetry depicts Kerouac's search for transcendence through spiritual dialecticism while mountaineering and hitchhiking through the West US, all through the narrator Ray Smith<sup>98</sup> and his teleological transition from Catholicism to Buddhism is an integral facet of Kerouac's artistry. Carolyn Cassidy corroborates this premise asserting how "Chaos was the rule until Buddhism came along and supplied the answers he sought – or so he believed. The tenets of Buddhism became a balm to his emotional and spiritual aspirations and fit his own psyche.",<sup>99</sup> and Kerouac's deification of Parker to that of Buddha, a deity that provided him spiritual transcendence, illustrates his perception of Parker as a spiritually superior being, and bebop as a religion that facilitated this mysticism.

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<sup>95</sup> Joans, Ted quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>96</sup> Warner, S. and Sampas, J. (2018). *Kerouac on Record: A Literary Soundtrack*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, p.93.

<sup>97</sup> Kerouac, J. (1959). *Charlie Parker*. Hanover Signature Record Corp.

<sup>98</sup> Kerouac, J. (2014). *The Dharma Bums*. New York: Penguin Books.

<sup>99</sup> Cassidy, C. (1997). *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, Plexus Publishing Ltd., xvi

Eric Lott asserts how “while the music generated a following, Beat writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg were the closest bebop came to having visible oppositional champions, a partisanship distorted by the projections of renegade romance”<sup>100</sup>, and this reverence of Parker and the Bebop movement is formalised in Kerouac’s 1947 article titled ‘New Modern Progressive Jazz – the New Bebop’, in which he claims how bebop renders all before it “limited and obsolete”, and Kerouac’s devotion to bebop is transcribed in the prose and the technical elements of his foundational Beat novel *On The Road*. When talk-show host Steve Allen asked him how long it took to write the novel Kerouac answered “three weeks”<sup>101</sup>, and the speed to which the original version of this novel was written, a three-week amphetamine, Benzedrine and alcohol infused<sup>102</sup> rumination into his past experiences, is evidenced from the loose structure and erratic stream of consciousness syntactical narrative present throughout. These structural elements are predicated upon the tenants of jazz experimentation and the unique improvisational spontaneity of bebop; Andrew Ross notes how “by 1959, scenes of jazz idolatry on the part of white intellectuals had become commonplace”,<sup>103</sup> and coining of the term 'bop prose' to describe this conscious effort to produce his novel along the lines of jazz avant-gardism substantiates this premise. An exploration of this modernist narrative choice is outlined in his writing *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose (1958)* in which he details his propensity for "trance writing", a technique borrowed from modernist poet William Yeats, and through his description of the methodology he denotes the requirement to write as a “jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases”,<sup>104</sup> further illustrating Kerouac’s literary predication upon Jazz musicology.

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<sup>100</sup> Op cit. Lott, E. (1988).

<sup>101</sup> Shea, A. (2007). NPR Choice page. [online] Npr.org. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11709924>

<sup>102</sup> Kerouac drank heavily and Marcus Boon reported how in the mid-1940s he began using amphetamines and purchasing Benzedrine inhalers

<sup>103</sup> Ross, A. (2016). No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture. New York: Routledge, p.67.

<sup>104</sup> Kerouac, J. (1958). Essentials of Spontaneous Pros. [online] Available at: <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/kerouac-spontaneous.html>

African-American cultural exploration through jazz is an essential part of the plot narrative in *On The Road*. With the narrator situating the novel "somewhere between its Charlie Parker Ornithology period and another period that began with Miles Davis",<sup>105</sup> at the time "bop was going mad all over America"<sup>106</sup> The foundation of the bebop era as a typographical signifier for the plot becomes evident. This bop exploration is formalised through the interactions the narrator Sal (alter-ego of Kerouac) and friend Dean (alter-ego of beat author Neal Cassady) had with African-American musicians, in particular that of Slim Gaillard. Kerouac describes how Dean was transfixed Slim's musicianship and improvisations. He considered Slim as a man who could do anything and everything that came into his head, and his admiration for Slim apotheosised to a point of reverence, paralleling that of Kerouac's own perception of Charlie Parker. Dean was described as "clasping his hands in prayer" and shouting "God! Yes!"<sup>107</sup> while Slim was playing, and through the religious syntax here, combined with the pleonastic hyperbole present in the repetition of "God" in the description of how "Dean approached him, he approached his God; he thought he was God"<sup>108</sup> it is clear Kerouac was demonstrating through Dean his own idolisation of bop musicality.

However Kerouac's romantic adoration is not free from the underlying trappings of racial essentialism. Freeman describes the phenomenon that "whites continue to be fascinated by African American cultural forms, including language",<sup>109</sup> and throughout the novel the appropriation of African-American vernacular is apparent. Sidran states how there is a "value transfer from black culture to whites through idioms such as black music and speech patterns"<sup>110</sup> and while Kerouac's use of proverbially "jazz" morphosyntactic features is

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<sup>105</sup> Kerouac, J. (2000). *On The Road*. Penguin Classics, p.13.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p.159

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p160.

<sup>109</sup> Freeman, K (2015) 'First things first, I'm the realest': Linguistic appropriation, white privilege and the hip-hop persona of Iggy Azalea. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 19(3), pp. 303-327.

<sup>110</sup> Sidran, B. (2011). *Black Talk: How the Music of Black America Created a Radical Alternative to the Values of Western Literary Tradition*. Cork: BookBaby.

predominantly reserved for African-American characters, the novel suffers from essentialism and homogenisation of African-Americanism to that of a monolithic entity of “hip” situated solely for value consumption from the voyeuristic white gaze, akin to that of Mailer’s narrative of “White Negro” identification. The comparison to Mailer is further illustrated through his discussion of the “happy, ecstatic negroes of America,”<sup>111</sup>, a phrase which particularly enraged James Baldwin, who said it’s “absolute nonsense, and offensive nonsense at that: I would hate to be in Kerouac’s shoes if he should ever be mad enough to read this aloud from the stage of Harlem’s Apollo Theatre.”<sup>112</sup> His indignation is justified when associating the parallels between this passage and Mailer’s descriptions of the “humble” “primitive” negro, happy in his lack of civilisation, and while Kerouac and the other Beats perceived themselves as intellectually above the conventional hipster, his racialised misinterpretations appear just as apparent, supporting Malcolm’s claim that “his primitivist view of black culture ... often misrepresents, exaggerates, and suppresses important elements of the music and the culture in which it originated”<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> Op cit, Kerouac, J. (2000).

<sup>112</sup> Bloom, H. (2009). Jack Kerouac's *On the road*. Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea, p.220.

<sup>113</sup> Malcolm, D. (1999). "Jazz America": Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's "On the Road." *Contemporary Literature*, 40(1), p.85.

## CHAPTER 4: Double Consciousness and *Sonny's Blues*: Bebop in the post-war African-American literary imagination

Seminal African-American poet Sterling Plumpck placed Jazz in the trajectorial remit of African-American predicated popular music, asserting how "At the emotional level, for me its gospel, Negro spirituals, and blues. And at the intellectual, conscious, craft level, it's always jazz".<sup>114</sup> Indeed for Plumpck, "jazz is the most complex manifestation of a wide range of ideas and sensibilities that permeate black music and culture generally",<sup>115</sup> and through the characters present in James Baldwin's Short story *Sonny's Blues* the inherently abstract and existential aspects of African-American bebop jazz, juxtaposed by the ostensible conformity of the jazz of bebop's predecessor to ostensible white mediocrity, are personified as opposing manifestations of the psychic effects of racial oppression. As Wells states "Jazz music plays a crucial role in James Baldwin's short story 'Sonny's Blues.'":<sup>116</sup> here through the use of a seemingly well-integrated unnamed narrator describing his life with his heroin-addicted younger brother Sonny through the streets of Harlem, Baldwin allegorises the oppositional cultural aspects of African-American jazz. The narrator demonstrates a particular disdain for Jazz, associating it with a certain "element" of people and using the jazz lifestyle with "good-time people"<sup>117</sup> to explicate his brother's wayward behaviour. Conversely, Sonny perceives a liberatory perspective to Jazz, idolising the free expressionist workings of the "Bird" Charlie Parker, illustrated further by how the narrator thinks of Sonny when he hears a group of boys outside his classroom window "whistling a tune, at once very complicated and very simple, it seemed to be pouring out of him as though he were a bird, and it sounded very cool and moving

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<sup>114</sup> Plumpck, s, quoted in Thompson, G. (2016). *Black Music, Black Poetry: Blues and Jazz's Impact on African American Versification*. London: Routledge, p.82.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Wells, D. (2015). *Performativity and Jazz in the Fiction of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison*. The University of Southern Mississippi.

<sup>117</sup> Baldwin, J. (2009). *Sonny's Blues*. Klett Sprachen.



through all that harsh, bright air”<sup>118</sup> – birdlike imagery here conjuring the image of Parker’s cool and complicated improvisation over a jazz accompaniment. Further indication of Sonny’s resonance with the bebop ethos is demonstrated by his indignation towards his brother epitomising jazz as Louis Armstrong, and his subsequent “out of touch”<sup>119</sup> lack of knowledge regarding Charlie Parker. From a cultural perspective, Baldwin's intentional association of Sonny with Parker and his brother with Armstrong is crucial when analysed through the lens of W.E.B Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness:

*“This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings..”*<sup>120</sup>

The two brothers here exemplify this internal struggle between the antithetical nature of the African-American psyche. Harold Bloom asks “Had Armstrong become "the white man's nigger"? Had Sonny's brother? Probably so”<sup>121</sup> justifying this premonition with the assertion that “[Sonny’s brother] had tried, as best he could, to reject his black self through becoming a respectable math teacher and dissociating himself from black culture as much as possible”;<sup>122</sup> Indeed through Sonny’s irritation with his brother’s reference to Armstrong, he uses language such as "old-time" and "down home", evoking connotations of ‘Uncle Tomism’ and minstrel performing, qualities a consensus of young black jazz artists in the bebop era perceived Armstrong to be exhibiting. Musicians such as Miles Davis, who asserted how he “always hated the way {Armstrong} used to laugh and grin to the audiences... acting the clown”;<sup>123</sup> For the Bebop artists such as Davis and Parker, Armstrong’s comedy routines, popping eyes, and

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Du Bois, W. (2017). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Restless Books, p.2.

<sup>121</sup> Bloom, H. (2007). James Baldwin. Infobase Publishing, p.159.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Op cit. Davis, M. and Troupe, Q. (1990), p.83.

giant grin were congruent with the antiquated minstrel performances, and thus demonstrated a level of passive subservience and conformity to white society. Contrastingly, Sonny's tumultuous life appears to follow the trajectory of his idol Parker, a man whose tragically young death of heroin addiction occurred years prior to the writing of this story. Joachim Berendt says of Parker: "He lived a dreary, joyless life and became acquainted with narcotics almost simultaneously with music. It is believed that Parker had become a victim of 'the habit' by the time he was 15."<sup>124</sup> So also, it appears, had Sonny here. Du Bois double consciousness can be additionally applied here to illustrate Sonny's inability to reconcile the "schizophrenic" narrative of deep-rooted distrust of whites due to societal oppression and the habitual negation of these feelings to be able to succeed in an fundamentally racialised system, resultantly resorting to Herion abuse as a way to ameliorate these existential anxieties.

"African Americans may not have been in chains any longer, but their actions and aspirations were heavily influenced by the expectations of white society",<sup>125</sup> and the bop era saw a continuation of Jim Crow segregating policies in the music industry, substantiating this notion. Monson presents various incidents documented in *Metronome* and *Down Beat* of racial incidents reported, such as how "Cab Calloway was arrested in Kansas City after attempting to visit Lionel Hampton at an engagement at the whites-only Pla-Mor ballroom"<sup>126</sup>, and how "Billy Eckstine lost a job at a Boston night club after he exchanged harsh words with a white woman patron who had hurled racial insults at him",<sup>127</sup> and these examples of a plethora of incidents demonstrating the racial injustice pervading every facet of this post-war American society, including that of the jazz music industry, one seemingly dominated by African-

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<sup>124</sup> Op cit. Bloom, H. (2007).

<sup>125</sup> Op cit. Wells, D. (2015).p.1.

<sup>126</sup> Op cit, Monson, I. (1995).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

American artistry, explicate how artists such as Parker potentially felt unable to manage this constant struggle without a substance to mitigate the constant agony of societal rejection.

Parker was never one to romanticise his addiction, being antithetically disturbed by younger musicians and “hip” bohemians emulating his heroin habit. He maintained that:

*"Any musician who says he is playing better either on tea, the needle, or when he is juiced, is a plain, straight liar... Some of these smart kids who think you have to be completely knocked out to be a good hornman are just plain crazy. It isn't true"*<sup>128</sup>

However it was ultimately the venerating myths surrounding these substance addictions, rather than the tragedy of a struggle against racialised tribulations, that enticed the self-alienated hipster audience to engage with their perception of the bop lifestyle.

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<sup>128</sup> Woideck, C. (1998). Charlie Parker: His Music and Life. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p.38.

## CONCLUSION

In an interview with *Down Beat*, Charlie Parker made the now infamous statement that “they teach you there’s a boundary line to music. But, man, there’s no boundary line to art”;<sup>129</sup> through this discursive strive for intellectual freedom juxtaposed against the external realities of a racially oppressive society a movement was fashioned that transcended the melodic and harmonic constraints of their predecessors. However Monson notes the tragedy in what the participating bop musicians saw develop as a result of the culture surrounding their art, that “when transposed downtown and scrutinized by mixed audiences and the press, the stylistic aspects of the musical scene—the clothes, the hats, the talk, the goatees, the drugs—would breathe life into the very primitivist presumptions that the new modern musical movement”;<sup>130</sup> African-Americans had become a symbol for social transgression and absence of traditional pretensions, and the myths propagated by hipsters such as Mailer and the Beats of equating bop to black primitivism and romantic exoticism laid antithetically to all that the young jazz cats aspired to represent.

As Sawyer Theriault asserts, “in all of its modes, jazz narrates a people's emotional reaction to oppression”;<sup>131</sup> and ultimately African-American scholars such as Baldwin observed the inability of these idolising hipsters to fully comprehend this notion from a black perspective.

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<sup>129</sup> Parker, C, quoted in Stewart, J. (2011).

<sup>130</sup> *Op ci*, Monson, I. (1995).

<sup>131</sup> Theriault, S. A. (2011). "Jazz Writing: Identity and Multiculturalism in Jazz Literature." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3(06).

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