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January 2006

# American Zeitgeist: Spontaneity in the Work of Jackson Pollock, Charlie Parker and Jack Kerouac

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## **American Zeitgeist:**

### **Spontaneity in the work of Jackson Pollock, Charlie Parker, and Jack Kerouac**

During the decade following World War Two, a body of artistic work was created that clearly articulated for the first time, a distinctly *American* aesthetic, independent of European models. This is not to say that celebrated works like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Appalachian Spring* and Roy Harris' *Third Symphony* are not recognized as American masterpieces; but their American characteristics are expressed through content, rather than form or methods of production. Fitzgerald and Hemingway all furthered their apprenticeship in Europe during the 1920s while Copland and Harris studied in Paris with Boulanger. It remained for the next generation of the avant garde, living for the most part in New York, to create original schools through the modes of Abstract Expressionism, the new chromatic jazz of Be Bop, and the literature of the Beats. The singly most important characteristic of the new American expression was the central role played by spontaneity and improvisation yielding works of astonishing vibrant surface detail.

The emphasis on the spontaneous as an alternative to the careful and rational reflected larger cultural and philosophical issues. In seeking a subjective, existential view of reality, honesty, authenticity, were prized over the objective world view, process over product. Whether expressed in gesture painting, spontaneous bop prosody, or the chromatic flights of bebop, the emphasis was on the experience, rejecting the academic craftsmanship of revision as antithetical to the glorification of the *now*. This emphasis plus the incorporation of elements from African and Native American sources were interpreted as an attack on the privileged hegemony of the Anglo-American academy. Beat writers were ridiculed by proponents of the New Criticism who vaunted T.S. Eliot as their model. Kerouac's spontaneous prose was dismissed as "mere typing" by Truman Capote. While mainstream journals such as Life magazine devoted some attention to abstract art, it was more often of a patronizing nature, referring to Pollock as "Jack the Dripper". The new jazz faced opposition even within its own ranks, even prompting a revival of New Orleans music, now called "Dixieland". Louis Armstrong dismissed bop as making about as much

sense as “Chinese music”. So with its fusion of modernist complexity with vernacular) or “street”) immediacy the new art represented a third alternative to European elitism and mainstream pop culture. In an even larger context, the avant garde of the late 1940s represented a reaction to Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and the Gulag - the latter having a dampening impact on the leftist Communist idealism of the 30s. Whether implicit in words or explicit in painting and music, the avant garde became a central voice in the new bohemian counterculture criticism of United States political and corporate globalization with its strategy of cold war xenophobia and domestic consumerism. The full effect of this will not be fully realized until the mid 1960s when the civil rights movement and opposition to the war in Viet Nam galvanized many to question the policies of the government.

Three artists, Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), Charlie Parker (1920-1955), and Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), play a central role in the emerging post war avant garde, each incorporating elements of spontaneity to their arts. The purpose of this paper will be to trace their development leading to the breakthrough work of the late 40s and 50s, emphasizing their commonalities, both philosophical as well as biographical. This development will be sketched in three phases: **apprenticeship**, emphasizing their complete mastery of traditional forms, ( a subject often ignored or overlooked by critics) **mature mastery**, the classical flowering of their most creative and profound work, and **mannerist decline**, the remaining output characterized by repetition of previous work and self parody, generally considered inferior to the classic phase. The outline of their biographies shows many similarities. Roughly of the same generation, each were born and raised in provincial settings, Pollock in Cody, Wyoming, Parker in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kerouac in Lowell, Massachusetts. Each came from working class blue collar maternally dominated families, with dysfunctional (Pollock and Kerouac) or nonexistent (Parker) relationships with their fathers, Pollock and Kerouac becoming highly misogynistic. Each produced their most important work in New York beginning around 1945, where they all habituated the same Lower East Side and Greenwich Village neighborhoods, often hanging out in the same bars and coffee houses. All three experienced difficult personal lives, cut short from substance abuse resulting in early deaths (Pollock at age 44. Parker at 35, and Kerouac at

47). What is of great interest is the mutual interest and influence among the artistic intelligentsia of the period. Much of Kerouac's innovative spontaneous prose sketching achieved most notable in *Visions of Cody* and *The Subterraneans* were heavily indebted to his sophisticated knowledge of jazz. Several of the "choruses" in *Mexico City Blues* are profiles of Parker, Lester Young, and other musicians. Lee Krasner, Pollock's wife, has documented the painter's interest in jazz as well as classical music. Night Clubs, such as the Five Spot, doubled as jazz venues as well as art galleries. A Pollock painting illustrates the cover of Ornette Coleman's, *Free Jazz*, released in 1959. Some artists worked in several disciplines, most notable saxophonist Larry Rivers who became a prominent painter, composer-novelist Paul Bowles, pianist-poet Cecil Taylor, and poet-painter-composer Weldon Kees. Poetic recitation with jazz, begun with Kenneth Patchen and Charlie Mingus included performances at the Village Vanguard with Kerouac who recorded with tenor men Zoot Sims and Al Cohn as well as recited on television with Steve Allen backing him up on piano. The image of these performances, with their "beards, bongos and beatniks" became simplistic cultural clichés in the late 1950s. perpetuated by the mainstream media in an attempt to trivialize and ridicule the movement. To reiterate the central thesis of this argument, the main thread that unites this rich period of American creativity is the use of improvisation for the purpose of creating art characterized by great emotional and intense expression.

### **Apprenticeship**

Jackson Pollock was not a born painter, in fact, by most objective standards, never developed good draftsmanship, an inability that would cause him considerable self doubt during his apprenticeship. Indeed, what informs Pollock's work is a struggle to overcome demons, both technical and personal, a thesis stated by Frank O'Hara in his 1959 monograph, one of the first studies of the painter's works published after his death:

If there is a unity in the total oeuvre of Pollock, it is formed by a drastic self-knowledge which permeates each of his periods and underlies each change of interest, each search. In considering his work as a whole one finds the ego totally absorbed in the work. By being "in" the

specific painting, as he himself puts it, he gave himself over to cultural necessities which, in turn, freed him from the external encumbrances which surround art...encumbrances external to the *act* (my emphasis) of applying a specific truth to the specific cultural event for which it has been waiting in order to be fully revealed. This is not automatism or self-expression, but insight. This creative insight is the greatest gift an artist can have, and the greatest burden a man can sustain

O'hara posits that art for Pollock is a performance seeking clarity out of obscurity, a ritual uncovering, a psychodrama absorbing the ego in the dangerous dance of self-discovery. When criticized one by Hans Hoffman for not using nature as a model, Pollock replied, "I am nature".

The first influence on Pollock's serious interest in art was his oldest of four brothers, Charles, who proceeded Jackson to New York to study with Thomas Hart Benton. Much of Pollock's early interest in art was generated by sibling competition. When Pollock was around 10, Charles introduced him to Dial Magazine which contained reproductions of Picasso, Matisse, Brancusi, and other modernists. Other important stimuli were the frequent trips he made with his brothers to the Grand Canyon, Zion and Bryce National Parks. Perhaps one can see in the geologic strata of these Western landscapes a parallel with Pollock later over all paintings. He also was exposed to Native American culture and their sand paintings and petroglyphs find echoes in the painters mature work. Pollock's formal instruction began at Riverside Manual Arts High School, near Los Angeles, when he was fortunate to be included in the inner circle of an unorthodox art teacher, Frederick Schwankovsky. Although he remained a conservative painter, Schwankovsky encouraged his students expand their consciousness through exploring different media. One of his favorite experiments was to pour oil paint onto a glass surface which was spun around like a potter's wheel creating abstract vortices of color. Pollock found this unconventional approach compensated for his lack of drawing skill. Schwankovsky, who became something of a father figure, replacing Pollock's often absent father, also introduced Pollock to the philosophy of Krishnamurti, who was presented to the West in 1929 by the Theosophical society founded by Annie Besant. Pollock attended a six day retreat with Schwankovsky where he met the Indian guru who preached the need for a new art characterized by liberation, individualism and

happiness. "Art must flow spontaneously from an inner impulse". The 16 year old Pollock was entranced by this message, even for a time wearing his hair long, in the manner of Krishnamurti. Years later, when he had abandoned interest in Theosophy, Pollock would always speak of the importance of the episode in furthering his self-confidence in finding his own artistic path. Another important interest of Pollock at this time, again resulting from the influence of his older brothers, was a flirtation with radical politics and art that led him to an appreciation of certain Mexican artists, especially Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera, the latter especially known for his large murals celebrating the common working man. One of Rivera's most controversial murals, created for the Rockefeller Center in New York, was destroyed because it contained a portrait of Lenin. As we will see, the full impact of these and other Mexican artists will not be seen until later. After finishing high school, the stage was now set for perhaps the most important decision in Pollock's life, the move to New York for study with regionalist Thomas Hart Benton.

Once again it was his older brother Charles who paved the way who had become one of Benton's closest acolytes and helped his brother gain admittance to Benton's school, The Art Students League, in September, 1930. The school's curricular philosophy seemed ideal for Pollock: no required courses, no grades, no attendance records, enrollment was month to month. Many prominent artists were hired as visiting instructors, including Thomas Eakins, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, George Bellows and Arshile Gorky, but it was Benton who Pollock was determined to work with. Thomas Hart Benton may perhaps seem an unlikely last and most important influence on Pollock, considering Benton's realistic style with its emphasis on traditional technique. as Benton recalled in 1959:

Jackson was out of his field...his mind was absolutely incapable of drafting logical sequences. He couldn't be taught anything.

Even tracing the outlines of images was difficult:

"Every damn time, instead of tracing, he would set the paper next to the drawing and copy it freehand", recalled a fellow student, "even then he would avoid the more difficult parts of the body, leaving blank circles for faces"

Benton emphasized traditional exercises in nude drawing and the study of the old masters,

especially Michelangelo and Tintoretto for spatial rhythms, Rubens and Rembrandt for tonality and composition, but especially Benton forced Pollock to study and copy El Greco. All this emphasized Pollock's weakest skill, causing continuous frustration. His brother comments:

Everything Jack did in his student days was a struggle, a struggle to get things to come out right.

Pollock withdrew behind a wall of reticence and resentment, fueling his sense of inadequacy with substance abuse. In spite of all this, Pollock became Benton's closest protégé and was the only student chosen to assist him in a major commission, a set of murals for the New School of Social Research. Pollock learned from observing the master's meticulous planning and execution of this large scale project. Benton's influence on Pollock is perhaps most evident however, in things other than artistic style or technique. Much of the older man's larger than life personality became mirrored in the student. Benton's rages were legendary, filled with vulgarity and insulting invective that made and kept enemies easily. With his drinking and misogyny he brought a "macho" sensibility to the refined, sissified world of art, as Hemingway and later the beats did to literature. The outlaw artist as counterculture rebel, *agent provocateur*, increasingly became Pollock's *persona* as his mature art coalesced.

In 1933, Pollock began distancing himself from Benton and regionalism by working in different media of ceramics and sculpture, studying with Ahron Ben Shmuel . He also became influenced by the paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder, whose pessimistic, apocalyptic vision Pollock incorporated in his Self Portrait. 1933, and Seascape, from 1934. It was at his time that Pollock's as well as other artists' careers became subsidized by Roosevelt's WPA program, . During its operation from 1933 until 1941, some 2,500 murals, 108,000 paintings and 240,000 prints were created making it the most ambitious commissioning project in US history. The next major influence on Pollock's apprenticeship was the rediscovery of Mexican art., especially the emotionalism of Orozco and the unorthodox techniques of David Alfaro Siqueiros, Siqueiros investigated the physical properties of paint, its viscosity and flow rate. He poured paint directly onto the canvas, delighting in the accidental results. He also experimented with duco paint and spray guns.

In 1938, during rehabilitation after one of his self destructive alcoholic binges, Pollock was introduced by his therapist to the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung. Pollock was particularly impressed by the relevance of Jung's ideas of the collective unconscious and theory of archetypes to art. Jung believed that an individual emerges into consciousness only after a long journey of self awareness, in part by discovery of instinctive patterns that represent accumulative racial patterns.

One more mentor appeared in 1939 that would complete Pollock's apprenticeship, John Graham. Born Ivan Gratianovitch Dombrowski in Warsaw, 1887, Graham became a confidant of Picasso before arriving in New York in 1918, eventually creating a studio of future stars that included Adolph Gottlieb, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, and the sculptor, David Smith. Pollock joined this circle and was exposed to modernist European art. Picasso, whose *Guernica*, Pollock saw, made perhaps more impression on him than any single painting. Graham also introduced surrealism through the work of Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy and Juan Miro, as well as the abstraction of Wassily Kandinsky Paul Klee, and Piet Mondrian. Graham's credo: "*the unconscious mind is the creative factor and source and storehouse of power and all knowledge*" helped Jackson acquire the self confidence that would enable his mature phase to begin.

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An aspiring jazz musician could hardly have picked a better time and place to be born than Kansas City, 1920. When Charlie Parker began serving his apprenticeship in the mid 1930s, the region had blossomed into a vibrant arena of local and visiting bands and an after hours scene featuring jam sessions. Developments in rhythm and blues along with harmonic advances in New York will result in the first bebop recordings around 1945. Above all what made the Kansas City approach most significant was its emphasis on spontaneity through its emphasis on improvisation.

Charlie Parker was no child prodigy, in fact his first attempts at participation in jam sessions were met with ridicule. Then, in a seemingly miraculous turnabout, between 1937 and 1937, his playing was transformed making him among the most in demand players in Kansas City. At around age 12 he began playing brass instruments in school bands where he

learned the rudiments of musical notation. He switched to the alto saxophone a year later, supposedly inspired by Rudy Vallee. It was at this time that he began haunting the bars and night clubs of the red-light district that flourished during the Pendergast era, learning his craft through studying professional at work. This street education also included emulation of substance abuse that would plague him throughout his short life. He probably began using heroin by age 15. The images we have of Parker's sitting in at after hours jam sessions have become the stuff of jazz mythology. One incident, cross documented by more than one observer, served as a focal point in Clint Eastwood movie, *Bird*. The following account is related by bassist Gene Ramey:

I remember one night in particular when we went to jam with Basie. Jo Jones waited until Bird started to play and, suddenly, in order to show how he felt about Bird, he threw a cymbal across the dance floor. It fell with a deafening sound, and Bird, in humiliation, packed up his instrument and left.

The importance of the jam session in the enculturative process for the jazz musician cannot be overstated. It offered the social amenities of professional camaraderie and a chance for beginners to learn techniques from their elders. Perhaps more importantly, it forced the player to deal with the emotional challenges of the improvisation process and the need to constantly interact with the rhythm section. It schooled them in the competitive aspect through participating in "cutting contests", musical duels as symbolic tests of manhood. So the continued failure at these sessions were difficult lessons for the young Parker, but each rebuff only served to send him back the woodshed for more practice. In an interview Parker claimed that he practiced 11 to 15 hours a day, playing scales and etudes in all keys and memorizing standards and blues riffs. Around 1935, the 15 year old began his professional career playing with a band called "The Deans of Swing", led by pianist Lawrence Keyes. Mentors during this period include clarinetist Tommy Douglas, who helped Parker with his playing technique, and guitarist Efferge Ware who taught harmony and voice leading.

Parker's breakthrough began in 1937 during a summer gig in the Ozarks with the George E. Lee band when he began listening carefully to tenor saxophonist Lester Young, who had begun recording with Count Basie in 1936. Young was playing a kind of proto-bop,

emphasizing an elusive rhythm subtlety and harmonic linear logic often employing ninths and other upper chord tones. All presented with a veiled, light tone with relatively little vibrato compared to Coleman Hawkins. Another and ultimately more important influence was saxophonist Buster Smith whose band he joined after returning from the Ozarks gig. Not only was he influenced by Smith's alto playing, but also looked up to him as an older mentor, perhaps filling the need of the father-figure he never had. As Smith later recalls:

He used to call me his dad, and I called him my boy. I couldn't get rid of him. He was always up under me. In my band, we'd split solos. If I took two, he'd take two; if I took three, he'd take three; and so forth. He always wanted me to take the first solo. I guess he thought he'd learn something that way. He did play like me quite a bit, I guess. But after awhile, anything I could make on my horn, he could make too- and make something better out of it.

One of the techniques that Parker would perfect was also learned from Smith:

We used to do that double-time stuff all the time. Only we called it double-tongue...Charlie heard me doing it, and he started ...

Another member of Smith's band was the pianist, Jay McShann, who eventually started his own big band with Parker (and is credited with providing Parker with his famous nickname, "Yardbird", or "Bird" for short, which I will use for the rest of this essay). In 1938 or 39 (much of this phase of Bird's biography is a matter of conjecture) he left for New York where he stayed for about 6 months before returning home. While apparently unable to find much work, Bird is supposed to have heard the legendary pianist Art Tatum on numerous occasions. Whether this conjecture is true or not, certainly Tatum's use of extended and substitute chords as well as his penchant for inserting musical quotations became part of Parker's mature bop style. Another event looms large in the hagiography of bop. Bird had been jamming with a group led by guitarist Bidley Fleet when one night, while playing Cherokee, with its difficult bridge, Parker experienced his breakthrough epiphany. As later recounted shortly before his death, Parker recalls the fateful moment:

I remember one night... I was jamming in a chili house on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December 1939. Now I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used at the time, and I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn't play it. Well, that night I was working over "Cherokee", and as I

did I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, i could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive.

The first tangible result of this intensive two year breakthrough can be heard in Bird's first professional recordings made in 1940-41 with McShann after his return to Kansas City. Four solos, of around 2 minutes duration total, provides us with a tantalizing glimpse of Bird's final internship. The most discussed of these solos is his one chorus on *Hootie's Blues*. What is striking is his modern use of vibrato, and the transition from the triplet to sixteenth note double time near the end.

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It has been estimated that Jack Kerouac wrote over a million words before he was 21 and of which only a fraction has been published. Unlike Pollock and Bird, Kerouac started early, writing his first novel at age 11, creating various student and home newspapers as well as serial magazines inspired by the radio program, *The Shadow*, which he also illustrated. All this in spite of the fact that English was his second language, both his parents of French Canadian background. All during his adolescence, he read voraciously, beginning with Jack London's adventure stories, then advancing to Whitman, Thoreau, Hemingway, Saroyan, and Albert Halper - the latter, a Chicago writer little known today who wrote a dozen novels of urban realism. Later he read his way through Melville, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Homer, and Galsworthy. Also, as one might expect, *Quebecois* being his natal language, French writers also are cited by Kerouac as important influences which he read in the original. These include Rimbaud, Celine, Balzac, and Proust, all of which he read in the original. Of paramount importance were two of his last influences, Thomas Wolfe (not to be confused with the present Tom Wolf) and Galsworthy. From Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, Kerouac conceived of the Duluoz saga connecting all of his mature novels in one long auto-mythology. This linking of his novels with ever returning characters was also influenced by Balzac's *Humain Comedie*. Thomas Wolfe remains the most important influence on Kerouac early literary philosophy and technique. Like Kerouac, the North Carolina born Wolfe wrote quickly with little revision. His rhapsodic style pulled the reader along with long rolling sentences, analogous to the sweeping American landscape. The

following quote from *Look Homeward, Angel*, suggest this exultation of the American expanse and prophetic of Kerouac's *On The Road* phase.:

Thus did he see first, he the hill-bound, the sky-girt, of whom the mountains were his masters, the fabulous South. The picture of flashing field, of wood, and hill, stayed in his heart forever...he dreamed of the quiet roads, the moonlit woodlands, and he thought that some day he would come to them on foot, and find them there unchanged, in all the wonder of recognition.

Wolfe's novels were thinly disguised autobiography as was virtually all of Kerouac's novels. The pervasive Wolfean influence, which is best seen in Kerouac's first published novel, *The Town and the City*, represented an obstacle Kerouac had considerable difficulty in overcoming before finding his more original voice in the later versions of *On The Road* and *Doctor Sax*.

Returning to the adolescent work The following is an extract from an article on the Count Basie Orchestra he wrote in 1940 while attending Horace Mann Preparatory School. Filled with boyish enthusiasm, it illustrates his early interest in jazz:

Possibly excepting Duke Ellington, the Basie band is the most underrated and greatest band in the country today. Unlike the vacuous phraseology of pseudo- swing bands, Basie's stuff means something. As for solo work, there is no greater assortment of soloists to be found on any one band-stand.

Kerouac then presciently identifies one of the band's greatest strengths:

To begin with, the Count has the greatest rhythm section in the history of jazz, and this has helped his other great musicians to improve. The Count himself is an outstanding soloist. He is a thrilling player with tremendous ideas....Jo Jones is the most finished drummer in existence....Freddie Green's steady guitar work has been unparalleled in jazz since the days of the old school guitarists. When Freddie starts his rhythm going, in unison with Walter Page's mighty bass-playing and Jo Jones chimes in on the drums, you have the rhythm section that every maestro dreams of.

He then discusses several horn soloist, most notable Lester Young:

Lester Young, who is now rated along with Coleman Hawkins on the hot tenor, is the Count's outstanding soloist. Lester uses a different riff on every chorus, and his enormous store of ideas enables him to take an unlimited number of solos. His phrasing on jump numbers is unequalled, while he is highly proficient when it comes to the blues.

The last important series of events leading to the formation of Kerouac's original voice began in 1943 when he enrolled at Columbia University, subsidized by a football scholarship. Through a mutual friend, Lucien Carr, Jack met Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. Burroughs, eight years older than Kerouac, became the mentor for the small group, introducing them to the hipster street culture of Times Square. He preached a philosophy based on: 1) naked self-expression as the seed of creativity, 2) the artist's consciousness is expanded by derangement of the sense (this after Rimbaud), and, 3) art eludes conventional morality. Burroughs and Kerouac even collaborated on a novel, *And The Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* that remains unpublished. Burroughs will remain an important father figure for the next decade. In 1945 Kerouac began an ambitious novel that attempted to recapture memories of his childhood growing up in Lowell. Finished in 1948 after difficult and concentrated labor, *The Town and the City* is both Kerouac's last apprenticeship work and debut as a professional writer. It is a fond farewell to linear storytelling and traditional modes of literary syntax. The opening paragraph, depicting his home town of Lowell (called Galloway in the novel), is, after the opening staccato, a Wolfean sprawl :

The town is Galloway. The Merrimac River, broad and placid, flows down to it from the New Hampshire hills, broken at the falls to make frothy havoc on the rocks, foaming on over ancient stone towards a place where the river suddenly swings around in a wide and peaceful basin, moving on now around the flank of the town, on to places known as Lawrence and Haverhill, through a wooded valley, and on to the sea at Plum Island, where the river enters an infinity of waters and is gone. Somewhere far north of Galloway, in headwaters close to Canada, the river is continually fed and made to brim out of endless source and unfathomable springs.

By the time of its publication in 1950, Kerouac was well passed Wolfe. He had become acquainted with the music of Charlie Parker, beginning to adapt the rhythms of bebop to his

prose. He was now poised for the astonishingly original works of maturity.

### **Mature Mastery**

In 1940, Pollock's works were part of an exhibition at the McMillan Gallery organized by John Graham that included paintings by Willem de Kooning and Lee Krasner. Krasner, a protégé of Hans Hoffman became the Pollock's manager, press agent, and surrogate mother. They were married in 1946. She was most influential in completing Pollock's knowledge of cubism and surrealism and in bringing his work to the attention of critic Clement Greenberg, who became Pollock's first and most discerning champion. Krasner, an important artist in her own right, would, along with Robert Motherwell later develop collage in the 1950s .

Pollock's style at this point can be seen in several paintings *Male and Female*, 1942, presents Picasso-like multiply images, suggesting different phases of the relationship. *Pasiphaë*, , and *She Wolf*, from 1943 , are based on mythological themes. This last painting was the first Pollock to be purchased by The Museum of Modern Art. More playful and surreal is *The Moon Woman*, 1942, and *Bird*, finished in 1944. The most important of the works from this period is the *Mural*, commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim in 1944. Guggenheim was at first indifferent to Pollock's work but changed her mind after Mondrian expressed his enthusiasm for Pollock's *Stenographic Figure*, painted in 1942. Pollock created the massive *Mural* (almost 8X20 feet) in one fifteen hour nonstop frenzy. Pollock relates:

I had a vision.... it was a stampede....of every animal in the West....everything is charging across that goddamn surface

The mural anticipates his "all over" palimpsests, capturing a moment within in a moving visual environment. It was a breakthrough for Pollock and Guggenheim loved it. She became Pollock's more important benefactor, supporting him with a monthly stipend until the end of his life. Her gallery, *Art of This Century*, also promoted the work of William Baziotes, and Robert Motherwell, all of which, along with Pollock, hosted one man shows. Later Guggenheim claimed discovery of Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Adolph Gottlieb and

Hedda Sterne.

Pollock introduced another innovation in 1946 with the series of paintings entitled *Sounds in The Grass*, when he took the canvas off the easel and placed it on the floor, painting while walking around and even standing on it. He explains in an interview for *Possibilities Magazine* in 1947:

“My painting does not come from the easel. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.

He then discusses new techniques in delivering the paint:

I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.

Most interesting are his remarks about the unpremeditated start of a painting, then, in partnership with the painting, the ultimate image reveals itself:

When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a sort of “get acquainted period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own, I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is a pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.

These principles form the genesis of “Action”, or “gestural” painting. In a sense Pollock has become a dancer, with the painting a history of his movement. Like the ghostly trails of subatomic particles created in a particle accelerator, the painting represents a documentation of activity, a road map, which, like the uncertainty of quantum interaction, exhibits extreme subjectivity. In his influential 1952 essay, *American Action Painters*, Harold Rosenberg suggests links with existentialism:

...the canvas began to appear...as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce...The image would be the result of this encounter...What matters always is the revelation contained in the act.

In an article on de Kooning, Rosenberg continues:

Rejecting any external definition of himself or preoccupation as to the direction of his work, his sole concern has been to maintain touch with himself....Each confrontation of the drawing board or canvas is a singular situation calling for a new act - and the act and the artist are one.

Pollock now entered the most productive period of his life. His work slowly began to be purchased by galleries, beginning with The San Francisco Museum of Art and MOMA and were included in a European tour organized by Guggenheim in 1948. In 1949 Pollock presented two solo shows at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Also that year *Life* magazine featured his work with the provocative: "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?", and a documentary film was made. Much of this productivity was as much the result of Krasner's ability to curb his drinking habits as Guggenheim's patronage. In 1946 the couple move to Easthampton, Long Island, where they lived for the rest of his life.

Much of the critical acclaim of Pollock's work was the result of Clement Greenberg, columnist for the *Nation* magazine. In *The Painted Word*, Tom Wolfe's, screed on abstract art, he characterizes Greenberg's writing style:

he would veer from the most skull-crushing Göttingen Scholar tautologies, "essences" and "purifies" and "opticalities" and "formal factors" and "logics of readjustment" and God knows what else...to cries of despair and outrage such as would have embarrassed Shelley...he said the entire future of art in America was in the hands of fifty brave but anonymous and beleaguered artists "south of 34th Stree...What can fifty do against a hundred and forty million?"

Some examples of Pollock's work during this classical phase include *Blue Unconscious*, his first floor painting, the nostalgic *Full Fathom Five*, painted with oil and aluminum paint, *Galaxy*, his first drip painting, and *Number 1*, the first painting of his numbered series. Of any of the innovations Pollock became associated with, none caught the public imagination more than drip painting. In point of fact, Pollock was not the first to use the technique. Hans Hoffman, Max Ernst, and William Baziotes had employed dripping, but more as an experiment in automatism. As have already noted, Pollock's high teacher had encouraged unorthodox paint application. What Pollock did was turn dripping into a precise, controlled method, in a sense painting the air with what he called "memories arrested in space". Criticism that characterized his work as chaotic and accidental affected Pollock

deeply, causing anger and resentment. In their biography of the painter, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith described the liberating effect of dripping:

Jackson had finally found what was, for him, the perfect image: an image that freed him from the lifelong consternation of pencil and paper, brush and canvas, chisel and stone, all the tools that have proved too fixed, and too explicit; and image that allowed him to attenuate the heavy, obscurant energy of the brush into the lyrical, long-winded energy of the line; an image that could capture every spin, every transformation in his imagination's eye, no matter how fleeting.

Two paintings have been singled out as perhaps Pollock's masterpieces. *Number 31, 1950*, also called *One*, is an accumulation of webs of tan, blue and lavender rendered in calligraphic nuance. Every detail of this 8'10"X17'6 space exhibit his virtuoso control of the drip technique. On an even larger scale is *Number 30, 1950*, referred to as *Autumn Rhythm*, described by Naifeh and White as:

A cat's cradle of black stretches across the entire 17'8" expanse of unsized canvas; heavy lines run in unbroken arcs from top to bottom, almost nine feet, while smaller lines fling themselves halfway across the canvas in great aerial loops. Wisps of white and tan float through the loose fabric of black without obscuring it. Sprays of teal blue, only a few insinuate themselves at the margins.

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The recordings of Charlie Parker that demonstrate his classic maturity are generally considered to be from the period 1945-1948; all small groups with some shifting personnel, primarily released on the Savoy and Dial labels. After his final recordings with McShann in July, 1942, a significant gap occurs in Bird's discography until 1944, an hiatus caused by wartime rationing as well as a recording ban imposed by the musicians union. The result is that when Bebop's first recordings were finally released, the new style appeared seemingly out of the blue without the benefit of transitional work. The lack of much recorded documentation lends an air of mystery and mythology to the origins of bop. Two contexts during this period were important for Bird, the continued impromptu experimentation with small groups sessions and his commercial work with Big bands. By 1941 Bird had become a mainstay in New York's underground scene, especially at

Clarke's Uptown House, and Mintons, in Harlem. There the future leaders of the new music tested their ideas in the open communal forum of the jam Sessions. The most important of these included pianists, Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, guitarists, Charlie Christian, bassists Jimmy Blanton and Oscar Pettiford, drummers Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who had the most impact of Bird's music. Besides these young lions, most of who were in the early twenties, older players, most notably Coleman Hawkins, sat in as well. Parker and Gillespie also played in two innovative big bands led by Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine, who forged a new approach, reconciling often antithetical aspects of swing and bop. Eckstine's band roster reads as a who's who of future jazz greats, including saxophonists Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, Sonny Stitt and Lucky Thompson, trumpeter Fats Navarro, drummer Art Blakey, pianist Tadd Dameron, and vocalist Sarah Vaughan. It is truly unfortunate that this magnificent band never released any professional recordings.

Parker began small group recordings on Savoy with guitarist Tiny Grimes in 1944, but his first significant recordings were as a member of Dizzy Gillespie's All-Stars. *Shaw 'Nuf*, from their second collaboration in May of 1945, is perhaps the first definitive Bop statement. Executed at breakneck speed, much too fast for dancing, the horns play the intricate unison melody in close unison. Bird's playing is amazing in its fluency and confidence. What is striking compared to prior small group recordings, such as the Benny Goodman Sextet, is the minimalist, stripped down use of preconceived arrangement in favor of improvisation. *Shaw 'Nuf* illustrates another aspect of the emphasis on the casual, while the melody (attributed to Gillespie) is new, the AABA form and chord progression is from George Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm*, a song popular because of its circle of fifths progression in the bridge. Another tunes from this session, Tadd Dameron's *Hot House*, is based on Cole Porter's, *What Is This This Called Love*. The practice of using chord progressions from well known standards had a practical advantage. Rhythm sections did not need to learn new harmonic and formal patterns, as frequently, recordings were made with little rehearsal or with bands assembled especially for the date. More importantly, this practice is another example of the the new music's emphasis on spontaneity. Or to put this in a different way, Swing, with its reliance on the written arrangement and coordinated section playing

represented European aesthetics of discipline and control. Bop in a sense deconstructed the music back to African elements of spontaneous orality. This presents a seeming paradox: while creating a music of complex surface detail, alienating many casual listeners, the music has a primal quality collapsing the distance between the technique and the expression. One of Bird's most famous quotes speaks of the connection between music and life:

Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.

One of the definitive moments of Bird's career occurred in November, 1945, when he made his first recording as a leader for Savoy. Tunes like *Ko Ko*, *Billie's Bounce*, and *Now's The Time*, represent him at the peak of his technical ability. For the first time, Bird had a drummer in Max Roach that could keep up with him in fast tempos and the 19 year old Miles Davis to split the trumpet duties with Gillespie. Davis, who was at this time no match for Gillespie's virtuosity, was hired as a lyric contrast to Parker's *Ko Ko*, based on *Cherokee*, with its bridge beginning concert B Major, features Bird in two aggressive choruses, effortlessly negotiating the 260+ quarter note tempo. The head is astonishing in its rhythmic displacement, anticipating later modernists like Ornette Coleman. *Billie's Bounce* and the riff derived *Now's The Time* are 12 blues tunes. The organization of this landmark session is remarkable for its casualness, even by Parkerian standards. The originally booked Bud Powell, left town unexpectedly so Gillespie was asked to comp and Argonne Thornton was brought in for the some of other tunes. Bird's reeds were not working well, resulting in lots of squeaks before new ones were rushed in. Bird was notorious for pawning altos and playing on borrowed (or stolen) horns seemingly oblivious to what is often a major concern of many players, who spent much time painstakingly rifling through boxes of reeds before finding just the right match.

Of more importance than his choice of reeds was Bird's declining health through increasing use of heroin and alcohol, the effects of which can be clearly heard in one of his most controversial recordings, the so called *Lover Man* session from July 1946. The heavily medicated saxophonist could only manage one take per tune. In *Lover Man*, he clearly misses his entrance, and his usually pure and confident tone is weak and wobbly. Shortly

after this date Bird was admitted to The Camarillo sanatorium where he spent six months drying out. He returned for his second group of classic recordings for the new label, Dial, beginning with *Relaxin at Camarillo*, in Feb., 1947. The session featured a tricky blues tunes that baffled the experienced sidemen. Ross Russell, owner of Dial and later biographer of Parker, relates the challenge of this tune:

We held a rehearsal two days before the date. Bird showed up about an hour late. He was supposed to have written four originals. He arrived with a line for a twelve-bar blues that he'd scribbled in a taxicab on the way out. The entire rehearsal was spent in everybody's trying to learn this sinuous twelve-bar line. Actually they didn't get it down anywhere near cold by the end. I remember driving Dodo Marmarosa (pianist) home later that night. He kept talking about about this line. It was still buggin him....He said next day he hadn't been able to sleep...It's indicative of the sort of thing Bird created. When you consider that the musicians on the date were some of the best men available, and they couldn't quite pick up on it, it's pretty remarkable. Bird was that far ahead of the most advanced musicians of his time.

In October of 1947, Bird recorded what many feel is his finest solo and purest example of jazz improvisation, *Embraceable You*. If defined as creating a new melody, much of what passes for jazz improvisation would not qualify. Most early jazz solo were referential embellished variations of the tune. During the swing era stylized patterns based on harmonic arpeggiation became common. Most solos consisted of sequences of these learned patterns, or licks, strung together, interlocked with the chord progression. As jazz became ensconced in the schools, various well-intentioned manuals of etude-like exercises has perpetuated this practice. *Embraceable You* is unique in that Bird creates and develops a motive in a composerly fashion. After the obligatory four bar piano intro, Bird eliminates entirely the statement of Gershwin's melody instead introducing an six note figure, followed by an ornamented repetition then repeats up a fourth with its embellished echo. Then the motive is used to initiate a longer melisma finally ending the seventh measure with an expanded, transformation of the motive. The fact that this opening five note motive may be a quote from *A Table in a Corner*, does not diminish Parkers skill in thematic improvisation. Unfortunately, these moments began to appear less and less frequently as Bird's health declined and his playing relied more and more on repetition of

the tried and true. With some notable exceptions, the recordings of Bird's final years lapse into mannerism and self-imitation

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In the period between 1950 and 1955 Kerouac wrote his finest works, creating at least 10 novels and an important collection of poems, an astonishing feat of productivity perhaps only rivaled in American literature by Faulkner's run of masterpieces from 1930-1932.

Three works, *Visions of Cody*, *The Subterraneans*, and *Mexico City Blues*, best represent Kerouac at his most original. All are strongly influenced by music.

*On The Road*, next novel after *The Town and the City*, became Kerouac's most influential work, serving as a primer for the counter culture of the 1960s, can be read as a transitional novel, leading the author from linear narrative to sketching and spontaneous prose. The work exists in at least five different versions, the second of which, legendary in its being typed on one long roll of butcher paper, became the published version in 1957. The last version, *Visions of Cody*, was not published until 1972, is considered by many Kerouac scholars, as his finest work. The stimulus for *On The Road* appeared in New York in 1946 in the personage of Neil Cassady, a cowboy from Denver, who had an intellectual streak that contrasted sharply from his background as a petty thief, womanizer, con man and hustler. Cassady was seen as a kind of street-smart Rousseauesque noble savage and convinced Kerouac to undertake a series of cross country trips to discover the real America. The journal that Kerouac kept of what became four of these hitchhiking odysseys became the raw material for the novel. *On The Road* centered around the exploits of Cassady as "Dean Moriarty", observed by the author, "Sal Paradise". while the picaresque narrative of the first versions still maintained a linear, or horizontal flow of events, the subject matter of the day by day at times prosaic wanderings of the anti-hero was not. Particularly resonant was Kerouac's description of jazz as in the following:

The behatted tenor man was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from "EE-yah" to a crazier "EE-de-lee-yah!" and blasted along to the rolling crash of the butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn't give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs, crash rattle-ti-boom. Uproars of music

and the tenor man *had it* and everybody knew it. Dean was clutching his head head in the crowd and it was a mad crowd. They were all urging that tenor man to hold it and keep it with cries and wild eyes...

Later Sal asks Dean what "IT" is?

...to put down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas,...and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it*- everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries, Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives....He has to blow across bridges and come and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT-"

For Kerouac (and Ginsberg) Cassady personifies spontaneous hedonism, a man of motion, in continuous celebration of the NOW, expressed in the following oft' quoted excerpt:

I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars..

Kerouac concludes the published version of the novel with a Whitmanesque praise hymn:

So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and a sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night the blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarity, I even think of Old Dean Moriarity, the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarity.

With Vision of Cody, Kerouac completed the transformative process of adapting bop rhetoric to prose. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac, with his "Essentials of Spontaneous

Prose”, outlined his most important pedagogical exegesis on his writing:

Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, “blowing” (as per jazz musician) on subject of image...Write “without consciousness” in semi-trance (as Yeats later “trance writing”)Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at “moment” of writing, and write outwards swimming in sea of language to peripheral release and exhaustion...Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind. Don’t think of words when you stop, but to see picture better.

One is struck by the similarities of Kerouac and Pollock in their beginning a piece without premeditation, discovering the nature of the piece through the composition process. In addition to spontaneous prose (which Ginsberg called “Spontaneous Bop Prosody”) Kerouac experimenting with a process he referred to as “sketching”, rapidly notating visual stimuli on location: “purify your mind and let it pour out in words...write with 100% honesty both psychic and social, and slap it all down shameless, willy-nilly, rapidly” he advised Ginsberg.

In another polemic written in 1959, well into his period of decline, Kerouac contributed an article for Evergreen magazine which further articulates his writing philosophy. In “Belief and Techniques for Modern Prose” Kerouac list 30 Essential facets of his work, many of which influenced by reflect Buddhist concepts that began to preoccupy him after the writing of immediately after *On The Road*:

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumbsaint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry, but exactly what is

11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time
15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
18. Work from pitch middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience. language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact picture of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In Praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You're a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies sponsored & Angeled in Heaven

These approaches can be read in the later versions of *On The Road* culminating in *Visions of Cody*, which he began in 1951. *Visions of Cody* (with Cody Pomeroy replacing Dean Moriarty as Cassady) added a vertical element, superimposing at times multiple temporal digressions over the horizontal narrative (Kerouac of course did not invent stream of consciousness, and was the first to admit his debt to Proust and Joyce). In "*Following Lee Konitz*", a passage taken from Kerouac's novel, "*Visions of Cody*", the writer sees alto saxophonist Lee Konitz in Mid-Town Manhattan and begins surreptitiously following him, eventually to Manny's, a favorite music store of jazz musicians. Along the way, the sights of New York trigger memories of his past, as well as daydreams

of the future. The piece concludes with Kerouac finding himself at Times Square gazing up at the giant marquees of films such as "Quo Vadis".

**FOLLOWING LEE KONITZ** the famous alto jazzman down the street and don't even know what for-saw him first in that bar on the northeast corner of 49th and Sixth Avenue which is in a real old building that nobody ever notices because it forms the pebble at the hem of the shoe of the immense tall man which is the RCA Building- I noticed it only the other day while standing in front of Howard Johnson's eating a cone, or rather it was too crowded for me to get a cone and I was just standing there and I was thinking "New York is so immense that it would make no difference to anybody's ass if this building exists and is old" - Lee, who wouldn't talk to me even if he knew me, was in the bar (from which I've made many phonecalls) waiting with big eyes for his friend to show up and so I waited on corner to think and soon I saw Lee coming out with his friend who'd arrived and it was Arnold Fishkin the Tristano bass player-two little Jewish gazotsky fellows they were really as they cut across the street and Konitz in that manner that was forceful and I said to myself "He can take care of himself even though he goofs and does 'April in Paris' from inside out as if the tune was the room he lived in and was going out at midnight with his coat on" - (but I haven't heard him for weeks and weeks)- Both of them real small among the crowds, Fishkin is five-foot-three or such and Konitz five-six or such-cutting along so I follow, and they turn west at 48th, I go across the street, temporarily bemused first by a sign for a large furnished room with cooking privileges and bath in a beat sort of hidden tenement smack in the cunt of midtown but how can I live there or even be like Lee Konitz cutting around the world of men and women when my father told me to take care of my mother on his deathbed (these my thoughts)-and where d'you think they go but Manny's the music store of hipsters and Symphony Sid but which however at this moment (and strangely connected with the feeling I had had while waiting for Konitz looking over big buildings to see Atlantic clouds blowing in from sea and realizing sea is bigger even than New York and that's where I oughta be) is filled with a whole crew of sailors apparently in the store to buy equipment for a big whaling oompapa Navy band! And Konitz goes completely unrecognized by them although the Danny Richman-like owners know Lee so well they don't say to him, as I would, "Where you playing now, great genius?" they say "When you leaving?" knowing already of his road plans - Lee buys reeds or such in a box almost but not quite big enough for an alto (and

already packed and waiting for him) and then he and Fishkin cut around the corner (as I follow through a sea of crowds) to a mysterious marble lobby of big office buildings and cut right upstairs on foot and in fact a whole bunch of hip looking guys are coming to do same (avoiding elevators) and I study board to find out big deal on second floor or third (walkup) floor but nothing, so the mystery remains though I still say it must be a music school and this was typical of my lostness and loneliness, I go around dressed like a bum with a seedy envelope, have no Fishkins to walk with, unless I'm drunk, and spend my time watching the frenetic lights of Times Square ( the hugecurrent *Quo Vadis* montage that goes up almost as high as Astor Hotel roof, a blue-light woman tied to a stake that goes higher than her head in blue-light eyries and neons burning a painting of Rome that has in it eighteenth-century tenements of Pittsburgh quite Georgian and also Greek Parthenons, *MGM presents* on white neons then huge *QUO VADIS* lighting up, first ordinary, then running, then blinking, then shivering, then in the climax runningblinking~shivering as if coming) and this sign is bigger than next door's *TEN TALL MEN* which is big enough and biggest I ever saw till *QUO VADIS*, and I am lonely and small in all this, goodnight.

The culmination of Kerouac's jazz-influenced techniques is *The Subterraneans*, one of his most hermetic reads. It describes the lifestyle of the bohemian world of New York's lower East Side (although changed in the published novel to San Francisco to avoid possible litigation). A centerpiece of the novella is one breathless three-page sentence centering around a visit to the "Red Drum" to hear Charlie Parker, later followed by a return to Heavenly Gate, the home of Mardou Fox, the female heroine in the novel. Following his own counsel Kerouac wrote the piece in an astonishing three day nonstop benzedrine-fueled rush. The passage is studded with various vertical and horizontal digressions.

The final work to be discussed is the most related to music. In 1955 while living with Burroughs in Mexico Kerouac began writing one poem a day, each poem not exceeding the length of a single page. The piece begins with a preface: "I want to be considered a jazz poet, blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam session on Sunday...I take 242 Choruses". These "choruses" contain many references to jazz, as three choruses near the

end paying homage to Charlie Parker. Kerouac has become a *griot*, chanting the oral history of his idol:

(239th Chorus)

Charley Parker Looked like Buddha  
Charley Parker who recently died  
Laughing at a juggler on the TV  
after weeks of strain and sickness,  
was called the Perfect Musician.  
And his expression on his face  
Was as calm, beautiful, and profound  
As the image of the Buddha  
Represented in the East, the lidded eyes,  
The expression that says "All is Well"  
-This was what Charley Parker  
Said when he played, All is Well.  
You had the feeling of early--in-the-morning  
Like a hermit's joy, or like the perfect cry  
Of some wild gang at a jam session  
"Wail, Wop"- Charley burst  
His lungs to reach the speed  
Of what the speedsters wanted  
And what they wanted  
Was his Eternal Slowdown.  
A great musician and a great creator of forms  
That ultimately find expression  
In mores and what have you

(240th Chorus)

Musically as important as Beethoven,  
Yet not regarded as such at all,  
A genteel conductor of string orchestras  
In front of which he stood,  
Proud and calm, like a leader of music  
In the great Historic World Night,  
And wailed his little saxophone,  
The alto, with piercing clear lament  
In perfect tune & shining harmony,  
Toot - as listeners reacted  
Without showing it, and began talking  
And soon the whole joint is rocking  
And everybody talking and Charley Parker  
Whistling them on to the brink of eternity  
With his Irish St. Patrick patootle stick,  
And like the holy piss we blop  
And we plop in the waters of slaughter  
And white meat, and die  
One after one, in time.

(241st Chorus)

And how sweet a story it is  
When you hear Charley Parker tell it,

Either on records or at sessions  
Or at official bits in clubs,  
Shots in the arm for the wallet,  
Gleefully he whistled the perfect horn

Anyhow, made no difference.

Charley Parker, forgive me -  
Forgive me for not answering your eyes -  
For not having made an indication  
Of that which you can devise-  
Charley Parker, pray for me-  
Pray for me and everybody  
In the Nirvanas of your brain  
Where you hide, indulgent and huge,  
No longer Charley Parker  
But the secret unsayable name  
That carries with it merit  
Not to be measured from here  
To up, down, east, or west-  
-Charley Parker, lay the bane,  
off me, and every body

### **Mannerist Decline**

Celebrity for Jackson Pollock, when it finally arrived in the form of the three page spread in *Life* magazine, proved every bit as unsuccessful in ridding Pollock of his demons as it will for Kerouac when *On The Road* is published. Pollock was perfect for the mainstream press' notion of what an American artist should be: an outsider, a loner cowboy from the West, rough hewn and anti establishment. Like Hemingway, Pollock was a man's man, whose alcoholic rages were to be tolerated as the price for genius. The down side of all this unprecedented notoriety was the vehemence of the critics, both pro and con, and the inevitable envy of other artists.

In 1950, when a groups of artists banded together to protest MOMA's hostility to abstract art, it was clear that without Pollock's endorsement, the effort would be ineffectual. Pollock agreed and once again was in *Life* magazine, along with 16 other artists. These artists, which included Rothko, Still, Baziotes, Motherwell, Gottlieb and de Kooning, were dubbed "The Irascibles" (notably absent was Weldon Kees, who had decided to move to San Francisco). The consensus was that *Life* was interested in the story only because of the

Pollock connection. Artistically, the masterpieces of 1946-1950 created a standard difficult to maintain. Beginning in 1949, Pollock, partly in an attempt to generate more commercially viable pieces, began painting smaller works of a calligraphic nature. Similar to Kline and de Kooning, many of these drawings are in black and white. Two works seem to stand out in his last years that recapture his earlier brilliance, *Number 12, 1952, (Blues Poles)*, and *The Deep*. *Blues Poles* was a palimpsest, in which Pollock took an older painting and added the vertical lines. Sixteen years after Pollock's death, the piece was sold to the Australian government for 2 million dollars, a record for any American painting. The other completely unique painting is *The Deep, 1953* which portrays a womb-like opening in the middle of an organic brushed white field. The last years of his life were filled with increasingly erratic behavior and alcoholic self destruction. Tortured by self doubt and anxiety Pollock began to use tranquilizers and flirted the psychological techniques of L. Ron Hubbard, called Dianetics. This late phase of Pollock's life has been documented by photographer Hans Namuth. In 1951 he directed a documentary film with music by Morton Feldman (John Cage had been asked first but refused), featuring shots of Pollock dropping paint, agates and sand above onto herculite, a shatterproof glass used in car windshields. Pollock turned actor-dancer. Dance critic Roger Copeland has called Namuth's film:

one of the world's most significant dance films...it demonstrates the fundamental impulse behind abstract expressionism was the desire to transform painting into dancing.

Composer Feldman adds:

I wrote the score as if I were writing music for choreography.

To add authentic, Namuth asked Pollock to read a "script" culled from previous bits of interviews. This bio-polemic, droned in a colorless monotone, summarizing a career soon to end:

My home is in Springs, East Hampton, Long Island. I was born in Cody, Wyoming, thirty-nine years ago. In New York I spent two years at the Art Students League with Tom Benton. He was a strong personality to react against. ...I don't work from drawings or color sketches. My painting is direct. I usually paint on the floor. I enjoy working on a large canvas. Sometimes I use a brush, but often prefer a stick. Sometimes I pour the paint straight out of the can...When I am painting I have a general notion as to what I am about. I can control the flow of the paint: there is no

accident, just as there is no beginning and no end.

Soon after filming was complete, and after two years of sobriety, Jackson starting drinking. He died while driving drunk on the night of August 11, 1956.

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In December of 1947 Charlie Parker made his first recording for Verve Records, owned by Norman Granz. He would stay with Verve for the rest of his life. Granz was interested in promoting Bird in new and less austere contexts than the classic bop quartets and quintets, as a result, Bird's new band with Red Rodney replacing Miles Davis, was never recorded in a studio. Granz used big bands, string orchestras, and even voices in an attempt to reach a wider, pop audience. These were initially released in eight albums entitled "*The Genius of Charlie Parker*". Bird seemed to enjoy playing in these groups and many of these recordings, particularly those with strings, emphasize the lyrical, romantic side of Parker's beautiful alto playing. Among the best of these *Just Friends*, recorded in November of 1949, illustrates his impeccably clean legato execution of double-time passages. Granz also included Bird in the *Jazz at The Philharmonic* series, jam sessions. In general, however, his playing seemed more perfunctory in the Verve work compared to the Savoy and Dial recordings. One bright spot was his participation in an International Jazz Festival in Paris where he was greeted with more enthusiasm than he'd ever enjoyed in his homeland. This was not the first time that the French intelligentsia had appreciated this most important of America's cultural contributions. The first serious study of jazz was by French musicologist, Andre Hodier. Composers such as Stravinsky and Milhaud used elements of Ragtime and Jazz in their music. While in Paris Bird met the renown saxophonist Marcel Mule, and became interested in studying with famed composition teacher, Nadia Boulanger. Another event in 1949 was the opening of Birdland, at the corner of 52nd and Broadway. At the gala opening, Bird played with one of his childhood idols, Lester Young. Ironically, a few years later, Bird was denied entrance to the club that bore his name because of his erratic behavior. In 1953 Bird journeyed to Toronto to play a memorable concert at Massey Hall, reuniting with Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Max Roach, with Charlie Mingus on bass. While perhaps not "The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever" as it was

later hyped, Parker was in fine form playing a white plastic alto. Perhaps his best final recordings were the September 1953 dates with Al Haig, piano, Percy Heath, bass, and Max Roach, drums. Of particular excitement are the several takes of *Kim*, a rapid fire improvisation (no head is played) based on “rhythm” changes. One new direction that occupied Parker near the end of his life was the desire to expand his music beyond the confines of jazz. For some time he had been an avid listener of Bartok and Stravinsky. He even took some lessons from Edgar Varese and began planning ambitious commissions for Paul Hindemith and Stephan Volpe. Most unfortunately, Bird’s personal path of self destruction prevented these collaborations from from being fulfilled. He suffered a severe blow in March 1954, when his baby daughter, Pree, died of sudden infant death syndrome. One year, on March 12 (Kerouac’s birthday) Bird was dead. So drastically had he aged in his 35 years that the coroner initially thought he was a man in his sixties. While there is some controversy over the events surrounding his death, he probably died while watching a juggler of the Tommy Dorsey show while visiting Nica de Koenigswarter at the Stanhope Hotel in Manhattan, an episode that is commemorated in the 239th chorus of Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues*. The pallbearers at his funeral held in Harlem included his friend, Dizzy Gillespie. Following the wishes of his other, his body was flown back to Kansas City where he was buried in the Lincoln Cemetery. Two weeks Carnegie Hall was sold out for the first annual Charlie Parker Memorial Concert.

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In 1957, *On The Road* was finally published, six years after it was written. Launched with a rave review in the New York Times by Gilbert Millstein, who compared it to Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, , the novel soon rose to number 7 on the bestseller list, and Kerouac suddenly found himself famous. In the next few years nearly all his novels were published. He became somewhat of a TV celebrity, appearing on the Steve Allen Show, and interviewed by William F. Buckley. All this exposure however, came with a price, in the form of attacks from academics and mainstream media. His writing was dismissed and ridiculed for lack of technique by writers such as John Ciardi, James Dickey, Herbert Gold, Norman Podhoretz, and John Updike. The mainstream press obsessed about the

relatively minor instances of sex and drug use in *On The Road*, completely overlooking the spiritual message of the book. In 1958, Herb Caen, a columnist of the San Francisco Chronicle coined the word "Beatnik", giving the media its catch phrase reducing the Beat Generation to a patronizing caricature, perhaps best seen in the bohemian character of Maynard Krebs in the TV sitcom, *Gilligans Island*. The prototypical beatnik sported a goatee and long hair, wore a beret, blue jeans and dark glasses, idled away their time in coffee houses decorated with large pseudo-Pollock paintings, snapping their fingers to silly bad zen-inspired poetry accompanied by a bebop combo, usually with flute and bongos, and is a fan of the method acting of Marlon Brando and James Dean. The criticism that affected Kerouac most deeply however, viewed his writing as symptomatic of a social phenomenon that threatened morality, and indeed, an assault on the very fabric of Western Civilization. Too fragile to sustain these attacks and fueled by increasing substance abuse, the remaining decade of Kerouac's life became a downward spiral of despair and resentment. Most of his later writing reflects his world weariness and rarely captures the excitement of the earlier novels. One exception is *Dharma Bums*, written and immediately published in 1958, which centers around Kerouac's interest in Buddhism and was instrumental in the the interest in Eastern religion in the 1960s. The hero of this novel is a portrait of Gary Snyder, a San Francisco poet who became Kerouac's mentor . Snyder later moved to Japan to become a Zen monk. Another major document of Kerouac's study of Buddhism is the recently published, *Some of the Dharma*, a compilation of poems, aphorisms, observations and study notes. While impressed intellectually with its emphasis on a moderation, and a clean drug free lifestyle, Kerouac at this point in his life lacked sufficient self discipline to profit from Buddhism. Kerouac spent his last year living in Florida and Lowell with his mother, a sad, politically conservative drunk, out of step with the idealism of the 1960s, an idealism that his writings had in large part, helped to shape. This disconnect was clearly evident in 1965, when Ken Kesey's and his Merry Pranksters, with Neal Cassaday, drove in the converted school bus, *Furthur*, from San Francisco to the East Coast and visited Kerouac. Kesey, the author of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, was, along with Timothy O'Leary, promoting the use of LSD. The meeting did not go well, Kerouac remained withdrawn and sullen, refusing Kesey's offer of acid and pot, instead

swilling his bottle of Tokay wine. Kerouac was equally unimpressed with his most famous disciple, Bob Dylan, whom he dismissed as "...just another \*\*\*\*\*ing folk singer." In an ironic postscript, it took nearly twenty years for the city of Lowell to recognize their most famous son. After years of opposition from local politicians and civic leaders ("I'm worried about what kind of role model he'd make for our kinds" one Councilman said), a commemorative stele was unveiled in 1988 and the mayor was forced to declare June 25th, Jack Kerouac day.

### Aftermath

All three of the men we have studied left a varied legacy. Parker's was the most unequivocal. Along with his friend and collaborator Dizzy Gillespie, who enjoyed a normal life span, dying in 1993, Bird has been universally hailed as a seminal figure in jazz, alongside of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Much of the music of the 1950s was spent processing the perceived implications of his music, branching into the well known tendencies of cool and hard bop. It wasn't until the next decade that Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane and others brought new forms of linear and modal improvisation that departed from the chromatic functional harmonic approach of Parker. As a prophet of social consciousness, Bird's reaction to racial intolerance found echoes in the militancy of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Kerouac lived long enough to see elements of his style appropriated by post beat writers such as Ken Kesey and Thomas Pynchon yet was unable or unwilling to share in the youth movement of the 1960s, so much of was the result of *On The Road*. Allen Ginsberg, his principle disciple, did become a well known activist, furthering the Western interest in the Buddhism that he introduced him to. Pollock's legacy was perhaps the most transient, already being eclipsed during his last years by Willem de Kooning; and by the end of the decade, Robert Rauschenberg, who began working in the new field of assemblage, while Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol were celebrating the found object in Pop Art. Lee Krassner's art flourished, especially in collage. Finally, in the extreme of using random, chance events, philosopher-composer John Cage derived spontaneous compositions from his study of Eastern religion, especially zen and he / *Ching* with his environmental study, *4'33'*, first "performed in Woodstock, N.Y., 1952.

And so, this vigorous and glorious art , characterized by vibrant surface detail encompassed within spacious forms, containing an immediacy and urgency using spontaneous methods to collapse the boundaries between art and life, high brow and low brow, thought and action, process and product, an American zeitgeist had come and gone.