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"I Didn’t Punctuate It": Locating the Tape and Text of Jack Kerouac’s *Visions of Cody* and *Doctor Sax* in a Culture of Spontaneous Improvisation

JOHN SHAPCOTT

The post-war American electronic consumer revolution heralded an explosion in the use of readily available recording equipment to represent a range of cultural production. Whilst the new technology encouraged a quantitative increase in sound-based art, the majority of practices in the first post-war decade were restricted to musical production. Jack Kerouac realised the tape recorder’s democratic potential for capturing a range of voices previously denied ready access to mechanical reproduction. These included his own ethnic French-Canadian voice, the marginalised class voice of Neal Cassady and the newly emergent, economically active, female voice of Carolyn Cassady. They attain experimental literary representation in the transcribed form of five consecutive days of recorded conversation, “Frisco: the Tape,” at the centre of *Visions of Cody*. This remains a unique tape/literary representation propelling the marginalised voice into a culture of spontaneity.

The use of technology by marginalised writers brings in its wake a reconsideration of the compositional process by which a finished work is achieved. Michael Davidson’s *Ghostlier Demarcations. Modern Poetry and the Material World* examines the implications of such literary influences as “the use of pens or typewriters, the kinds of paper they preferred, whether or not they liked to have music in the background, the type of music” in

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With thanks to Carolyn Cassady and Dave Moore for spontaneous help.
arriving at a critical evaluation of "the value of writing as a material practice beyond its rhetorical complexities" (6). The material text of "Frisco: the Tape" may be read as precisely that ideal type of cultural production resulting from dissemination "through conduits whose own material conditions implicated [it] in realms of community, contingency and conversation" that are located within multiple layers of signification.

*Visions of Cody* presents a visible demonstration of text production linked directly to the sense of community provided by Kerouac's friends in San Francisco. Alongside Beat notions of global inclusiveness that recognised the socio-political importance of the "fellaheen" in future societal structures, Kerouac also nurtured the idea of a more restricted model of utopian social organisation that looked to the commune in a rural setting, removed from mainstream economic and political dependency. The home provided for him by Neal and Carolyn Cassady gave a tantalising glimpse of alternative social practice whilst, in the short term, offering a secure writing base. This creative environment produced an intensity of experimental prose not to be equalled when Kerouac resumed composition in the family home. In *Visions of Cody* Kerouac sees the need for tape's ability to fix a multitude of voices that he wanted "to recall in toto but couldn't because like the real world so vast, so delugingly vast, I wish God had made me vaster myself" (129). Kerouac envisaged the tape recorder as an extension of his writing body, enabling him to capture a spontaneous world that he could reinterpret in literary form at leisure.

The fate of the 1952 tapes has not been the subject of any sustained critical commentary, giving the impression that the pages of transcription represent the sole valid base for exegesis. The first reference to the existence of any surviving tape appears in the 1975 second revision edition of Ann Charters's Kerouac bibliography, where she details the contents of an eighteen minute tape (112). Asked at the 1982 Naropa Conference on "Kerouac and Women" whether she knew of any undocumented recordings, Carolyn Cassady referred to a "short twenty minute precious thing of he and Neal reading together in 1952 when they were young and alive."¹

Tim Hunt's *Kerouac's Crooked Road* presents an extended analysis of the tape transcripts without mentioning the existence of a tape that yields the voices of Kerouac and Cassady "when they were young and alive." He represents the recorder as an amalgam of "both the sketcher's eye and the narrative voice" (212), standing in an impersonal relationship with the

¹ The transcription is by the author from a cassette of "Kerouac and Women," Kerouac Conference, Naropa, CO, 27 July 1982.
actors and sound effects within its range. Whilst technically accurate in an objective sense, the particular history of Cassady’s EKCO recorder and the role he gave it in persuading his friend to join him in San Francisco, means that considerable traces of the physical and temporal setting shape the tapes’ sound. The little that remains of the 1952 tape plays an important part in glossing the intermediate stages of understanding and interpretation of the process of transcription from sound to print.

The importance of the sound essence of the tape becomes apparent from listening to the opening minutes of Neal Cassady reading Proust. Although Kerouac occasionally corrects his pronunciation, Cassady proceeds largely uninterrupted, except for interventions to explain the onward flow of Proust’s prose in terms that resemble his own letter-writing style: “This is mind you all one paragraph ... It’s all see one paragraph. That’s why I’m continuing you see. It’s for the sake of the paragraph ... It’s all very clear ... how it is ... He’s understandable isn’t he? Oh yes, he is, he is understandable um.” This is a small sound clue towards validating Gerald Nicosia’s claim that it was by “continually hearing Neal read aloud from Proust” that Kerouac was aided in the construction of a jazz breath line to expand “his sentences with more balanced rhythms and a periodic structure” (376). Nicosia continues with comments on the place of scat singing in Kerouac’s writing of Visions of Cody that are validated by the tape: “He still scats mouthfuls of syllables just for the effect of the sound, but now the scattings tend to fall into larger, better defined movements of thought, and flow together toward the moment of revelation” (376). Kerouac’s unaccompanied jazz singing on the tape is used to drive the songs towards a conclusion that owes as much to the expression of pure sound as to the lyrics’ narrative meaning.

The 1952 tape serves as an aural appendix to the “Frisco: the Tape” transcripts, retrieving layers of spontaneous everyday immediacy. It exists as a physical artifact, possessing nothing within itself that necessarily distinguishes it as a work of art. It enters a democracy of discourse where its audible traces testify to Davidson’s notion of “the contingent character of writing, the degree to which texts speak to their moment as well as to other texts and writers” (Ghostlier xiii). He draws attention to the way in which “poets since Pound have incorporated the material fact of their writing into the poem in ways that challenge the intentionalist criteria of traditional textual criticism” (Ghostlier 69). Kerouac’s incorporated materials include sketch-books, letters, radio, film, jazz records and tape

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2 This is the author’s own transcription from a cassette of the 1952 tapes, made available to him by Carolyn Cassady and Dave Moore.
recordings. This array of materiality impinges on the practice of writing as "archaeological, the gradual accretion and sedimentation of textual materials, no layer of which can ever be isolated from any other" (Ghostlier 69). The 1952 tape thus enters a discourse of multiple layers of signification and becomes one more unit of temporal evidence in an ongoing process of signifying, taping, transcribing and typing.3

The surviving four minutes of Doctor Sax on tape provide important "archaeological" evidence of both Kerouac's spontaneous writing method and of Beat intersubjectivity. Other than a 1949 set of recordings made in John Clellon Holmes's New York apartment, they provide the earliest recorded example of Kerouac at work. They include some unpublished material: "I was worried if Billy knew all about the Count and his barn [Neal Cassady interjects a familiar 'Yeah'] back of the Delorge's house where the old man had died suddenly." Otherwise the tape mirrors closely the published text. Kerouac imitates the voice of W. C. Fields and is frequently joined, rather than interrupted, by encouraging yells from Cassady who helps to drive the momentum of the Dracut Woods sexual voyeurism experience (198–99). The tape recorder may have helped Kerouac to structure social disclosure in the form of a free-flowing confession that, according to his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," discourages retrospective attempts to "improve' or defray impressions, as the best writing is always the most personal ... always honest, ('ludicrous'), spontaneous, 'confessional' interesting, because not 'crafted'" (58). The capacity of the unconscious mind to reveal "ludicrous" or irrational associations was an idea inherited from surrealism, and Kerouac links his surrealistic technique to jazz practice: "sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words, blowing (as per jazz musician) on subject of image" (57).

The sixth book of Doctor Sax includes a passage of scatological centrality conforming to Kerouac's strictures on timing in terms of an oralcy of immediacy. Sax's speech utilises a stream-of-consciousness to

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3 There is a notable link between Kerouac's 1952 recorded scat singing and a 1997 compact disc, Kerouac: Kicks Joy Darkness, Robert Elliot Fox's review refers to the "subtleties of Beat literary aesthetics ... demand(ing) a sensitive and attentive ear, not just an entranced eye" (3 of 7). A sufficiently "sensitive and attentive ear" would detect that Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter's reading from Visions of Cody (track 16), recorded whilst literally on the road, contains the 1952 tape of Kerouac's scat singing, faintly audible on the car cassette. This provides an illuminating example of Michael Davidson's metaphor of textual archaeology involving the "gradual accretion and sedimentation of textual materials." Whilst the disc's linear notes credit the singing to Kerouac, they do not acknowledge the recording source.
invoke a multitude of references centred on the passing (time) of the “pee-
rade”:

Fear not the green loss – every twig in your
cerebular tree is aching to return to you now.
No particular loss is there in the use of the
loss – by same token no gain by use of gain,
habit gain, habit loss – all and every moment
is yearning to stay grown to you even as the
pee-rade passes it – you’ll take up your
place in the hierarchical racks of
vegetabialized heaven with a garland of
carrots in your hair and still you won’t
know you ever suffered such sweet wishes
– in your death you’ll know the death part
of your life. And re-gain all that green,
and browns. (204)

The deliberate misspelling of parade escapes notice in its oral form but in
print it becomes what Roland Barthes refers to as a “‘happy’ spelling
mistake” (Rustle 45). The scatology of “pee-rade” invokes the accent and
delivery of W. C. Fields. The resultant conflation of Sax/Fields serves to
recall memories of Cassady’s father, William Burroughs and Leo Kerouac,
all of whom are referred to in connection with the comedian’s vaudevillian
period. Previous commentary has emphasised the personal historical
context of Kerouac’s W. C. Fields references, without noticing the
performative way in which he fits into the actual practice of improvisatory
composition. W. C. Fields’s pre-film professional life shaped his mastery
of the spontaneous improvisatory phrase, delivered either in the inspired
flow of stage monologue or issued as rebuke to an unruly member of the
audience. Sax’s “pee-rade” is an example of Barthes’s performative
exclamation that issues as “a mysterious commandment that comes to him
from his own history – perhaps even from his own body?” (45).

The “pee-rade” of oralcy-in-print exemplifies Ginsberg’s notion of the
reinstating of the speech base to prose: “It has the same syntactical
structure of fast excited spoken talking – this is an interesting event in
prose development, and it’s no less communicative to me than heard
speech ... heightened speech in other words.”4 The remains of the 1952
tape help to link printed “syntactical structure of fast excited spoken
talking” to its original oral format. That so little remains is due to the
expense of tape, and to the fact that the participants in these early taping

4 Letter from Ginsberg to his father, Jan. 1957, quoted in Michael Davidson (San Fran
77).
experiments of spontaneous bop prosody could not realise their future importance. Carolyn Cassady has no recollection of what happened to the tapes, other than the surviving eighteen minutes. Writing to me she explained that “we had little money, so we kept using the same tapes over and over. I rather suspect they were taped over. Boy do I regret that now!” (personal communication).

Bebop’s emphasis on immediacy and spatial intimacy promotes those spontaneous outbursts of expression of appreciation or encouragement during the course of performance that are replicated in the tapes. The linear and referential structure of the taped speeches resembles that of improvised jazz solos, providing meaning, both for the receptive listener/reader and for the performer. Whereas bebop’s nuances of rhythm, tone and timbre could not be transposed readily into printed musical notation, and therefore made aural transmission of primary importance, Kerouac nevertheless undertook the exploratory task of representing the spontaneity of everyday conversation in a print that bore the speaker’s distinct psychological signature. In constructing an alternative to traditional forms, Kerouac’s transcriptions pursue the values of intersubjectivity and body–mind holism so central to the post-war culture of spontaneity. As a vision, not only of Cody but also of sociality itself, the tapes suggest an intersubjective dynamic in which the individual speaker and the surrounding community empower one another along bebop’s antiphonal structural lines. Each speaking presence enlivens the other(s), creating the total performance labelled “Frisco: the Tape.”

For John Tytell, the participatory ethic is aligned to the goal of complete self-revelation aimed at positioning the idea of self in opposition to a culture, the values of which encourage apathy. Thus the tape may be read as a democratic poetic manifesto, issued to counter the “potentials for lying on a national scale,” in which the Beats “raised the standard of honesty no matter what the artistic consequences” (62). The consequences for Kerouac included critical attacks, misinterpretation and publishing difficulties. The tapes represent a spontaneity of expression starkly at odds with conventional reporting of bureaucratic utterances in the early 1950s. Their pure form of spontaneous prosody exemplifies the nature of common everyday speech, as opposed to the censored and psychologically crafted prose of the cultural establishment’s Cold War blandishments.

In opposing establishment formats of “pompous personages orating and not saying anything spontaneous” (Ginsberg Composed 71), Beat poetics’ alignment with improvisatory jazz presaged a social change with
political implications. The tapes offer the first sustained literary experiment in the mimesis of the spontaneous immediacy of personal interactions. This tape-to-text is interpreted by an accompanying series of authorial-editorial annotations and clearly delineated background/foreground noises, rather than by reference to an external abstract social-rule structure. The democratic nature of the exercise has similar disturbing political implications to those raised in John Szwed's analysis of collective jazz improvisation, since "no political system has yet been devised with social principles which reward maximal individualism within the frame-work of spontaneous egalitarian interaction" (588).

The Cassadys' San Francisco living-room becomes the democratic location for storytelling, mirroring the after-hours jam session in which a room full of musicians explores sonic ideas. Cody and Jack are recorded in concert, in the original dictionary sense of "agreement, union, as work in," rather than on a stage, divided as performers from silent auditors. At the Carnegie Hall jazz concert that concludes On the Road, the professional jazz performance separates Sal Paradise both from Duke Ellington on stage and from the ticket-less Dean Moriarty. In later years, after the publication of On the Road had thrust Kerouac into the public limelight as a reluctant spokesman for the Beat Generation, he found it impossible to replicate the informal equality of the Cassady sessions when given a public platform that separated him from his friends. As with the jam sessions, the conversationalists in the San Francisco living-room were both performers and audience. The taped conversation conveys the notion of improvisation propelled by a sense of relaxation that Paul Berliner defines as the "groove" that increases the jazz musicians' powers of expression and imagination. "At such times, the facility artists display as individual music thinkers combines with their extraordinary receptiveness to each other. It is the combining of such talents in the formulation of parts that raises these periods of communal creativity to a supreme level" (389). When these moments happen, or are skilfully contrived, Berliner's referencing of "laughter," "grinning," "giggling" and even "orgasm" (389) in a jazz context, transfers readily to the tape's atmosphere. Indeed, Cody's major "solo," dealing with William and Joan Burroughs' difficulties in

⁤ Erving Goffman's Forms of Talk emphasises the need for the reader/listener of taped conversation to have some form of access to bodily orientation and tone of voice in order to interpret the internal dynamics of group discussion. He refers to conversational shifts as "footings" and summarises those which alter the reader's/listener's evaluative frame. The first of Goffman's "footings" - "Participant's alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self is somehow at issue" (128) - would, for example, apply to Jack's interpretive annotation on Cody's "(demurely downward look)" (155).
disposing of marijuana, is prefaced by a sustained outburst of laughing, regularly interrupted by laughter, and a self-referential “tittering laff,” and brought to an end by Evelyn’s exclamatory but laughter-ridden “Course” (274–80). The laughter choruses read as musical punctuation, freeing Cody the performer to concentrate on his urge for verbal continuity without concern for eventual structure on the printed page. Even when it occurs, Cody’s closure is contingent and offers an oral oppositional form to traditional narratives valuing the stability of beginnings and endings.

Kerouac’s determination to capture the speech patterns of individuals and social groups is foregrounded in the tapes, where dialogue and monologue function, not as technical devices at the service of plot progression, but as the central fulcrum of Beat poetics. Nicosia emphasises the frankness of the prose contained within the tapes as being not only of literary, but also of political importance in contributing to a democratic culture of spontaneity. Writing in 1983, he regretted that thirty years and “powers of freedom later, many critics fail to realise the impact of Neal’s dictum that you could write about life without changing anything” (338).

The increasing availability of Kerouac’s pre-war writing has helped establish his credentials as a jazz critic. His early emphasis on the importance of rhythm in praise of drummer Jo Jones (Atop 22) presages his later writing’s development of the notion of rhythm to co-ordinate internal, subjective reality with external processes. Ethnomethodology defines time as two-dimensional, involving a phenomenological construct of internal rhythms, or paces, interacting with those of the people and objects in the surrounding environment, and an abstract clock time that facilitates the efficient conduct of public duties. The former refers to the group dynamic of, for example, the Cassady household in conversation, whilst the latter embraces a corporate American time requiring Cassady, defined as railroad brakeman, to be on a specific train at an exact time. Bebop emphasises the polyrhythmic aspects of jazz, encouraging the participants/listeners to regard time as their own flexible creative force rather than as an immutable objective one. Within the five-days’ span of Kerouac’s taping, there is less a sense of urgency of being “on time” than of the participants being “in time.” The complex vocalisations of the tape serve the paradoxical purpose of asserting the values of an oral culture within a printed format. Jazz, both in its historical location and in its recorded performance on the tapes, serves to align Kerouac’s spontaneous poetics with bop’s perceived possibilities of asserting the values of black oral culture.
Jack and Cody discuss the dynamics of group improvisation in relation to a recording of Coleman Hawkins’s “Crazy Rhythm.” In terms of the theoretical consideration of Kerouac’s poetics it is important to stress that, by means of an editorial insert, he is able to suggest a soundtrack to accompany his prose: “(MUSIC: ‘Coleman Hawkins’ ‘Crazy Rhythm’)” (175), and “Listen to this (starts ‘Crazy Rhythm’)” (196). Kerouac’s use of musical inserts may be considered in a number of contexts, but here he deploys what Claudia Gorbman identifies as classic Hollywood soundtrack practice for diegetic and extradiegetic music, namely that of creating “Unity.”6 Unity is defined as the variation and repetition of musical material and instrumentation in the subordinate but important role of formal and narrative unity. Thus, although a day has intervened in the tape narrative and the tape has been changed, Kerouac’s clearly indicated repeat of the jazz soundtrack provides a thematic unity that might not be apparent at first reading. The Hawkins recording also acts as a form of what Gorbman calls “Narrative Cueing.” The music provides the reader, who has also to “hear” the prose soundtrack, with referential and narrative cues to indicate a participant’s point of view, establish formal demarcations, and comment upon character and setting.

The excitement over the group improvisation on the Hawkins recording is replicated by the transcribed exchanges. Kerouac uses his editorial authority to track the listeners’ excited response to the music with italicised inserts. They describe Cody’s “(gesturing low at waist)” (176) as a spontaneous gesture of physicality “conducting” the diegetic soundtrack. Whilst tracking the performance of “Crazy Rhythm” with such comments as “(Coleman comes in low toned, fast)” (176), Kerouac choreographs the body’s communicative powers to jazz rhythms. The choice of “Crazy Rhythm” also offers an extradiegetic clue to Cassady’s personality, where his intensity of spoken delivery, spilling ideas over narrative boundaries into surrounding text, is paralleled by Hawkins’ style of playing on the 1937 recording.

In presenting a complete transcript of the taped Cassady, Kerouac the writer offers process, a way of talking amplified by editorial insertion, that

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6 Claudia Gorbman (73) distinguishes in film study between diegetic sound that refers to what the characters might actually hear and extradiegetic sound that is something taking place elsewhere, as for example, in the voice-over narration by an unseen character. Diegetic music, then, emerges from the gramophone in the Cassadys’ living room. The extradiegetic soundtrack is provided in non-musical terms by Kerouac’s insertions. These provide what Gorbman calls the enragé effect, adopting a term used by Roland Barthes (Image 38–39) to describe the process by which magazine captions reduce the polysemy of photographs to specific meanings.
privileges the virtuoso verbal performer, Cody, over the technically proficient but limited role of the transcriber. The taped realisation of Cody and Jack presages a post-war Beat reorientation of cultural attention and redistribution of social energies. The values advanced are those of a culture of spontaneity embodied in “spontaneous bop prosody,” emphasising the possibilities of action and interaction within established corporate structures.

Kerouac inserts the details of recorded music that may be retrieved by the reader, either in memory or on disc. In Gorbman’s terms, Billie Holiday’s “Good Morning Heartache” functions as a signifier of emotion, emphasising specific moods, and particular feelings, suggested in the narrative. In the transcript, it functions by calling attention to itself and thereby disrupting any possible illusion that the action of the dialogic narrative is unproblematic. The improvisations of the jazz artist who responds in performance to an individual sense of what sounds are right for which moment, are by definition incompatible with standard textual formats. The jazz enthusiast thus reads Jack and Cody’s dialogue against a Holiday soundtrack that carries its own history, providing it with an ontology alongside that of the text.

For Jack and Cody, the music serves to recreate memories of a specific occasion when Huck (Herbert Huncke) was playing the record on Bull’s (Burroughs’s) Texan farm porch. The recorded sound acts as a mirror offering aural reflections of its likeness. The listener hears himself in the music he chooses to play, thus becoming destabilised between the self that is heard and the self that is hearing. The text cannot control and match the characters (Jack, Cody) with the reader to guarantee a unity of character/self as the object of listening versus the character/self as the agent of listening. The tape intervenes in the technological gap between typewriter and gramophone, presenting a contested space for reader improvisation between writing and sounding. In Deliberate Speed Lhamon argues that the tape focuses on this contested space in terms of a staged arena for the main participants to construct a perceived unity of memory resulting from improvised practices analogous to those used by Lee Strasberg in his Method training with actors (161–63). In alerting the reader to Jack’s search for Holiday’s recording of “Body and Soul,” Kerouac cues in a metadiegetic soundtrack in which the music, whilst not sonically present in the room, is nevertheless present as a form of audible memory for both main characters, and for the knowledgable reader. The unlocatable record joins Kerouac’s other physically present props as part of a recall procedure that parallels Strasberg’s affective memory. Jack
explains his search for the record as an attempt to concentrate Cody’s unfocused mind on his time in Texas:

JACK. Yeah, but purpose ... of playing it  
at this moment was to evoke the musical sound –
CODY. Oh yes ...
JACK. – of the Texas that we were talking  
about last night
CODY. Texas, why –
JACK. See, that’s what I was doing over there (168)

Jack’s determination to focus the conversation on Cody’s time in Texas is emphasised for the reader by italics.

Having put “Good Morning Heartache” on the gramophone, Jack allows time for the music to evoke the necessary mood for recollection. Cody associates it with Bull sitting on his porch—“Man, he just sits there” (169)—and presents Jack with the necessary level of verbal association to begin a series of questions centred on the recall of physical objects as triggers for a hoped-for outburst of spontaneous but structured memory recall:

CODY. ... but it seems to me he was in  
a chair ...
JACK. Where’s this thing play, inside
the screen?
CODY. Off in the corner – yeah inside  
the screen, yeah
JACK. On the porch or in the house?
CODY. Yeah and I’m sittin, on a bench ...  
all by myself, and Huck’s –
JACK. Yeah. Where were the washtubs?
CODY. The washtubs were on the other  
side of the porch – (171)

The tape captures the intensity of the build up of Jack and Cody’s responses to one another, with Jack’s barrage of locatory questions preventing any deviation from a reconstruction of the Texas scene. The technique of recalling an emotion’s physical setting and imaginatively reoccupying it, is designed to recall the original emotion that much more vividly. Throughout the taping, Cody is carefully positioned by Jack so as to be ready to deliver a series of spontaneous improvisations analogous to what Lhamon calls the “deliberate speed” of method acting.

Kerouac skilfully uses the tape recorder as a tool to elicit free-flowing discourse from Neal Cassady, who otherwise confessed to finding it difficult to structure a coherent narrative. On the page, Cody’s verbal
ejaculations helped fix his character as one of urgent restlessness. They also link Kerouac’s spontaneous bop prosody to the practice of recorded jazz. In particular, Cody’s transcribed “Hmn-yeah-hee” may be compared with the jazz singer’s choice of scat syllables. Freeing themselves from the constraints of delivering song texts, singers use scat to create abstract improvisations that explore diverse features of pitch articulation, colouration and resonance. Cody, in the transcript, becomes a jazz performer in the tradition of improvisation.

James T. Jones has noted a parallel between the compositional method of improvisational spontaneity and the culture to which it relates. He shares Lhamon’s view that much of early 1950s American culture reflected and encouraged a concept of speed, both as a form of artistic practice and as a desired value. “The torrent of words loosed by the spontaneous method effectively mimics 1950s overproduction. To make the product easily available, you must produce more of it than is actually needed” (147). Whilst Jones’s simile for Kerouac’s prose suggests the free flow of its form, it raises unanswered questions about the “manufacture” and level of demand for artistic “produce.” Indeed, Kerouac’s use of tape was in part an attempt to capture commonplace human interaction in order to shape better his literary output and, inasmuch as the experiment was not to be repeated, its “failure” owed as much to a lack of affordable technology as to any ideal notion of 1950s overproduction. Jones’s contention that a “good deal of waste results” (147) from such spontaneous practice as taping begs yet another question of definition with regard to control of ultimate definitions of value, worth and waste. Far from an excess of waste, the fleeting traces of the original 1952 tape, overlayed with continuous readings and scat songs, testify to Beat writers’ inability to gain sufficient access to economic capital to forward their poetics.

The tape reproduces the “waste” of everyday conversation in the form of a typographic verbal signature that identifies Cody’s personal uniqueness. An analysis of one of Cody’s “sentences” illustrates his life as a progressive present, mapped by a syntactical journey that always threatens to trip over itself:

... But what I’m sayin is that, I say,
well of course he does man, he knows

7 Berliner (126) draws attention to the scat syllables used by individual singers, such as Ella Fitzgerald’s “dwec” and Sarah Vaughan’s “shoo-bee-oo-bee shoo-doo-shoo-bee-oo-bec,” as indicators of personality as surely as are Cody’s “hee hee hee hee” (163) and his “OH-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-s-shrunkski” (147).
more about it than I do, he knows about that, you know, he knows about, you know, see, (laughing) and so that's the same way that what I'm sayin, I know - but, so I have to tell him, I'm just sayin, those words, remember certain things led me to think of all this here, which wasn't anywhere, as I said, it's just like even now, as I told in the story about the bed ...

(178)

As with a jazz riff, the sound shifts in this passage follow the sense of a line leading to a concluding note, namely “bed.” Cody’s performance may be delineated by what William H. Gass refers to as a spindle diagram, allowing the reader ready access to the common points of verbal return, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

The sound connections on spindles two, three, four, five, six and nine link the language in one melodic line, with the repetitions returning in the manner of personalised jazz riffs. The musician’s phrases figure as a constant thread in performance, taking up the status of signature patterns. Cody’s predilection for pronouns – “I,” “me,” “he,” “you” – suggests a pattern of vocabulary allied to a personality privileging individual over group identity, that plays a consistent role in his individually signed improvisational language. By the time he reaches the last three horizontal lines of Figure 1 – “as I told in the story about the bed” – Cody has returned safely to his harmonic home base, steering his elongated line to the same cadential phrasing of his “I’m saying” (“I told”), to the subject matter of the bed that concludes the passage. Throughout it there appears to be a rhetorical opposition between the “I” (Cody) that knows something – in this instance, the story centred on the bed – and the struggle to find the words to say it. It could be read as a monologue in a Kazan method improvisation where an actor haltingly negotiates an exercise centred on a bed. For Cody, however, the improvisatory sentence is less an exercise than a narrative struggle to achieve a coherence of memory that is translatable from verbal into typographic from. His preoccupation with reading Proust is central to an unavailing struggle to translate the spontaneous flow of memory into “balanced” prose. Cody continues with an expression of the untrained artist’s difficulty in transforming the process of spontaneity into the form of art:

8 William H. Gass explains the concept of a spindle machine “so named because we can run our eye, the way one used to be able to thrust a knitting needle through holes punched in IBM cards” (ix).
I go on talking about these things, thinking about these things, and memory, 'cause we're both concerned about, ah, memory, and just relax like Proust and everything. So I talk on about that as the mind and remembers and thinks and that's why it's difficult for, to keep, ah, a balance. (179)

Ultimately, Cody recognises that Duluoz will interpret his performance in
text, although both acknowledge that the idiosyncratic nature of his performative style will be preserved:

CODY. ... I'm going through the process of telling you, and you're the one who wrote it down, see, so I'm saying, you know, you know, more about it than I do -

JACK. I didn't punctuate it

CODY. No, you know more about it than I do ... no well, it was unpunctuated talk anyhow. What I'm saying ...

Exercising authorial control over the tapes' collective aspect of improvisation, Kerouac will take material from Cassady — alongside that from a range of other sources stretching from Melville to B-movies — and mediate between continuity and change as he transforms it into text.

The tapes end with a silence, suggestive of continuity, as the main characters leave the scene of the action whilst the tape machine records the voice of a radio preacher. For a brief textual moment machine talks to machine in the absence of active human agency, as mechanical reproduction appears to be threatening to produce surrogate humans. The lack of distinct textual differentiation between recorder and radio indicates a possible loss of identity as the author removes himself from the text: “(long silence, Jack is gone, tape ends on a radio blues singer singing Baby ...) (TAPE CONTINUES WITH COLORED REVIVAL MEETING ON RADIO)” (285). This is a particularly ingenious move by the writer, who introduces himself through the voice of Duluoz in the first line of the tapes as “I'm an artist!” (151) and at the tapes’ conclusion uses the transcript of the radio broadcast to suggest that, in Hunt’s words, “the ‘I’ of the Spontaneous Prose writer can express himself with the logic of a single performance while at the same time admitting and preserving his multiplicity and freedom to evolve” (225).

Kerouac uses this textual moment of conversational silence to establish further his credentials as a writer of spontaneous bop prosody aware of the tradition with which he wishes to align himself. He uses his authorial editorship role to valorise jazz’s secular blues roots, its sacred gospel influence and its collective community base. The radio revival meeting is the longest direct transcription from a recorded source to be found in any of his work. Kerouac used the radio as an inspiration to find new musicalities for exploring beats, rhythms, sounds and inflections. The choice of the most basic form of blues, followed by gospel, as a form of
conventional closure to "Frisco: the Tape," foregrounds an improvisation of themes, characters and ideas connected to the social and economic marginality of the Beat writer and those African Americans with whose experience he identifies. It also completes a textual tape loop of anti-linearity in returning thematically to the transcript’s opening references to Mezz Mezzrow’s 1946 autobiographical Really the Blues. Mezzrow, a white jazz musician who admired African American culture, attempted to present the inflections of black speech in the form of a transcript that itself is indebted to the radio broadcasting of jazz (216–23). According to his co-author, Mezzrow “came to believe he has actually, physically turned black” (389), whilst in Kerouac’s transcript it is the text that has literally and metaphorically turned black. In the process, the tapes’ conclusion fixes in print what would otherwise be one of a plethora of unrecorded black social/sacred performances and links it, in Stephen Tyler’s words, to sacred art where the “text is the power of lines that connect. It is akin to drawing sacred, potent, magical figures, like mandala, which are always figurations in both senses—as things and metaphors” (281). In exploring the magical “lines that connect,” Kerouac has learned to hear the world differently and has been willing to effect a corresponding revision of his writing practice so that his spontaneous improvisatory form admits a broad range of popular culture into the textual historical memory.

The tape transcript revises the expectations defined by genres, shifting the borders of textual construction to include language that embodies its own form of poetic improvisation, demanding an extension of critical perspective. Davidson refers to the direct quoting of forms such as a radio transcript as a “textual insert” that produces a rhetorical shift in demanding a liberal critical response from the reader to the author’s definition of “the historicity of the present” (98). The Beat epiphanic yell of “Wow,” heard in the tapes and throughout Kerouac’s texts, echoes the spontaneous collective outburst of the Black Church. The congregation resembled a jazz-club audience in driving the performance on until, as

9 Mezzrow prefaces the dialogue section of his autobiography by explaining how the language used on the street was influenced by broadcasting: “The words logies and lo^eerose were coined so guys could refer to my gauge without having anybody else dig it, and some of our musician pals used to stick these hip phrases into their songs when they broadcast over the radio because they knew we’d be huddled around the radio in the Barbeque and that was their way of saying hello to me and all the vipers” (216–19). Kerouac shared aspects of Mezzrow’s contentiously romantic view of the black other. In this context it is interesting to note that his recording and transcribing of the “Frisco” tapes followed closely upon his 1951 black narrated novella, Pic.
Gayl Jones describes it, "the preacher and the congregation reach one purifying moment and a furious catharsis is fulfilled" (200). The radio preacher's holy yell of "I heeeeeeereeedd!" (414) is the open-ended closure of spontaneous performance that calls artistically for Kerouac's response, portraying Cody as the Holy Goof offering his own improvised performance as "he stood there in Holy San Francisco ... saying Yes! To every bit of it, one chorus, one solo after another, soft, sweet, harsh or high, the saint, the goof" (286).

The fractured perspectives presented by the originality of the tape transcript are subsumed within a black marginal culture of spontaneity that is able to link Cody and preacher symbolically, and, in the process, offer an aura of holiness that encompasses him as the "Saint, the Goof." Kerouac's preacher leaves the text as the radio's echo of "mother! mother!" suggestively invades the privacy of the Cassadys' home, haunting the blank page of textual aporia before Duluoz commences his "Imitations of the Tape" with a literal echo of childhood. The unity of scripting and voice is thus historicized in relation to its Quebecois origins on the margins of mainstream culture, and to its developmental empathy with marginalised black culture. Although the original voices on the 1952 tape may have been all but removed, their improvisatory form lives on in Kerouac's continuing influence on the shaping of the cultural and material history of America's counter-culture.

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10 Robert Holton draws attention to Kerouac's "desire to reinvest modern life and sexuality with a sense of the holy." The "lack of an adequate religious framework was, for Kerouac, an important problem not only in sexuality, but in all areas of life" (51). The tape's conclusion offers a fleeting synthesis of childhood Catholicism and Mother Church, Beat saintliness and black epiphanic chant. Continued uncertainty in this area led to Kerouac's exploration of Buddhism from 1952 onwards.
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