

JACK KEROUAC'S *OCTOBER IN THE RAILROAD EARTH*: WRITING AND  
MUSIC IN A JAM SESSION

Jack Kerouac's *October in the Railroad Earth*: Writing and Music in a Jam Session

César Alirio González Blanco

National University of Colombia

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DIRECTOR:

Norma Isabel Ojeda

Author's note

César Alirio González Blanco, Department of Languages, National University of

Colombia, Bogotá.

Code number: 445945

E-mail: [cagonzalezbl@unal.edu.co](mailto:cagonzalezbl@unal.edu.co)/[cegonzalezbl@gmail.com](mailto:cegonzalezbl@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

The current paper interprets the poetic work *October in the Railroad Earth* by the American writer Jack Kerouac from the perspective of the rhythm and its relation with jazz composition principles, one of Kerouac's most important influences. Studying the sound and the rhythm as an essential element in Kerouac's work allows a better understanding of his aesthetic proposal as a criticism of the society of his time. The interpretation of the piece is done by analyzing Kerouac's recordings with the musician Steve Allen entitled *Poetry for the Beat Generation*, published in 1958. The analysis and interpretation of the piece follows the tenets of literary analysis proposed by Michail Bachtine.

**Key words:** rhythm, Jack Kerouac, spontaneous writing, improvisation, jazz, Bebop.

## Resumen

Este estudio hace una interpretación de la obra *October in the Railroad Earth* del escritor norteamericano Jack Kerouac desde la perspectiva del ritmo y su relación con los principios estructurales del jazz, una de las principales influencias del autor. El estudio de la sonoridad y el ritmo como parte fundamental en la obra de Kerouac permitirá una mejor comprensión de su propuesta estética como una crítica a la sociedad de su momento. El análisis e interpretación de la obra se hizo teniendo en cuenta las grabaciones de Jack Kerouac con el músico Steve Allen, tituladas *Poetry for the Beat Generation* publicadas en 1958. La interpretación de la obra tiene como punto de partida las consideraciones propuesta por Mijail Bajtín.

**Palabras clave:** ritmo, Jack Kerouac, escritura espontánea, improvisación, jazz, Bebop.

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## Introduction

After World War II, the American society was the scenery of a contrast between a sense of Americanism represented by winning the war, technology and mass production, and a feeling of Americanism that placed its roots in ethnic diversity and dialog –dialog in all senses.

A group of the society, mainly artists from different disciplines, definitively did not agree with the model of America proposed by the mainstream. Among them, Jazz musicians redefined the genre and developed one of the most revolutionary musical kinds of the twentieth century: bebop, which influenced not only music, but also literature.

Writers in the movement known as the Beat Generation took bebop composition techniques as their main source to create their literature. Writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, among others, developed and applied different writing techniques based on jazz improvisation. Out of these poets, Jack Kerouac was the one who worked in depth on the creation of a technique based on jazz phrasing. The principles of his technique were published in 1953 under the title of *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*.

The present paper analyzes the rhythmic features of the piece *October in the Railroad Earth* (1953) by Jack Kerouac in relation to jazz composition as an assessment of his time.

To achieve this, a parallel of the basics of the study of rhythm in music and poetry was made. Thus, it was possible to recognize and characterize the rhythmical features of the poem and to look for their correspondence with jazz composition techniques.

The result of such an analysis shows how rhythm in the piece embodies the valuation made by Kerouac and how jazz composition elements allow him to make a strong critique of his time.

## Justification

Literature and music just make part of my life. I read and listen to music every single day the same way I sleep or go the bathroom or have breakfast. Therein lies the real value of this project: since music and literature make part of my life, a better understanding of them implies a better understanding of a part of myself and of my relation to the world. When I decided to study Philology and Languages my main goal was to read American literature, especially literature of the 1950's, in its original language. *October in the Railroad Earth* is one of my favorite pieces by Jack Kerouac; since I heard this recording the first time, I became fascinated. Much later, when I read the text, I understood that my fascination came from the rhythm of the language, and that music is inseparable from his prose.

Since Kerouac knows that bebop is music of reaction, his own way of reacting is expressed not only by some techniques taken from jazz improvisation, but it is also articulated in the sound qualities of his prose. The rhythm in Kerouac's work creates streams of sense that shed light on the valuation of the world proposed by the author. Thus, this work interprets the way Jack Kerouac elaborates his aesthetic proposal as a criticism of the American lifestyle of his time by means of the rhythmic qualities of his work *October in the Railroad Earth*. This piece plays an important role in Kerouac's imagery, since he considered it a special exercise of spontaneous writing, usually included in his live performances.

The relation between Kerouac's writing and jazz is not something new, it is well known and has been appreciated by many readers and critics as well as rejected by many other people. Even though some authors have suggested that sound and rhythm are important for a better appreciation of Kerouac's prose, I have not found, so far, any study of that nature. From an academic point of view, this is the contribution of this work to the field of studies about Jack Kerouac. I know that I might be just swimming on the surface of the problem and that a more in-depth analysis and could be made, but my intention is to open a door and to continue reading Kerouac's work with a better understanding of his aesthetic proposal in order to enjoy my readings more.



## Objectives

### General Objective

- To interpret rhythm in the work *October in the Railroad Earth* by the North American writer Jack Kerouac, in relation to the elements of Jazz improvisation of the 1940's and 1950's as a critical aesthetic proposal.

### Specific Objectives

- To characterize the way and the sense in which Jack Kerouac uses the features of the English language to create rhythm in his work *October in the Railroad Earth*.
- To identify the elements of jazz composition used by Kerouac in the piece *October in the Railroad Earth*.
- To analyze how jazz elements of composition make Kerouac's work meaningful as a critical aesthetic proposal in the American literature of the 1950's.

## Limitations of the Study

In the current paper the piece *October in the Railroad Earth* by Jack Kerouac is analyzed from the perspective of poetry and jazz music. To do this, the scansion of the poem is based on the recording of the piece included in *Poetry for the Beat Generation*, recorded in 1958 by Kerouac and the piano player Steve Allen, and released in 1959.

*October in the Railroad Earth* is part of a longer text entitled *The Railroad Earth*, written in 1953 and included in the traveling book *Lonesome Traveler* in 1960. In this paper the entire text (*The Railroad Earth*) is not going to be analyzed, but only the fragment *October in the Railroad Earth*, which was published separately in the *Evergreen Review* in the summer of 1958.

Although an approach to some jazz elements is made, this research is not focused on an aesthetical appreciation of Kerouac's work as a piece of jazz, but as a piece of literature in which some jazz composition principles structure meaning. The analysis of the interventions of the musicians who perform with Kerouac go beyond the current paper. *October in the Railroad Earth* is not going to be interpreted as a song or a musical piece, but as a literary work. The recordings are going to be used just as reference, when the analysis demands it.

## State of the Art

### **Bebop, the *White Negro* and the birth of *Spontaneous Prosody***

Since the conflict did not happen in its territory, the United States was in a privileged economical position at the end of the World War II. In general, there was a sensation of “American leadership” based on a mixture of “wartime and Cold war xenophobia” –seen as a kind of fear for “un-Americanism”– and a pride for America’s material prosperity among the population. Such a way of thinking was promoted as the “American Way of Life” and it was rooted in Corporate liberalism. Corporate liberalism is a thesis that proposes a “pact” among owners of corporations and high up government officials to become “the class of elites”; it “is a social and economic arrangement that has predominated in the United States since the 1920’s” (Belgrad, 1998: p.3). The American way of life, seen from the eye of Corporate liberalism, is characterized by what has been called the “culture of abundance” and “Progressive thinking”, which are a combination of scientifically managed work –mass production– with mass leisure and mass consumption. McCarthyism also played an important role in the background of this overview (Belgrad, 1998: p. 2).

While many people identified themselves with that way of thinking, a part of the society disagreed with it, and some of them even felt excluded from it. Action painters, Bebop musicians, Beat poets and many other artists differed with the mainstream and expressed their disagreement in their art works and the way they

explored their creation techniques. Artists proposed a third alternative to Mass Culture and High Culture through Spontaneity, whose goal was to show a possibility for awareness and radical social change (Belgrad, 1998: p. 16).

The "American way of life" of the Corporate Liberalism was not conceived for everyone, a part of the population was excluded from it by law: African American people could not live in the suburbs because the law did not allow them and did not have the same opportunities as whites did, so they were forced to live on the borderline. For three centuries African American people (AA) had no rights and, after the War of Secession in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they finally should have gotten their freedom, segregation laws kept excluding them.

Before World War II, big clubs in which the average white Americans met to listen to big bands and to dance swing were really popular. When the States entered the war, those big clubs closed down and the big bands disintegrated. Many AA men, including musicians, went to the war, fought and won it side by side with the white soldiers. Because of their participation in the war, AA people hoped that the American society would finally accept them with no exclusions; they felt that they had won that right. But after the war, segregation laws and exclusion continued and AA were not fully included in the society as they wanted. AA started to show their general discontent by coming back to their roots in order to reaffirm their culture.

The average American had always considered jazz as music for their own entertainment. Swing was very commercial at that time, usually music for dancing

in clubs, for white people. Some AA people started to reject swing because they felt that it had been whitened and that it was senseless: swing did not communicate their feelings anymore, so they did not identify with it anymore. AA musicians started to meet in small pubs located in AA neighborhoods. There, they used to perform in groups of four or five musicians. Later, this line-up would replace the typical big band line-up and would be known as a “combo”, a reduction of the word “combination”. During these sessions, musicians returned to the roots of jazz in order to redefine jazz itself, in order to reaffirm their culture and also to express their feelings towards American Society. Those musicians created jazz in new ways by means of polyrhythm, structure call-response and prosodic tone. The result of these sessions was the rise of jazz to one of its most elaborate points: Bebop.

Bebop was a new aesthetic form in which jazzmen in the 1940's and 1950's claimed a place in American society by means of improvisation. On the stage there used to be a notice that said: “please not to dance”. Bebop was a kind of jazz conceived to be listened, not to be danced. Since The American Way of Life was a “white” way of life, improvisation became a way of identification and a way to unify AA feelings. Bebop was the music of rebellion; it started as a reaction against the bland ballads and lush orchestras of the swing years and became a means of expression of a great part of the society (Jarazo, 2006).

At that time, white American bohemians, bums, burglars and outlaws began to frequent black's pubs. These whites identified themselves with jazzmen and AA

renegades because they also were excluded from the American Way of Life. Apart from that, these whites were fascinated with bebop. The result of the meeting of these two cultures were the *hipsters*. In his essay *The White-Negro* (1957) Norman Mailer wrote "it is on this break scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist. A Hipster was a white person who lived on the borderline of society, who liked bebop and knew about bebop because he understood the feelings expressed by it. Hipsters adopted jazzmen's slang as well as their appearance and customs. As Norman Mailer (1957) says, a Hipster was a white-negro and her/his language was the Hip, a combination of white and black American English in which the meanings of words came from the black community. Language was important because it was a way of identification, a way of feeling included in a group: the group of the excluded ones. Mailer says

"the source of hip is the Negro for he was living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries. But the presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American life is probably due to jazz and its knife-like entrance into culture" (Mailer, 1957, p.3)

A hipster is a kind of psycho-philosopher, an outcome of societies that do not offer spaces for catharsis. Hipsters were also young people who were horrified and petrified by the atomic bomb.

As Octavio Paz says, all societies have had moments of crisis in their foundation and every period of crisis starts or coincides with a criticism or updating of language. Every philosophy starts with an analysis of language, it is impossible to conceive a new philosophy without a new language, without an alteration of meanings. That is why almost every moment of decadence or crisis in the history

of human kind produced great poets at the same time (Paz, 1956). After WW II, there was a crisis in the American society and the signs of nonconformity was expressed in its language.

Hip was the language that AA and Hipsters shared, the bridge between the two cultures, the son of a society that had to stand the Great Depression, two world wars, the atomic bomb and, at that moment, the cold war. The meaning of words had mutated into a language of liberation; words expressed a philosophy of a new view of America. Hip was a way to question American society and a way to go into exile from that society and the exiled were the hipsters, the white-negroes.

The figure of hipsters began to make part of American culture and became their mass media heroes: James Dean represented hipsters' attitudes, when Marlon Brando performed Stanley in the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he took hip to movies and the audience became fascinated, and finally, Elvis Presley was a white with the movements and soul of a black. In his poem *America's New Trinity of Love*, Jack Kerouac wrote:

"Love is sweeping the country. While wars and riots rage all around the world, in a vortex that resembles the dying Dinosaur Age of Violence, here within her sweeter shores, America is producing a Revolution of Love. Three young men of exceptional masculine beauty and compassion and sadness have been upraised by its reaching hands (...) the new American hero, as represented by the trinity of James Dean, Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley, is the image of compassion in itself. And this makes him more beautiful than ever." (Jack Kerouac, *America's New Trinity of Love*, 1957).

The poets of the Beat Generation<sup>1</sup> took some influences from Bebop improvisation techniques and transposed them into the language of literature. Among these writers, Jack Kerouac was the one who worked more in depth in the development of a writing technique based on Bebop principles. The result was *spontaneous prosody*, a technique created by Kerouac during the early 1950's and "performed" in the creation of his most representative works. The most important points of this technique were published by Kerouac in 1953, at the request of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, under the title of "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose".

Although these poets made part of the big middle-class, they identified themselves with the excluded ones. This identification was a way to question the freedom created and imposed by Corporate Liberalism. The beat poets followed the example of the Hipsters and assumed the jazzmen's customs and slang. They found beauty in the diversity of American society, in the underground that the mainstream ignored.

In "Kerouac Among the Fellahin: On the Road to the Postmodern" (1995), Robert Holton proposes that beat poets' fascination for jazz and the excluded ones was a way to question the American white male. This stance redefined the relation between whites and African-Americans so much that, by the middle of the 1950's,

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<sup>1</sup> Many authors, even the "Beat" writers, agree that such generation actually never existed. This denomination was a "label" adopted by the mass media, taken from an article written by John Clellon Holmes in 1952. These writers were more like a group of friends who shared some points of view and influences, but from a literary point of view, their aesthetic proposals and techniques were really diverse (Duval, 2012: p. 19).



many young whites identified with the “surfaces of the African-American avant-garde” (Holton, 1995).

Holton's essay approaches the concept of “Fellahin”. According to Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac takes the term from Oswald Spengler's “The decline of the West” and refers to the descendants of “those groups marginalized by civilization during its ascendancy who remain when a culture, having risen to world dominance, ends its trajectory with a gradual collapse.” (Holton,1995). According to Spengler, says Holton, the history of the primitive Fellahin is parallel to that of the official world, and that history of the Fellahin is the “history of the great culture”.

In his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”, Kerouac proposes that the best way to allow the emergence of the deepest content of the mind is to transcribe its surface as immediately as possible. The way he can do it is the improvisational jazz developed by bebop musicians. This allows him to ridicule the authorities as well as to get out of the prison of the liberty imposed by the establishment.

Jazz was common place among beat poets, beboppers and poets in the American post-war shared a way to see the world. In his article “Influence of Jazz on The Beat Generation”, Mike Janssen reviews some of the approaches in which the writers brought jazz techniques into their poetry, creating what they called “bop prosody”. Allen Ginsberg, for instance, prolonged the poetic line according to his own breath, paused for air and then threw the other line, as a saxophonist or trumpeter does when playing his instrument. In *A Coney Island of the Mind*, Lawrence Ferlinghetti included seven poems written with the intention of being

read with jazz accompaniment. Gregory Corso wrote several poems spontaneously. Beat poetry generally has syncopated rhythm, similar to jazz (Janssen). For beat writers, jazz became an attitude towards life.

Beboppers and beat poets met in pub-bars to perform jazz and poetry. In those jazz readings, musicians also found new means to explore their music. The guitarist Bruce Lippincott said "We respond with our instruments as emotionally as possible to the words of the poem and also the pre-arranged form. Such as... for this many lines we will have the drums swelling and rolling and the bass will enter at the bottom and play bowed" (Charters, Ann, 1993, quoted by Janssen). Janssen remarks that just a few poets were musicians and that, on the other hand, musicians usually did not write poetry. Apart from that, just a few musicians took part in the reading sessions. In this sense, the influence flowed just one way, from jazz to poetry (Janssen).

Jazz improvisation and some of the greatest poets of the American literature were the substance of beats' aesthetics. Holton quotes Seymour Kim stating that Beat poets were "picking up not only the fascinating American-Negro rhythm and notes (of jazz) . . . but the spoken language as well." They took the "improvisations and verbal inventions of the Negro and incorporated them in their language and in their thinking" (Holton). Fernanda Pivano says that, while the American avant-garde of the middle 1950's was influenced by the New Dada, which was an European movement, the beat poets were influenced by jazz and by American writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Stephen Crane and their

biographies. For this reason, they are the first absolutely American movement since The Lost Generation (Pivano, 1960).

Although jazz was a great influence for the entire group, Jack Kerouac was the one who needed the most to reflect on it and to explore its possibilities in writing.

Orality has a significant place in Kerouac's production and his musical sensitivity was expressed in his everyday life. In his article of 1983 "Jazz and Jack Kerouac", Larry Kart places the importance of Kerouac's aesthetics on the fact that Kerouac had a wonderful ear for the speech of others and also to hear himself (Kart, 1983). Allen Ginsberg talks about the "Blues and Haikus"; he highlights the energy of the pronunciation, the deep color of the vowels and the "bite of the consonants." Ted Berrigan also acknowledges it in a *Paris Review's* interview, Berrigan introduces the interview underlining that "The most amazing thing about Jack Kerouac is his magic voice (...) it dictates everything, including this interview" (1968). The pronunciation and the rhythm of the daily speaking was the matter of his sonority. According to Ginsberg, Kerouac's style of poetic oratory comes from his special ability to "taste" the vowels and to appreciate the consonants and cadence of sounds (1989). In his Lecture "Jack and Jazz", Sam Charters also remarks Kerouac's ability to use his voice and says that he was all the time fooling, goofing and scatting with the voice, and that this is something that entered so directly into what he wrote (Charters, 1982). Kerouac's orality beats the rhythm of his art and, as Juan Carlos Garay says, that is more notorious when Jack's works

are read aloud because “there is a rhythm that beats the narration all the time” (Garay, 1994).

Kerouac's musical sensitivity allowed him to incorporate jazz techniques into his prose and his poetry in order to follow his ideal of being a jazz poet. Garay says that since *On the Road* is an errant novel without a fixed scenery, its essence is rather from time than space, and in that sense, it is closer to music. Such an idea is true in most of Kerouac's works in which movement is more important than the stillness. Pivano makes a parallel between bop improvisation and Kerouac's style. According to her, bop focuses on the interest of its compositions in several passages of the improvisations and in the same way, Kerouac's stylistic structure is based on variations on a main theme, which determines a period. Each period is based on an image that jumps from one place to another, like a musical variation (1995). Pivano says that Kerouac's compositions must be read in the language of jazz.

Because Kerouac's most admired musicians were Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonius Monk, his style has always been related to them. However, Larry Kart rejects such a statement and says that the rhythm created by Kerouac in his phrases, paragraphs and chapters is more like the one by Roger Beloit-Allen Eager and Brew Moore, they were both influenced by Lester Young, who also influenced generations of white musicians.

Improvisation was not limited to writing, performing was an important moment in the practice of jazz-poetry. The reading sessions were announced as “beat music”

and became very popular in the mid 50's. Bevilaqua states that Kerouac altered the texts while reading according to the mood of the public in the same way as Charlie Parker modified his scores in live shows (1996). The reading itself was an improvised performance in which Kerouac played not only his own works but also other literary pieces. Jazzman David Amram performed as a sideman with Kerouac for several years. His descriptions of the readings provide a good example of the content of the sessions; Amram explains the process of improvisation from the other end, the one of the sideman: "I never knew whether Jack was reading something that he made up on the spot or if it was something of his own. There may be something by Walt Whitman in there, or maybe a fragment of a poem by Hart Crane, or something from Shakespeare, Beowulf or Chaucer" and later "I would listen very hard to what he was reading and on the spot created music that the readings gave me ideas about." As jazz is a dialogue, each musician must listen carefully to the other in order to play something that complements what the others are talking about. That is what Amram did in the sessions "When he was reading I tried to do something to complement the music that was already there in his reading" (Amram).

Jazz made part of every aspect in Kerouac's life and he took it to each one of his creations. Amram says that Kerouac recorded the audio of the narration of the film "Pull my Lady" on the spot, while he was watching the movie. After the recording, Kerouac declined to record it again "He believed in spontaneity and the narration turned out to be the best part of the film." (Amram quoted by Larry Kartl). Adam Charters affirms that Kerouac loved jazz so much because he actually

understood the meaning of bebop in the history of America and the American society. Jack's love for jazz led him to create spontaneous writing. Bop helped Jack find what he was looking for and is an important element to understand what Kerouac was looking for (Charters). The result of all his reflections about the relation between spontaneity and writing is his *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*, published in 1953.

In the *Essentials* Kerouac expresses his thoughts about spontaneous writing and its relation with improvisation in jazz, because the method is openly influenced by music. Kerouac did not create the method since the beginning of his work, but developed it throughout the years. Ann Charters, who is considered Kerouac's official biographer because she was the only one who worked with him on that for some years, says in the documentary *What happened to Kerouac?* that he really believed in the idea of spontaneous prose and focused all his career into underlining it, performing it and justifying it.

Justin Trudeau makes an interesting interpretation of the method as a Genealogy of Performance that mixes past performance avant-garde practices with Kerouac's own contemporaneity (1995). As Kerouac's prose takes its technique from several postwar artistic genres, the *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* act as a kind of postwar artistic manifesto. Trudeau defines the Genealogy of Performance as a cultural artifact that collects and interprets past performances as well as their representations in order to bring us their repetitions. The performance is a contested concept and the role of the performer would be to find the errors in

society and reveal that there is another truth beyond what we know about that society.

Trudeau takes four concepts introduced by Joseph Roach to characterize the Genealogy of Performance in order to explain what the *Essentials* do. Displaced Transmission is the adaptation of historical practices to changing conditions. Surrogation is defined as a tendency to substitute one commodity for another by symbolic transfer. Orature, is a term between orality and literacy; it includes gestures, songs, dancing, processions, storytelling, proverbs, gossip, customs, rite and rituals. The last concept is Kinesthetic Imagination, which is a site of the memory placed in the body and that is articulated through physical expression (Roach cited by Trudeau, 1995).

As a Displaced Transmission, Kerouac would take his approach to sketching from the Impressionists of the 19th century. In the section that opens the *Essentials*, entitled "Set-Up", Kerouac writes "The object is set before the mind, either in reality. As in sketching (before a landscape or teacup or old face) or is set in the memory wherein it becomes the sketching from memory of a definite image-object." (Kerouac, *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*, quoted by Trudeau). By placing the "image-object" in the now of sketching, Kerouac could create meaning at several levels. The way Kerouac approached his individual objects was by sketching them to, later, place those sketches up against one another. Such approach reveals the attraction for direct observation that allows Kerouac to create "verbal pictures" within his creations (Trudeau). As a reaction towards the

established norms of representation of natural objects at their time, the Impressionists intended to create what Monet called “a spontaneous work rather than a calculated one”. To achieve such works, these painters would take their implements out of their studios to paint landscapes from direct observation. The Impressionist painters have always been related to Kerouac’s approach to discourse (Matt Theado, quoted by Trudeau). Kerouac’s ability for observation, a result of the displaced transmission, allowed him to bring a discourse into a different context.

The process of Surrogation is the key to understand the use of bop as a performative writing in spontaneous prose according to Trudeau. In the second part of Kerouac’s *Essentials*, entitled “Procedure”, he writes: “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. 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” (*Essentials*). Trudeau quotes Tim Hunt and Fiona Paton to explain the relation between improvisation in bop and literature. Hunt and Patton affirm that the role of the image-object in spontaneous prose could be compared to the role of the melody or theme in jazz. On the other hand, Kerouac’s syntax favors sounds, meter, and individual words that are used in jazz contexts and that are part of his own language. That way, Kerouac’s sound could be equivalent to the unique sound that a jazz musician makes. Paton remarks the way Kerouac improvises between the beginning and the end of an image (Hunt,



Paton quoted by Trudeau). In fact, this is one of Kerouac's ways of composing. In the interview with Ted Berrigan, Kerouac explains the method: "You remembered the line at the end (...) you lose your mind in the middle. That applies to prose as well as poetry. In prose you make the paragraph. Every paragraph is a poem. Jazz and bop, in the sense of a, say, a tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement's been made (...) That's how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind" (Kerouac in Ted Berrigan's interviews, 1968).

Trudeau affirms that the hybrid style of bebop is a result of the diversity of Harlem. Improvisation became a means of negotiating and redefining a new racial and inter-racial identity. Kerouac's spontaneous prose surrogates not only the technical level of bebop, but also its meaning as a racial social identity in which Kerouac negotiates his condition as a white. This process of identification is the one explained by Mailer in his *White-Negro*.

Kerouac's confessional style is also comparable to some of Stanislavski's techniques based on a mimetic stance, where the actor surrogates his/her own experiences onto the character in order to get extreme emotional qualities. In the same way as jazz improvisation, such method highlighted the particularity of the individual artist. Kerouac's *Essentials* show the ability to surrogate between the artistic genres of the postwar (Trudeau).

In Kerouac's Spontaneous Prose, *Orature* acts as a go-between orality and literacy where jazz is appropriated as a literary technique. In his *Method*, Kerouac writes: "No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas-but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases)--measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech" (*Essentials*). Trudeau points out that the syntactical tool that Kerouac chooses to separate his sketches and mental breaths in the space dash.

Kerouac's appropriation of bebop took him to go in depth into his interest about the sound and spontaneity, focusing his attention more and more on orality. Joseph Roach argues that orature does not accept the opposition between orality and literacy because they have developed each other interactively over the time (Roach quoted by Trudeau). The approach to oral speech as a method of postliteracy, allowed Kerouac to develop his own, unique sound, his own prosody. Trudeau highlights the need to go more in depth into the analysis of sound in Kerouac as a fundamental element of his aesthetics: "Sound and Kerouac's articulation of it become not just a prescribed way in which to read his work; it also becomes a call to listen to further understand its structure" (Trudeau).

From "Scoping", in the *Essentials*, Trudeau proposes the function of prosody in Kerouac's work not only as impulse towards the sound found in music, but also as the physical articulation of the effect between writer and reader. "Not 'selectivity' of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-

on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement (...) satisfy yourself first, then the reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind." (Kerouac, *Essentials*). Thus, the body becomes a place to perform. Kerouac believed –one of the many reasons why he empathized with Buddhism– that every single person contains the entire universe. That's why thoughts are limitless and contain the rhythm of the universe itself. Then, prosody is a way to release the limit between body and mind and to transmit sensations to the reader.

Kerouac rejected that division of body and mind; instead, the reader would perceive, by the "telepathic shock", the writer's feelings at the moment of writing. Reader and writer sharing sensations is what Ann Douglas calls "culture of intimacy". Douglas explains that intimacy is a means to inspire the readers to slow down instead of going too fast:

"Kerouac makes the reader his confidant, taking him into his most private thoughts and experiences, into areas which the world sometimes seems to prohibit us from sharing with anyone—our feelings about our bodies, our self-imaginaries," (Douglas quoted by Trudeau).

Thus, Kerouac's prose would be a textual meditation of the body, a Kinesthetic Imagination.

Fernanda Pivano argues that the *Essentials* allude to a physical reality (Pivano, p.15). The orgasm is the axis of the philosophy of jazzmen and bebop and

its influence plays an important role in the *Essentials*. When Kerouac talks about the "Mental State", he writes:

"If possible write "without consciousness" in semi-trance (as Yeats' later "trance writing") allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so "modern" language (...) and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm" (*Essentials*).

Trudeau compares the use of orgasm in Kerouac and daydreaming in the Surrealists as places of the memory of the body. Writing allowed Kerouac to achieve a climax over and over, such the reader should have while reading.

This way, the work of art is not separated neither from the precise moment in which it was made nor from the presence of the artist; the moment itself makes part of the nature of the work. As examples, Trudeau brings Action Painters as William de Kooning, Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock, who began to consider the canvas as a place to act rather than reproduce or analyze or express an object. Pollock recognized the effect of placing the canvas of the floor and the way his own body interacted with it "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" (Pollock quoted by Trudeau). Kerouac was aware of the technical contributions of Action Painters and admired Pollock as an artist. But he was also very aware of his own body in relation to his writing sessions. John Clellon Holmes says that Kerouac got in shape for a couple days before one of his long writing sessions, he slept a lot, went jogging –Kerouac was an athlete–, he ate so well "knowing he was going to write until he dropped" (Clellon Holmes in the documentary "What Happened to

Kerouac?", 1986). Trudeau stands that the memory of the body would make the watcher and the reader feel Pollock walking around his canvas as well as Kerouac in front of his typewriting. That conception of the piece of art would refute the comment by Truman Capote –and that was a common place among Kerouac contemporaries– who affirmed that Kerouac's writing was simply typing rather than writing.

Kerouac's relation with music in general and jazz in particular has been analyzed and interpreted from several approaches: from the cultural meaning of his technique to the technical features as well. But sound relations in Kerouac's works have not been studied yet and, since Kerouac wanted to be considered a jazz poet and the primal matter of a musician is the sound and rhythm, studies of this nature are a must in order to understand and enjoy more Kerouac's works. This approach intends to open that possibility just for the pleasure of reading-listening to Kerouac's works as a jam session where music and literature meet to dialogue, to create art.

On October 7th, 1955, the famous Six Gallery Reading took place in San Francisco. There, Allen Ginsberg read his poem "Howl" for the very first time: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterically naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix...". That night other poets including Michael McClure and the Buddhist poet Gary Snyder also read their works on stage and Jack Kerouac was introduced by Ginsberg as a "marvelous writer". Snyder evokes the session "...Jack read long

passages of *October in the Railroad Earth* and it was a wonderful experience (...) and then we started to talk about Buddhism" ("What happened to Kerouac?"). Kerouac describes the night in a passage of *The Dharma Bums*, but in the novel Ray Smith –the personification of Kerouac– does not read, he just collects the money for buying more wine and is fascinated by listening to the others' poems and talking about Buddhism with Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder). *October in the Railroad Earth* was first published in the *Evergreen Review* in the summer of 1958 and is actually a passage of a longer piece called "The Railroad Earth", included in the travel book *Lonesome Traveler* (1960). In the introductory notes of the book Kerouac writes about his definition of it: "Lonesome Traveler is a collection of published and unpublished pieces connected together because they have a common theme: traveling (...) It's scope and purpose is simply poetry, or, natural description". (*Road Novels*, p.627)

Although *October in the Railroad Earth* is not one of Kerouac's most "well-known", it plays an important role in Kerouac's production. It was originally written in 1952 (Bevilacqua) in San Francisco, when Kerouac was working as a brakeman at the Southern Pacific Railroad. That was an important moment in Kerouac's creative process because he had started to work on his method of spontaneous writing in 1951 and from that year until 1953, when he wrote the *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*, he produced some of his most remarkable works. Such production includes novels *On the Road*, *Visions of Cody*, *Doctor Sax* and *The Subterraneans* among others. The quality of his early works is admired not only by critics, but also by his closer friends; John Clellon Holmes, says about Kerouac's

later novels says “the difference in the prose in the novel *Big Sur*, which I really consider tired, and the vitality of prose in the early short stories such as *October in the Railroad Earth* is an enormous difference” (King of Beats). That was a moment when Kerouac had discovered his own voice -beaten by jazz- and was testing his method in several ways.

Kerouac considered *October* a representative piece that embodies his deepest feelings about artistic creation. In the interview with Ted Berrygan, he is explaining how the way of a guy telling a “long wild tale to a bunch of men in a bar” generates certain rhythm in order to create impact and, as an example of that rhythm, he brings *October* to the conversation: “Incidentally, as for my bug against periods, that was for the prose in *October in the Railroad Earth*, very experimental, intended to clack along all the way like a steam engine pulling a one-hundred-car freight with a talky caboose at the end, that was my way at that time and it still can be done if the thinking during the swift writing is confessional and pure and all excited with the life of it (...) Goddamn it, FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings.” (Paris Review).

In 1957 Kerouac and his pianist friend, Steve Allen, performed together a couple nights and, after that, decided to record some tracks. The result was *Poetry for the Beat Generation*, released in 1959, but recorded in a single session and in a single take for each piece in 1958.

## Referential and Theoretical Framework

### Rhythm in poetry and music

The *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose* was the result of Jack Kerouac's dialogue with his contemporary world, with the political, economic, sociological and artistic environment of his time. This "manifesto" –as Trudeau calls it– and the works created by following its principles, involve Kerouac's writing technique as well as his "reading" of the world, his way to critically face the "American way of life" proposed, accepted and followed by the mainstream. This way, Bakhtin's concerns about a literary piece are really useful in order to analyze and interpret Kerouac's work. In his considerations about the treatment of the literary work, Michail Bakhtin places the text as a part of the history and the society. In turn the history and the society are *texts* read and evaluated by the author. The way the author makes part of those texts is by rewriting them. (Julia Kristeva quoted by Pouliquen, 1992: p. 16).

Literary work is produced due to three constitutive elements: the author-creator, the material piece and the aesthetic object. The author-creator is perceptible in the text because it is he/she who has made a unique evaluation of the world, a particular interpretation of the world. However, Bakhtin affirms that the reality proposed by the literary work is not completely new. What is original in the proposal of the text is the particular selection and organization of the verbal material in the work, and the ethical valuation contained in it. What provides



coherence to the piece is a process of distancing, in which the author-creator assumes himself/ herself as an observer who takes distance from practical life and his/her acting in it, in order to build an ethical singular meaning in which the world appears in an original way (Bakhtin, 1975).

To explain the nature of a literary piece, Bakhtin proposes the concepts of *Architectural form* and *Compositional form*. The former is an evaluation of the world and the latter is more related to the "verbal material", to the way the author uses language to create meaning; it is an expression of the former. Both forms are articulated; the Compositional form is not possible without the Architectural form (Pouliquen, 1992: p. 15):

The Architectural form consists of a particular interpretation of reality made by the author-creator in order to understand an aspect of the world. Such interpretation consists of a second interpretation of a previous ethical or political interpretation of systems of the world birthed within a community (Pouliquen, 1992: p. 7). This author's interpretation is made from the perspective of his/her knowledge and experience (scientific, ethic, aesthetic). This interpretation is produced from the standpoint of a *weltanschauung*, an ideology, which is presented in a very visible way but destabilized by elements of meaning, apparently not controlled by the system, but perceived by the reader. This new ethical-political judgment is the contribution of the text to culture (Pouliquen, 1992: p. 7).

The present analysis of the Architectural form in Kerouac is supported by the concept of *spontaneity*, taking into account that it embodies Kerouac's criticism

in a wide sense. Spontaneity is conceived here by considering Daniel Belgrad's study *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (1998). The analysis of the Compositional form is based on the characterization and interpretation of the rhythm in relation to poetry and jazz as compositional elements, that is, as verbal material.

As was explained above, the ideology that predominated in the United States since the 1920s was the Corporate liberalism. The American way of life, seen from the point of view of Corporate liberalism, is characterized by what has been called "culture of abundance" and "Progressive thinking", which is a combination of scientifically managed work (mass production) with mass leisure and mass consumption. McCarthyism also played an important role in the background of this landscape (Belgrad, 1998: p. 2).

The new valuation of this situation, the proposal made by action painters, jazz musicians, beat poets and many other artists was based on spontaneity, or better, it was spontaneity. Corporate liberalism promoted an ontology and epistemology of "objectivity", which understood "rationality" as a divorce of objective truths and subjective perceptions. It created an opposition between body and mind. In contrast, spontaneity constituted an aesthetics of metaphysics whose goal was awareness, consciousness. Spontaneity proposed the "rational" as a perspective defined by the interaction of body, emotions and intellect. This aesthetics of metaphysics proposed by spontaneity could be summarized as "intersubjectivity" and "body-mind holism" (Belgrad, 1998: p. 5).

Body-mind holism not only proposed the dialogue between intellect and emotions, objectivity and subjectivity, but was also rooted in the notion of “kinesthetics”. Kinesthetics sets a part of memory located in the human body and played through its physical expressions. It means that “body motions constitute a repository of unconscious knowledge”, that “ultimately led to experimental collaborations between poetry, painting and other media” (Belgrad, 1998: p. 11).

In bebop and spontaneous writing kinesthetics is related to *prosody*, which refers to features of oral communication that are not expressed by the word symbol, but by its body action. Prosody affects aspects such as timbre, tempo, pitch, rhythm, gesture and inflection. It is especially important in what Belgrad calls the “Poetics of Presence” (1998: p. 196), in which performance plays an important role. Physical presence places the performer and the listener in a position of dialogue, which is directly related to *intersubjectivity*.

Intersubjectivity conceives reality as a possibility that merges through a conversational dynamic. It implies a respect for the position of “the other”. Dialogue also implies listening. In this sense, intersubjectivity is related to the concept of *heteroglossia*. Heteroglossia means the multiplicity of voices or selves representing different orientations and world views. Heteroglossia is possible due to the closed relation between spontaneous art and ethnic diversity. Belgrad (1998: p. 40) remarks that most producers of spontaneous art were first or second generations of Americans who came from positions socially or geographically remote from institutional centers of cultural authority. Kerouac, for example, “attributed his

success with spontaneous composition to the fact that he had heard the sounds of the English language without knowing the meaning of words<sup>2</sup> (Belgrad, 1998: p. 42).

Belgrad highlights that:

“The social significance of spontaneity can be appreciated only if this aesthetic practice is understood as a crucial site of cultural work: that is, a set of activities and texts engaged in the struggle over meanings and values within American society. The cultural stance embodied in the art of spontaneity –and communicated through it– constituted a distinct third alternative, opposed to both the mass culture and the established high culture of the postwar period” (Belgrad, 1998: p. 1).

Since the present study analyzes and interprets the Compositional form in *October in the Railroad Earth* in relation to the elements of jazz improvisation, it is necessary to draw relations between music and poetry. Douglas Copland juxtaposes the structure of the novel and the structure of classical music.

In the first place, Copland affirms that in both music and the novel, events happen in time. The difference would be that events in music are much more abstract than they are in literature (1939: p.25). In terms of structure, Copland relates the division of the chapters in the novel, with the movements in classical music. In the novel, intellectual ideas –Octavio Paz would say “poetic images” in poetry– are expressed by words, which are meaningful sounds; in music those “ideas” are musical images, and are expressed by the notes. In music there would also be some smaller structures which would be similar to the paragraphs in the novel, but there is no name for such structures (Copland, 1939:118). Although

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<sup>2</sup> Kerouac came from a French-Canadian family and only spoke French until the age of 6.

Copland points out that these relations must be considered just in a general way, they are very useful as a starting point.

The first, the most innate of the four elements of music is *rhythm*. According to Copland, most historians agree that, if there were some kind of starting point, music might have started through rhythm (Copland, 1939: p. 48). Every author starts from a musical idea and, in many cases, such idea starts from some kind of rhythm (Copland, 1939: p. 39). Rhythm is one of the elements that allow cohesion and coherence in music, part of the intentions and meanings of the piece fall on rhythm.

In poetry, rhythm has a similar meaning. Rhythm can be considered as part of the compositional form in the sense that it organizes the sonorous matter, but it also makes part of the architectural form in the way that it creates tensions, and emotions (Bajtín, 1975: p. 26).

Octavio Paz defines a poem as a group of phrases founded on rhythm. The basis of the poetical phrase is not meaning, but rhythm (Paz, 1956: p. 51). Within the poem, words and images attract and reject each other by following rhythmical principles. Thus, rhythm highlights the poem from the other literary forms (Paz, 1956: p. 56). This way, rhythm is not just measure, but, as Bakhtin suggests, meaning as well. In poetry, it is not possible to separate rhythm from meaning, because the writer's intentions and the valuation of the poem are contained in rhythm.

In a wider sense, society and the universe itself are based on rhythm. Rotation and translation movements –which imply years, seasons, day and night, growth of plants, etc. –breath, heart beat, menstruation period, harvests, reproduction cycles, all of them depend on specific rhythms. In the same way, every society has its own attitude, its own philosophy and its own vision of the world, all of them, again, are contained in the rhythm of each society (Paz, 1956: p. 59-61). The poet takes the words of his society to create his poetry, so the rhythm of his poetry contains the rhythm of his society.

Some features of the language adopted by the Beat poets, the Hip, were explained before, but a better understanding of this language, in terms of rhythm, depends on more in-depth knowledge of stress and rhythmic qualities of the English language. Stress plays an important role in English semantics and phonetics; it affects the stressed vowel as well as the syllable, the entire word and even sentence meaning, sound and rhythm (Solé, 1991: p. 147).

At the segmental level, stress affects syllables and the entire word in several ways. Stressed vowels attract adjacent consonants, so both suffer changes in the presence or absence of stress. In stressed syllables vowels and consonants have a full quality of sound. The same vowels and consonants placed in unstressed syllables undergo a considerable process of reduction. Consonants in stressed syllables tend to be voiced, while consonants in unstressed syllables tend to be voiceless. Apart from the quality of the sound, in the segmental level, stress also affects the pitch, duration and loudness of a syllable. In stressed syllables, the

pitch is higher, the duration is longer and the volume tends to be louder than they are in unstressed syllables (Solé, 1991: p.147-150).

At the suprasegmental level, stress determines the syntactical function of words in the sentence. Since the function of stress in the sentence is to highlight the information, it occurs only in those words whose semantic meaning is the most powerful; they are called Content words –nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Unstressed words are called Grammatical words; that is, words that only express relations between words but that do not have a semantic charge –they are articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, conjunction). On the other hand, the choice of stressing some words rather than others depends on the context and the intentions of the speaker. This way, some words can change their syntactical function according to their stress (Solé,1991: p.151-152).

Finally, stress is also connected to speaking rate or *tempo*. Tempo is related to speaking style: the more careful the style, the slower the tempo and the more stressed the speech; the more informal the style, the faster the tempo and the less the stress (Solé, 1991: p. 152)

In terms of rhythm, English has special rhythmical features that affect meaning, pronunciation, speaking rate and other characteristics of spoken language. In *The Intonation of American English* (1945), Pike, establishes a distinction between two kinds of rhythm in languages. *Syllable-timed rhythm* refers to those languages in which syllables tend to occur at regular intervals of time, so each syllable tends to have the same length. That's the case of Spanish. *Stress-*

*timed rhythm* is a quality of those languages in which the stress, not the syllables, tends to occur at regular intervals. In that sense, length of syllables varies because the number of unstressed syllables between two stressed syllables may also vary. English is a *stress-timed language* (Solé, 1991: p. 153).

This attribute is called *isochrony* (when the stress occurs at regular intervals of time). Some factors are involved in order to keep isochrony in stress-timed languages. According to Solé, “those factors which affect the distribution of stress to ensure rhythmic alliteration” would be.

- a. dropping some stress to prevent too many stresses coming together.
- b. Stress addition in order to avoid a long succession of unstressed syllables.
- c. Stress movement to a preceding strong syllable if two stresses are next to each other.

Apart from these factors, Solé adds some factors “which affect adjustments in the length of sounds to keep a constant time interval between stresses”. Those factors are:

- a. Durational variation in the stressed syllables depending on the number of unstressed syllables in the foot<sup>3</sup>.
- b. Reduction processes that affect unstressed syllables: vowel reduction, consonant weakening, elision, assimilation.
- c. Weak forms (Solé, 1991: p.157).

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<sup>3</sup> In English, rhythm is organized into *feet*; feet depend on stress. Basics of metrical system of stress-timed languages will be introduced further.



Tempo also affects rhythm in stress-timed languages. The speaking rate does not affect the duration of stressed and unstressed syllables proportionally: the faster the speech, the more stressed-timed the rhythm is (Solé, 1991: p.157).

In poetry, the process of analyzing the rhythmical organization and sense of the poem verse by verse, line by line is called *scansion*. Because of rhythmic characteristics of English language, each unit of rhythm is called a “foot” and is the basic unit of meter. Meter refers to patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line. In scansion, a stressed syllable is conventionally noted as “X” and an unstressed syllable is noted as “/”. According to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, the metrical feet can be classified as:

Iamb (X /): A two-syllable foot in which the first syllable is unstressed and the second one is stressed.

Trochee (/ X): A two-syllable foot, this time with one syllable that is stressed and one that is not.

Spondee (/ /): A two-syllable foot, both of them are stressed.

Anapest (X X /): A foot with three syllables, two stressed syllables followed by one unstressed syllable.

Dactyl (/ X X): A foot with three syllables, one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables

Other much less frequent feet in English versification are:

Pyrrhic or Dibrach (X X): A two-syllable foot, both syllables are short and unstressed.

Amphibrach (X /X): A three-syllable foot in which a stressed syllable is surrounded from two unstressed syllables.

Tribrach (XXX): A three-syllable foot in which all syllables are unstressed.

Antibacchius (/X): A three-syllable foot in which the first two syllables are stressed and the third one is unstressed.

In order to get feet versatility, what changes the mechanical ka-boom verse into poetry is how the poet uses occasional variation in meter to emphasize the meaning of the poem. So the poet can substitute one or several feet according to the effect he wants. *Substitutions* “refer to the insertion of metrical feet other than the norm into a line in a particular meter” (Wilson, 2010, p. 3). Another source used to achieve dynamism is *Variation*; it is, “an alteration in a line that does not typically disrupt the typical pattern” (Wilson, 2010, p. 4). Although there are many kinds of variations, Wilson highlights three kinds, which are the most common:

these include **headless** or clipped lines (where the first unstressed syllable of an iambic line is deleted); **broken-backed** lines (where an unstressed syllable in the middle of the line is deleted); **feminine endings** (where an extra unstressed syllable appears at the end of the line); **feminine caesuras** (where an extra unstressed syllable is inserted in the middle of a line after a significant, punctuated pause; note that this could be defined as an anapestic substitution, but need not be) (Wilson, 2010, p. 4).

Timothy Steele points out that scansion divides verses according to units of rhythm, not units of sense. This way, the division of feet sometimes coincides with division of words, but sometimes it doesn't. On the other hand, scansion “determine(s) whether a syllable is metrically stressed or not by comparing it solely to the other syllable or syllables in the foot in which it appears. We do not weigh it against all the other syllables in the line or the poem” (Steele).

An important effect to be considered is the *elision*, noted as “>” in scansion, or sometimes grammatically noted by the apostrophe ('). Elision is the contracting

of two syllables into one for the convenience of the meter. Two conditions are necessary for elision to happen:

The first involves adjacent vowels, which may be either within the same word or facing one another across the gap between words (...)

x / x / > / x / x /  
Some frail memorial still erected night  
(Thomas Grey, *Elegy Written in a Country*)

(...)

The second condition (...) concerns pairs of lightly stressed vowels that appear in the same trisyllabic or polysyllabic word and that are separated by one of the liquid consonants ("l" or "r") or by one of the nasal consonants ("n" or "m"). In such cases, poets may, if they wish, syncopate away the first light vowel.

x / x / x / x / x /  
From strong Patroclus' hand the jav'lin fled  
(Alexander Pope, *The Iliad of Homer*)

(...)

It (elision) reflects both natural speech (...) and conventions of a purely literary sort (Steele).

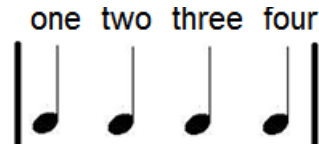
Line ending also determines rhythm in the poem. There are two basic kinds of line ending: *end-stopped* and *enjambment*. The former is the kind of line end determined by a natural pause, the latter is the one in which the sense of the verse is syntactically incomplete at the end of a line, so the meaning runs-over from one poetic line to the next.

An example of enjambment is found in John Donne's

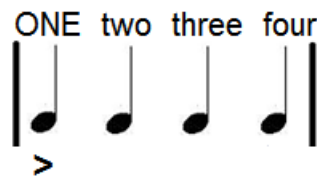
On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will  
Reach her, about must and about must go,  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.

Stress and rhythm are also closely related in music. The metrical unit of rhythm in music is the *bar*. The duration of segments of time is represented by the musical notes (whole note, half note, quarter note, etc), whose value may vary according to the tempo (the speed at which music is played). These notes are

grouped in the bar, so the bar is the way in which rhythm is scanned in music. Copland illustrates scansion in music with the following example. In a simple beat like one, two, three, four, one two three, four, one two three four, etc. each group of beats (one, two, three, four) is a 4/4 bar, and is represented as:



In this example, only the beat is set, but there is no rhythm unless some of these notes are stressed according to the musical sense of the phrase (Copland, 1939: p. 52). It is the same in spoken language and poetry; to get the rhythm it is necessary to stress the syllables properly according to the sense and intention of the phrase. In music, stress (noted as ">" above or below the stressed note) is usually marked in the first beat: ONE, two, three, four, ONE, two three, four, etc., and the scansion of this bar would be:

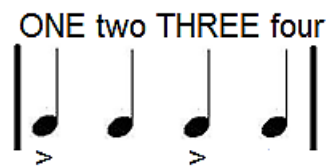


This would be a basic process of scanning a very simple rhythm, but there are more complex rhythms, usually created by altering the place of stress within the bar. On the other hand, it is possible to create polyrhythms: several independent rhythms combined simultaneously.

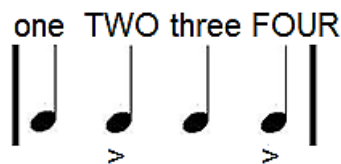
The most specific examples of polyrhythmic music can be found in Cuban music or jazz music. Rhythm in jazz is laid in the *basso continuo*, which acts like

the basis around which the other rhythms are created. In “ragtime”, the ancestor of jazz, the stress of the bar was set in the first and the third notes (ONE, two, THREE, four). Primitive jazz music made a simple change setting the stress in the second and the third notes (one, TWO, three, FOUR) and this small change created a whole new interesting scope of rhythmical possibilities (Copland, 1939: p. 57).

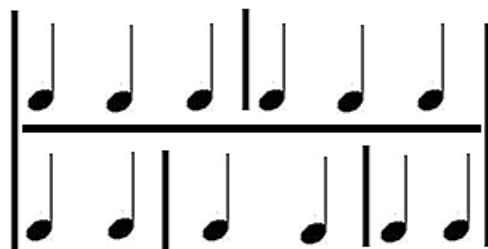
Ragtime bar:



Jazz bar:



Copland also remarks that not all jazz music is polyrhythmic, but most jazz musical arrangements are based on polyrhythms. The most independent polyrhythms are those in which the first time of the bars does not coincide. In those cases, a bar would look more or less like this (Copland, 1939: p. 57):



According to J. Berendt, the multiplicity of rhythms in jazz take the *beat* as point of reference; it is a uniform rhythm that supports the whole piece. The rhythmical order in which the piece is organized is based on the beat. Music can be produced from two dimensions of time: ontological time and psychological time. The former is objective and is related to meter, continuity and measure –this is the European conception of time in music. The latter is the rhythm of experience, of life, based on inner individual melodies and rhythms –the conception of time belonged to primitive towns. The perception of time and rhythm in jazz is rooted in what jazz musicians call *swing*<sup>4</sup>. Swing refers to both dimensions of time at the same time; it is related to the African sense of rhythm, which experiences time and rhythm through the body. This perception of time, which conceives rhythm as an individual experience (swing), is what allows jazz to be polyrhythmic in its essence, it is what produces the movement of stress along the bar; it is what gives jazz its precision; it is what creates and solves rhythmical tension between melody rhythm. Rhythm in jazz is closely related to swing, but swing is impossible to define with words (Berendt, 1959: p. 300-311).

Bebop musicians identified with the aim of other spontaneous artistic movements that wanted to develop an alternative to Corporate Liberalism by means of intersubjectivity and body-mind holism. Beboppers set the values of these principles in what LeRoi Jones called the African American musical elements. These elements are antiphony –or the call-response structure that is

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<sup>4</sup> The word *swing* has two connotations in jazz. One refers to a kind of jazz that was the most influential form of jazz from the 1920s to the 1940s. The other meaning is related to the perception of rhythm in jazz, and is expressed in each element of jazz composition.

considered further on—, polyrhythm and prosodic tone. Bebop was a kind of music played to be listened to rather than danced. This quality was expressed in its polyrhythmic complexity, fast tempo and high energy, which were expressions of body-mind holism and were connected to the sense of consciousness as well as the demands of recognition that African American people started to express through music (Belgrad, 1998: p.180).

Jack Kerouac was aware of all these features of music, poetry and linguistics. David Amram, who “was blessed to play with” jazz musicians such as Charlie Mingus, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk or Miles Davis, was also Kerouac’s sideman for several years in his jazz-poetry readings. Amram remarks Kerouac’s inner musicality and understanding of music:

When we worked together, aside from the fun we had, we shared an interest in finding new ways of combining the spoken words with music, without any preconceived formulas. We worked together with mutual respect and understanding of jazz tradition. Always listen. Always follow one another and always go with what the moment tells you to do (...) My music and Jack’s reading and even his occasional singing of the words were done differently each time (Amram, 2002: p. 20).

All of Kerouac’s knowledge of the features of rhythm is contained in his *Essentials of Spontaneous Prose*. There, Kerouac proposes the rhythmical conception of the poem expressed in the use of punctuation, the cadences of spoken language, rhetorical patterns of stress and rhythm, and the rhythmical possibilities of English as stress-timed language:

“**METHOD** No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas-but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown

phrases)--"measured pauses which are the essentials of our speech"--"divisions of the sounds we hear"--"time and how to note it down." (William Carlos Williams).

(...)

**SCOPING** Not "selectivity" of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang! (the space dash)-Blow as deep as you want-write as deeply, fish as far down as you want, satisfy yourself first, then reader cannot fail to receive telepathic shock and meaning-excitement by same laws operating in his own human mind.

(...)

**TIMING** Nothing is muddy that runs in time and to laws of time-Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue-no revisions (except obvious rational mistakes, such as names or calculated insertions in act of not writing but inserting)". (Kerouac, 1953).

Previous concepts of rhythm show that it is an essential element in both music and poetry, and they are used to analyze rhythm in *October in the Railroad Earth* as well as the valuation of the world contained in such a rhythm.



## Jack Kerouac's *October in the Railroad Earth*: Writing and Music in a Jam Session

*"I want to be considered a jazz poet blowing  
a long blues in a jam session on Sunday"  
Jack Kerouac, Mexico City Blues*

*October in the Railroad Earth* is a poem placed in a middle point between narration and poetry<sup>5</sup>. Throughout the poem, there are some elements that make the reader feel a sort of narration: the scene takes place along the Third Street in San Francisco, the voice is sometimes that of a narrator, but sometimes it is a poetic id, and there seem to be some "actions" taking place during an October Saturday afternoon-night. However, this narration actually does not have a starting point, a climax or an ending. On the contrary, there is no unfolding of actions either, but "natural description" –as Kerouac calls it– in which images are sketched one by one, creating a synchronous rather than a linear unfolding, as if everything were happening at the same time. In fact, there is a sensation that everything is in a continuous climax. Each sketch has its own rhythm, so rhythm changes along with the sketching of images, generating multiple rhythmical changes throughout the poem. This way, rhythm contains the meaning of the piece. These elements (variation of the voice, variety of places in which something seems to happen,

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<sup>5</sup> In the introductory note of the *Road Novels*, Douglas Brinkley, editor of the compilation, considers the texts belonging to *The Lonesome Traveler* as essays. The poet John Clellon Holmes, Kerouac's friend, conceives *October in the Railroad Earth* as a short story. In the "Author's note" of *Lonesome Traveler*, Kerouac writes: "The Lonesome Traveler is a collection of published and unpublished pieces connected together because they have a common theme: traveling (...) Its scope and purpose is simply poetry, or, natural description".

sketching of images and the role of rhythm) place *October in the Railroad Earth* (ORE) between poetry and narrative. The rhythmic changes of images can be observed and analyzed in features such as phrasing, timing, meter, rhetorical figures and syntax.

Phrasing is directly related to the length of verses. When the voice is describing places –only places–, verses tend to have less than seven feet and their length vary between one and six feet<sup>6</sup>. Because of stressed-timed rhythm, speaking rate can be determined by calculating the number of feet and the number of stressed and unstressed syllables in the verse: the more feet in a verse the faster the speech may be. Thus, the speaking speed of images related to places –without people– may vary from very slow to medium. When images of people interact with sceneries, the phrasing changes: verses tend to be longer, they have between seven and nine feet. As a consequence, speaking rate is slightly faster. When the voice describes people's activities of people or interaction among people –dialogues, etc.–, the length of the verses can go beyond ten feet and they can have even more than twenty feet. The speaking speed in these verses is very fast.

The opening sketch of the poem illustrates these changes. In the first verses, the speaking speed increases gradually according to the images sketched; then, it continues changing. The sketch starts with the description of an alley in San Francisco. The first three verses, which introduce the place, are written in

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<sup>6</sup> The division of the poem in verses and feet was done by listening carefully, once and again, the recording of *October in the Railroad Earth* by Jack Kerouac with Steve Allen.

regular feet. The first is a trochaic pentameter with a pyrrhic substitution in the fourth foot; it introduces the alley.

I / > T I / x I / > T I x P x I / x I (5 feet)  
1. There was a little alley in San Francisco

The next verse is a trochaic hexameter with two dactylic substitutions in the second and the fourth verses. It continues placing the alley in the city.

I / > T x I / x D x I / > T I / x x I / T x I / T x I (6 feet)  
2. back of the Southern Pacific station at Third and Townsend

The third verse is the trochaic verse that describes some sensations about the alley. In order to keep the trochaic rhythm, the first foot is headless and there is a dactylic substitution in the last foot. At the end of this verse, images of people interacting with the place appear for first time, so the verse goes up to nine feet and a half, but keeps the same speaking speed as the first two verses, the poem is still describing the place.

1/2 T T T T T T T D  
I x I / > I / x I / x I / x I / x I / x I / > I / x I / x x I (9 1/2 feet)  
3. in redbrick of drowsy lazy afternoons with everybody at work in offices

The fourth verse continues describing sensations but, since the previous verse mentioned people at work, the sensations of this verse are not produced by the alley, they are produced by the people themselves. Now it is not the rhythm of the place but the rhythm of the people the one that orients the sketch: although the verse has six feet, the speaking speed starts going slightly faster than in the first

three verses. This change produces a rhythmic irregularity: now the trochaic rhythm has disappeared and different kinds of feet have replaced it –anapest, amphibrach and tribrach.

A
Amp.
T
Tri.
Amp.
T

|x x / | x / > | / x | x x x | x / x | / x | (6 feet)

4. in the air you feel the impending rush of their commuter frenzy

The fifth verse describes part of the activities of the commuter. The verse has fifteen irregular feet: iamb, anapest, pyrrhic, dactyl and trochee. Because of its length, the speaking rate of this verse is much faster than it is in the previous ones<sup>7</sup>.

I
A
I
I
P
T
T

|x / / | > x / / | > | / | x | / | x x | | / x | / x |

5. as soon they'll be charging en masse from Market n' (and) Sansome buildings

I
I
P
I
T
D
T

|x / / | |x / / | x x | x | / / | x | / x x | / > | / x |

on foot (and in) n' buses and all well-dressed thru workingman Frisco of Walkup  
(15 feet)

After this fast, long verse, the sixth verse appears as an antibacchius monometer. The verse announces a stop of the rhythm and a change of image with a double question mark at the beginning. These marks create a certain tension in the verse. A noun phrase mentions the “truck drivers”, but nothing else is said about them.

Anti.

| / / x | (1 foot)

6. ?? truck drivers

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<sup>7</sup> Words in parenthesis indicate the way they were originally written. While Kerouac reads, he introduces some changes, not only in pronunciation, such as contractions, but he also changes or adds some words.

The seventh is an irregular ten-foot verse that introduces the fellahin. Despite its ten feet, the speaking rate in this verse is not as fast as it is in the verse five. On the contrary, it is closer to the one in the fourth verse; both verses are just an introduction of two different groups of people.

Amp.      I                      A                      S                      A                      T                      D

I x / x | x / | x    x /    I / > // x x / | / x | / x    x |  
 7. and even the poor grime-bemarked Third Street of lost bums even Negroes so  
 I / T x | x | / | / S / I (10 feet)  
 hopeless and long left East

The next verse continues the description of the fellahin and has four irregular feet. Throughout the poem, some changes in rhythm are suggested by graphic marks, in the case of verse eight, the word “try”, at the end of the verse, is italicized. In the recording, Kerouac slows down the speaking speed and, at the end of the verse, lengthens the diphthong /aɪ/.

I                      P                      A                      A

I x / | >    x | x    x // x >    / | (4 feet)  
 8. and meanings of responsibility and *try*

The ninth verse describes some activities of the fellahin. It is an irregular six feet verse and the speaking rate is medium again, not slow as it was when the previous verse ended.

P                      T                      T                      S                      D

I x    x //    x | / >    | /    > | / x    >    | / x    D    x | (6 feet)  
 9. that now all they do is stand there spitting in the broken glass

Verse ten continues with the description of fellahin activities. The image combines sensations of the people –Negroes, bums– and nature –the street, the

afternoon— and the length of the verse is 8½ feet. The speaking rate starts going faster again, but, since there is an interaction between people and nature, this verse is not irregular, it is an iambic verse with a feminine ending and two substitutions: a trochee in the second foot and a pyrrhic in the sixth foot. In this verse, images of nature provide regularity of verse and images of the fellahin —that started in verse seven— provide the length and the speaking rate.

$\text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I } \overset{\text{T}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{P}}{\text{x}} \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} \text{ (8, 1/2 feet)}$   
 10. sometimes fifty in one afternoon against one wall at Third and Howard

Images change in verse eleven with the presence of the commuter in the scene again. The verse has eleven irregular feet and the speaking rate continues going faster.

$\text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{P}}{\text{x}} \text{I } \overset{\text{D}}{\text{x}} \text{ x } \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I } \overset{\text{T}}{\text{x}} \text{I } \text{x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} \text{I x } \overset{\text{P}}{\text{x}} \text{I}$   
 11. and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and  
 $\text{I x } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{P}}{\text{x}} \text{I } \overset{\text{D}}{\text{x}} \text{I } \text{x } \text{I} \text{ (11 feet)}$   
 commuters of America

Verse twelve is a very small but fast verse. It has three irregular feet and there is a sensation that it is the reminder of the previous verse, but Kerouac's pause between the two verses is longer than a caesura, so they are two different verses.

$\text{I } \overset{\text{I}}{\text{I}} / \text{I x } \overset{\text{Tri.}}{\text{x}} \text{x } \text{I} / \text{I } \overset{\text{T}}{\text{x}} \text{I} \text{ (3 feet)}$   
 12. and Steel Ci vi li za tion

The speaking speed does not stop in verse thirteen, which has thirteen irregular feet. This verse continues describing activities of the commuter, the “frenzy” verses referred to above can be felt again in the rhythm of the verse.

I / x<sup>D</sup> x | x<sup>P</sup> x | x | / | x | / | x<sup>P</sup> x | x | / | / | S / | x<sup>P</sup> x | x | / | x<sup>A</sup> x | / |

13. rushing by with San Francisco *Chronicles* and *green Call-Bulletins* not even enough  
 I / T<sup>T</sup> x | x<sup>P</sup> x | / T<sup>T</sup> x | (13 feet)  
 time to be disdainful,

The top speed of the sketch comes in verse fourteen, which continues the description.

I / / > <sup>D</sup> x | x<sup>Amp.</sup> / x | x | x<sup>Amp.</sup> / x | x | x<sup>1/2</sup> | x<sup>Amp.</sup> / x | x | x<sup>1/2</sup> |

14. they've gotta (got to) catch one thirty (130), one thirty two (132), one thirty four  
 I x<sup>Amp.</sup> / x | x | x<sup>P</sup> x | / x<sup>D</sup> x | x | x<sup>Amp.</sup> / x | x | x | (8 feet, 4 1/2 foot)  
 (134), one thirty six (136) all the way up to one forty six (146)

Verse fifteen is shorter, but the speaking speed does not slow down. The image is a continuation of the enumeration made in verse fourteen, but now it is not a list of streets, now it includes time and the Earth itself, so the meter is again regular; the verse is an iambic heptameter with an anapestic substitution in the first foot, a pyrrhic substitution in the fourth foot and a trochaic substitution in the fifth foot.

I x<sup>A</sup> x / | x | / | x | / | x<sup>P</sup> x | / | x | x | / | x | x | / | x | / | (7 feet)

15. till the time of evening supper in homes of the railroad earth

Verse sixteen continues with images of nature, but at the end of the verse there is an image related freight trains. Its meter is less irregular than that of the

the previous verse, but the first part of the verse tends to be iambic and the second tends to be trochaic. A period –the only one throughout the sixteen verses– denotes the end of the sketch.

P            I            I            I            T            T            D            T            T  
I x >    I >    // x    // >    / // x //    x // x x I //    x I //    T x I

16. when high in the sky the magic stars ride above the following hotshot freight trains.  
(9 feet)

This analysis of the first sketch of the poem confirms that the phrasing of the images varies in length and speaking speed according to the flow. Beyond that, this first sketch leads to draw more conclusions about the rhythmic patterns that structure the entire poem.

The verse length also highlights the stress-timed rhythm attributes; since the speaking speed is faster in long verses, they tend to be more stress-timed: there are more unstressed syllables between stressed syllables, the isochrony causes dropping and movement of stress, the language tends to be more informal and the volume, pitch and duration of vowel and consonant sounds are affected by the speaking speed.

Some of these effects can be seen in the fourteenth verse, the fastest, although not the longest verse in the fragment. In the first foot, when talking about the commuter, there is a contraction “gotta” of the verb “have got to”. This contraction –which is common in informal language– affects the entire foot, dropping a natural stress that would be placed in the verb “catch”. Thus, a verse that could had started with two two-syllable feet, a trochee followed by an iamb –



“They’ve got to catch”–, becomes a verse that starts with a three-syllable foot. This change is caused because of stress-timed rhythm and it affects the entire verse, creating more three-syllable feet. Three syllable feet reduces the number of feet, although there are many syllables in the verse.

14. they've gotta (got to) catch one thirty (130), one thirty two (132), one thirty four  
 (134), one thirty six (136) all the way up to one forty six (146)

This verse describes the activities of the commuter, so the fast speaking rate and stress create certain phenomena that affect meter. One of these phenomena is the half foot. The verse has eight feet and four half foot that maintain isochrony and produce feminine forms: feminine caesuras and a feminine ending. Stress and the speaking speed also produce feet rarely used in English versification such as the amphibrach. Throughout the poem, this foot appears especially when the speaking speed is fast, and its function is to produce rhythmical stress between unstressed syllables: isochrony. The number of unstressed syllables together also generates another kind of unusual verses such as the pyrrhic and the tribrach; both kinds of verses merge especially when the speaking speed is fast. The use of amphibrach, pyrrhic and tribrach verses is easily observable in long phrasings throughout the whole poem.

P      P      I      P      P      T      A      I      P      P

69. —it was the way they fenced it but he never had the nerve to do it due to the fact  
 Tri.      Amp.      Amp.      Tri.      Amp.      I      P      Amp.  
 | x x x | x / x | x / x | > x x | x / x | x / | x x | x / x |  
 that he had no Money and nowhere to go and O his father was dead and O his mother  
 I      P      Amp.      I      Tri.      D      I      I      I  
 x / | x x | x / x | x / | x x | x | x / | | x | / |  
 was dead and O his sister was dead and O his whereabouts was dead was dead.—  
(29 feet)

The longest –hence the fastest– verse in the poem is verse sixty nine, with twenty nine feet. Because of its length, the qualities of fast-speaking speed explained above are strengthened. In this verse, there are more unstressed syllables between stressed syllables than in verse fourteen. The tension caused by the absence of stressed syllables produces four half verses. In verse sixty nine, since there are more unstressed verses, the tension is longer and it produces many more pyrrhic and tribrach feet. Some phenomena related to isochrony such as dropping and movement of stress are also easily observable.

The images related to nature have absolutely different attributes. As was said above, they tend to be shorter and slower and, again, stress-timed rhythm determines some features: there are less unstressed syllables between stressed syllables; since stressed syllables tend to have a longer duration and a louder volume, verses with more stresses slow down speaking rate and tend to sound louder; the sounds have a full quality and the language tends to be more formal – there are fewer contractions and colloquial expressions. Less unstressed syllables between the stressed ones allows the feet to tend to be more regular while in long verses, the feet tend to be irregular. The first three verses in the poem, written in trochaic verse, exemplify these features.

I / T > I / x I / > I x P x I / x I (5 feet)

1. There was a little alley in San Francisco

I / > T x I / x D x I / > I / x x I / x I / T x I (6 feet)

2. back of the Southern Pacific station at Third and Townsend

1/2 T T T T T T T D  
I x I / > I / x I / x I / x I / x I / x I / > I / x I / x x I (9 1/2 feet)

3. in redbrick of drowsy lazy afternoons with everybody at work in offices

When the images do not include people, the phrasing tends to be even shorter and the feet, more regular. The rhythm of the poem can become really slow when series of short verses follow each other. The beginning of the third stanza is one of the slowest sketches in the entire poem. This sketch is written in iambic foot with two trochaic substitutions in verse forty three. The sketch describes the passage from afternoon to night and its effect on the street.

I x I / I x I / I (2 feet)

41. And () Now it's night

I x I / I x I / I (2 feet)

42. in Third Street

I x I / I / x I / x I (3 feet)

43. the keen little neons

Line ending also plays an important role in the creation of rhythm throughout the piece. The most usual line ending in both images of nature and images of people is stop end. Stop end determines the length of verse and allows rhythm to have natural pauses. Enjambment rarely occurs. When it happens, it creates tension and it announces the speaking speed changes. In the first sketch of the



$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & | & & | & & & \text{Amp.} \\ | & x & / & | & x & / & | & x & / & x & | \end{array}$  (3 feet)  
 46. —the cats in Annie's Alley,

$\begin{array}{cccc} & | & & | \\ | & x & / & | & x & / & | \end{array}$  (2 feet)  
 47. the flop comes on,

$\begin{array}{ccc} & 1/2 & \\ | & / & | \end{array}$  (1/2 foot)  
 48. moans,

$\begin{array}{ccc} & 1/2 & \\ | & / & | \end{array}$  (1/2 foot)  
 49. rolls,

$\begin{array}{cccccccc} & | & & | & & & P & & T \\ | & > & / & | & x & / & | & x & x & | & / & x & | \end{array}$  (4 feet)  
 50. the street is loaded with darkness.

Short verses are used throughout the poem to slow down the speaking speed, but they also appear in the middle of long phrasings when the speed goes fast. In these cases, short verses work like breaths or rhythmic cuts that add dynamism to long phrasings. A clear example of this use is found in verse twelve, an irregular trimeter placed in the middle of two verses longer than ten feet. The image is about the commuters.

$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} | & x & / & | & x & P & x & | & / & D & x & x & | & x & / & | & x & / & | & / & T & x & | & x & / & | & x & P & x & | \end{array}$   
 11. and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and  
 $\begin{array}{cccc} & | & & P & & D \\ | & x & / & | & x & > & | & / & x & x & | \end{array}$  (11 feet)  
 commuters of America

I > I / I x x x I / T x I (3 feet)  
12. and Steel Ci vi li za tion

I / x D x I x P x I x I / I x I / I x P I x I / I / S / I x x I x I / I x A / I  
13. rushing by with San Francisco *Chronicles* and *green Call-Bulletins* not even enough  
I / T x I x P x I / T x I (13 feet)  
time to be disdainful,

Punctuation marks are also note rhythmic changes. In *The Essentials*, talking about the method, Kerouac writes: “No periods separating sentence-structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas-but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as a jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases)” (Kerouac, 1953). Periods note pauses and change of rhythm, of speaking rate. Verse sixteen goes very fast and ends very fast, but before ending, the the sky is alluded to (“...when high in the sky the magic stars...”). That reference to sky announces the rhythm that comes after the period which is much slower. The images in the following verses are related to nature –California, the sea–. Then a long verse that introduces the brakeman comes and the sketching continues alluding to the sky and its sensations in mid-length verses.

17.  $\overset{P}{|x} > \overset{P}{|} \overset{T}{xx|} / \overset{T}{x} |$  (3 feet)  
 -It's all in California,

18.  $\overset{A}{|x} > / |$  (1 foot)  
 it's all a sea,

19.  $\overset{P}{|x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | > / | \overset{P}{x} / | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} / | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} / | \overset{P}{x} / | \overset{P}{x}$   
 I swim out of it in afternoons of sun hot meditation in my jeans with head on  
 $/ | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} | / | \overset{P}{x} | / | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | / \overset{T}{x} |$  (17 feet)  
 handkerchief or brakeman's lantern or (if not working)

20.  $\overset{I}{|x} / |$  (1 foot)  
 on book (s),

21.  $\overset{Amp.}{|x} / > \overset{Amp.}{|} > / \overset{T}{x} | / \overset{T}{x} | / \overset{S}{|} \overset{P}{|xx|}$  (5 feet)  
 I look up at blue sky of perfect lostpurity

22.  $\overset{I}{|x} / / | \overset{I}{x} / / | \overset{I}{x} / / | \overset{I}{x} / / | \overset{P}{|xx|}$  (6 feet)  
 and feel the warp of wood of old America

23.  $\overset{I}{|x} / | \overset{I}{x}$  (1 foot)  
 beneath me

This passage also illustrates the way commas work in the poem. Throughout the first sketch there are no commas –except to separate elements in a series, as in the verse fourteen– and the speaking rate is medium-fast. In the passage above, there are several commas very close each to other and the speaking rate is much slower. The presence of commas is usually determined by the sketching of images related to the sky. Another example of this is in the verses quoted above (verses 46-50), when nightfall is sketched and commas slow down the rhythm. Commas are not “unnecessary” in the poem, they guide the reader to identify the rhythm of specific passages in the piece.

Other punctuation marks such as quotation marks and dashes also denote rhythmic changes. The quotation marks introduce voices –images– of people in the

poem: the bum, the Negroe, a whore and the brakeman himself. The introduction of voices affects prosodic features such as tone, loudness and volume. In the recording, Kerouac emphasizes these changes coloring and stretching out sounds and varying his volume and tone of voice. Quotation marks also introduce changes in phonetics, syntax and spelling and the speaking rate of voices in quotation marks is always fast. In verse eighty, an African American minister is introduced by quotation marks and Kerouac's voice changes radically in the recording: the tone is very low and nasal and the speaking speed is very fast.

80.  $\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccc} | & x & & P & & x & | & x & & P & & x & | & / & x & | & / & T & > & | & & | & / & T & & x & | & x & x & / & / & / & T & & x & | & x & & P & & x & | & x & x & | \end{array}$   
you hear his great vibrant voice on the (sunny) Sunday afternoon sidewalk full of  
 $\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccc} | & / & & x & & x & | & / & & x & | & / & & x & > & | & & x & & A & & x & & / & | & > & \text{Amp.} & / & x & | & / & x & | & x & & | & / & x & & / & \text{Amp.} & / & x & | & / & x & | \end{array}$   
sexual vibratos saying "Why yes Mam but de gospel do say that man was born of  
 $\begin{array}{cccccccc} | & / & & T & & x & | & / & & 1/2 & & | & & (16\frac{1}{2} \text{ feet}) \end{array}$   
woman's womb—"

This quote ends with a dash, which also denotes a change rhythm. While commas indicate decreasing speaking speed and quotation marks increasing speaking rate, dashes can indicate both. When images of nature are introduced, a dash only opens; there are commas after it and the verses go slowly:

17.  $\begin{array}{cccccccc} | & x & & P & > & | & x & x & | & / & x & | & (3 \text{ feet}) \end{array}$   
-It's all in California,  
18.  $\begin{array}{cccc} | & x & > & / & | & (1 \text{ foot}) \end{array}$   
it's all a sea,

Also in:





performed by anyone, they just happen, so there is not a clear subject: it's raining, it's late, etc. ¿who is raining? ¿who is late? Actually, nobody does the action. In the poem, images of nature are expressed with impersonal forms: there is/are, passive voice, the pronoun "it" as a subject and –ing forms. On the other hand, images related to people always have a subject, either a noun, a pronoun, a phrase, etc. The changing of pronouns throughout the poem –I, they, he, she and even you– also produce rhythmical changes like the ones already quoted. The following example, taken from the first sketch of the poem, also illustrates the changing subject throughout the verses; the sketch starts with an impersonal sentence, then it goes to the second-person singular and finally to the third-person plural; the length of verses changes along with the subjects:

$\begin{array}{cccccccc} & T & & T & T & & P & T \\ | & / & > & | & / & x & | & / > & | & x & & x & | & / & x & | \end{array}$  (5 feet)  
 1. There was a little alley in San Francisco  
 $\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccc} | & x & & A & & x & / & | & x & & Amp. & & / & > & | & / & x & | & x & & Tri. & & x & | & x & & Amp. & & / & x & | & / & x & | \end{array}$  (6 feet)  
 4. in the air you feel the impending rush of their commuter frenzy  
 $\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccc} | & x & & | & / & | & > & A & & x & & / & | & > & | & & / & | & x & & | & / & | & x & x & | & & | & / & T & & x & | & / & x & | \end{array}$   
 5. as soon they'll be charging en masse from Market n' (and) Sansome buildings  
 $\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccc} | & x & & | & / & | & & | & x & & | & / & | & x & & | & x & & | & / & | & / & T & & x & | & / & x & & | & / & > & | & / & x & | \end{array}$   
 on foot (and in) n' buses and all well-dressed thru workingman Frisco of Walkup  
 (15 feet)

In the following example, the brakeman interacts for the first time in the poem and some similar happens. The sketching is describing images of nature by means of impersonal sentences and short verses, when the brakeman appears in the scene –it is introduced by the pronoun “I”– the verse is longer:

$\overset{P}{I}x \overset{P}{>} \overset{P}{I} \overset{T}{x}x|/\overset{T}{x} \overset{I}{|}$  (3 feet)  
 17. -It's all in California,

$\overset{A}{I}x \overset{A}{>} / \overset{I}{|}$  (1 foot)  
 18. it's all a sea,

$\overset{P}{I}x \overset{P}{x} \overset{I}{|} \overset{P}{x} \overset{I}{x} | \overset{I}{>} / \overset{I}{|}x / \overset{I}{|}x \overset{P}{x} \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{I}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{I}{x} | \overset{I}{x} / \overset{I}{|}x \overset{I}{|}x / \overset{I}{|}x \overset{I}{|}x$   
 19. I swim out of it in afternoons of sun hot meditation in my jeans with head on  
 $/ \overset{P}{|}x \overset{P}{x} | \overset{I}{x} \overset{I}{|} / \overset{I}{|}x \overset{I}{|} / \overset{P}{|}x \overset{P}{x} | \overset{P}{x} \overset{I}{x} | / \overset{T}{x} \overset{I}{|}$  (17 feet)  
 handkerchief or brakeman's lantern or (if not working)

The rhythm related to the brakeman hasn't been described yet. The brakeman is the voice that sketches images throughout the poem, sometimes as an observer, sometimes interacting in the scene. Verses in which the brakeman appears tend to be long, which means that they tend to have all the characteristics of long verses already taken into account. Something that attracts attention is the regularity of feet. Feet from scenes related to the brakeman are sometimes regular, sometimes irregular. When these feet tend to be regular, they tend to combine pyrrhic with iambic or trochaic verses, as in the examples quoted above, in verses nineteen and thirty-nine, in which the brakeman interacts. Examples of verses that include regular feet and in which the brakeman interacts, are in verses sixty-two and sixty-three. Verse sixty-three is the voice of the brakeman himself and it is introduced by quotation marks:



P
P
T
T
T
T
S
T
S
A

34. It was the fantastic drowse and drum of hum of lum mum afternoon nathin' to do,  
 (10 feet)

The verse is ten feet long and it describes sensations produced by the afternoon so, it is not fast, it tends to be slow. Stress in trochaic and spondee feet along with the consonance produced by the nasal /m/ and the assonance produced by the schwa /ʌ/ slow down the speaking speed in this verse. Similar effects of increasing or decreasing speaking speed caused by these figures make part of the rhythmic structure of the poem.

Euphony is used in descending diphthongs, especially in some long verses. The flowing of sound in this kind of diphthongs embellishes phrasing and increases speaking speed. The use of voiceless plosives such as /c/, /k/ and /t/ has a contrary effect in the poem. Series of plosives tend to appear at the end of long, fast verses and its function is to slow down speaking rate by generating cacophony. In verse sixteen there is a series of descending diphthongs that increases speaking speed – high, sky, ride, freight, trains. In the last two trochaic feet the sound /t/ generates cacophony and slows down rhythm –hot, shot, freight, trains. Then, a period closes the sketch.

P
I
I
I
T
T
D
T
T

16. when high in the sky the magic stars ride above the following hotshot freight trains.  
 (9 feet)

In the following instance, descending diphthongs –railroad, ain't, five, a.m., Bayshore, always, wild– appear all along verses eighty-three to eighty -ix. At the

end of verse eighty-six there are several voiced plosives and, again, a period closes the sketch –get, drunk, git. The presence of amphibrach feet suggests speaking speed.

I > P x | x / x | x Tri. x x | / T x | x / | x / | / x | / S P / | x x |  
 83. when I see the railroad ain't gonna call me till five (5) am Sunday morn probably  
 (9 feet)

I > Amp. / x | > Amp. / x | x x | / x | > Amp. / x | > Amp. / x | (6 feet)  
 84. for a local out of Bayshore in fact always for a local out of Bayshore

I x P x | > P x | / x D > I x Amp. / x | > Amp. > | Amp. / x | > | x P x |  
 85. and I go to the wailbar of all the wildbars in the world the one and only Third-and-  
 Howard  
 | / x | (8 feet)

I | / | x P | / | x P x | / x x | x x | / S / | x / | (8 feet)  
 86. and there I go in and drink with the madmen and if I get drunk I git.

Apart from these rhetorical devices, there are two groups of consonantal sounds that permeate the entire poem: nasals, especially the /n/ –the frequency of –ing forms increases this sound–, and fricatives, especially the /s/ –the frequency of plural nouns increases this sound–, and sometimes the /f/. In most verses, the slight presence of these sounds generates meaning and rhythm. By searching for meaningful words that contain one or some of these sounds, it is possible to perceive lines of sense that go through the poem. A possible semantic sequence, in order of appearance, would be:

San Francisco, station, afternoon, commuter, frenzy, workingman, dressed, bum, Negroe, hopeless, responsibility, now, one, neat-necktied, civilization,

disdainful, swim, meditation, brakeman, conversation, mountain, drum, hum, mum, land, sadness, night, street, neon, darkness, gladness, Saturday, listen, music, meaning, fellaheen, woman, womb, drink, drunk.

The repetition of some of these words in different moments of the poem allows updating the images.

The type of verses that prevail in the poem have a syntactical feature that generates rhythm. Since there is no subordination throughout the poem, the most used is the coordinating conjunction “and”. The repetition of “and” at the beginning of some verses –anaphora– helps to keep the speaking speed in certain fragments of the poem. This conjunction is also very frequent in the middle of verses and it has a similar effect. In the following fragment there are eight “and”; four of them are at the beginning of verses, the other ones in the middle:

Amp.    I            A                    S            A            T            D

I x / x | x / | x    x / | / > // x x / | / x | / x    x |

7. and even the poor grime-bemarked Third Street of lost bums even Negroes so

I / T x | x | / | / S / | (10 feet)

hopeless and long left East

I x    I    / | > P            x | x    x / | x >    A            / | (4 feet)

8. and meanings of responsibility and try

I x    P    / | T            T            S            / > | / x    >    I / x    D    x | (6 feet)

9. that now all they do is stand there spitting in the broken glass

I x    I    / | / > | x    / | x    / | x    / | x    P    x | x    I / | x    I    / | x    I    1/2

10. sometimes fifty in one afternoon against one wall at Third and Howard

I x    I    / | x    P    x | / | x    x    | x    I / | x    I    / | / T    x    | x    / | x    P    x |

11. and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and

I            P            D

I x    / | x    >    I / x    x | (11 feet)

commuters of America

I > I / I x x x I / T x I (3 feet)  
12. and Steel Ci vi li za tion

Hence, it has been shown how rhythm in *October in the Railroad Earth* contains the meaning of the poem and how that rhythm is expressed in phrasing, timing, meter, rhetorical figures and syntax. These structural features and the way they work in the poem are closely related to rhythmic structures of jazz music.

One of the most important elements in jazz is *swing*. It has emotional impact on the tone, melody, phrasing and rhythm. In terms of rhythm, swing is the dialogue between the ontological and the psychological conceptions of time. The ontological conception of time is represented in jazz by polyrhythmic complexity. Such polyrhythmic complexity is clearly audible in changes of speaking rate produced by variations in phrasing, multiple variations and substitution made in regular verses in order to keep timing, multiplicity of feet throughout the poem, and the use of rhetorical figures.

Psychological time is expressed by verb tense and the types of verbs used throughout the poem. The most frequent tenses are the simple present and present progressive. These tenses create the sensation that everything is happening at the same time. The types of verbs reinforce this sensation: feel, stand, be, swim, look up, have, hear, call, see, break, know, belong, moan, load, say, listen, get, find, bow, want, play. Some of them could be classified as non-action verbs; they are verbs that express existence, sensations and desires. These verbs fortify the felling of “everything”, they are a representation of the “now”, there



is no after or before but an eternal present. The now is especially important in jazz improvisation as improvisation comes from the unconscious, it is a question of intellectual emotion. Psychological rhythm is the internal and unique rhythm of the musician.

Because of psychological rhythm, swing creates and solves rhythmic tensions in jazz. In *October in the Railroad Earth* those tensions are determined by the succession of images and their own internal rhythm. Elements that increase speaking rate, such as descending diphthongs, amphibrach, pyrrhic and tribrach feet, stop-end line and quotations tend to create tension. On the other hand, elements that slow down speaking rate, such as ascending diphthongs, plosives, verses with regular feet, enjambment and commas tend solve tension.

In jazz, rhythm is founded on the roots of a *basso continuo*, which works as the spine that keeps the beat and allows the unfolding of the other rhythmical elements. Several elements keep the rhythm and work as basso continuo in *October in The Railroad Earth*. In phonological terms, nasals and fricatives keep the rhythm throughout the whole poem. In terms of syntax, the repetition of the conjunction "and" and the coordination of sentences by means of this conjunction maintain the beat. The tense of sentences, especially the present progressive, also works as a kind of basso continuo.

Two rhythmic features, typical of bebop, are perceived in the poem. The first is *fast tempo*, which allows frantic and versatile solos. In a 1968 interview, Kerouac talks about tempo in *October in the Railroad Earth*.

"...as for my bug against periods, that was for the prose in *October in the Railroad Earth*, very experimental, intended to clack along all the way like a steam engine pulling a one-hundred-car freight with a talky caboose at the end (...) the style has varied from the highly experimental speed-writing of *Railroad Earth* to the ingrown toenail packed mystical style of *Tristessa*, to..." (*Paris Review*, 1968).

According to Kerouac's words, fast rhythm is one of the aesthetical purposes of *October in the Railroad Earth*. Throughout the poem, the reader reads, sees and hears images in the same way as a passenger sees images passing by on the other side of the window of the train. Fast tempo is perceived in the long verses that prevail in the poem.

The second bebop feature is phrasing. Phrasing in bebop and phrasing in the poem have many connections. Since musicians were inspired by the cadence of speech to create rhythm, phrases in bop are irregular and asymmetrical. In the poem, irregularity in the length of verses is determined by natural pauses at the line endings –how stop ends and enjambment work was explained above. The use of short verses in the middle of fast, long verses is very similar to irregular phrasing of bop musicians, especially Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, when they included short phrases between long phrases in their improvisations.

The call-response structure in bop is seen in the way images appear one by one: the Negroe, the commuter, the sky, the brakeman, etc., all of them in constant dialogue, all of them generating polyphony, heteroglossia by means of their internal repertoire of rhythms.

Just like oral cultures do not create new stories and jazz improvisation does not create absolute new licks, stanzas in the poem do not introduce new images,

but images are sketched once and again throughout the stanzas. In the first sketch of the poem all images—except for the brakeman— are introduced; in the rest of the poem, there is a rhythmical repetition of those images. These repetitions —as in jazz improvisation— allow the updating of images; each time an image is sketched, it is surrounded by different groups of words and, that way, it is permeated by the meaning of those groups of words.

Images and their repetitions, meter, sounds, syntax and punctuation are the result of the strong influence that jazz had on Kerouac's aesthetics. In the interview with the *Paris Review* he says "in poetry you can be completely free to say anything you want, you don't have to tell a story, you can use *secret puns*"<sup>8</sup>. Later, in the same interview, the interviewer asks: "you said (...) that you let the line go a little longer to fill it up with secret images that come at the end of the sentence...". Kerouac says: "Sediment. Delta. Mud. It's where you start a poem...". Then he improvises a short poem. When he finishes the improvisation he says

"See? You remembered the line at the end... you lose your mind in the middle (...)  
That applies to prose as well as poetry (...) In prose you make the paragraph.  
Every paragraph is a poem" (*Paris Review*).

The first stanza of the poem shows this structure: paragraphs work as both a stanza and an entire poem, and images flow throughout it creating rhythmical meaning:

There was a little alley in San Francisco back of the Southern Pacific station at  
Third and Townsend in redbrick of drowsy lazy afternoons with everybody at work

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<sup>8</sup> Highlighted is mine.

in offices in the air you feel the impending rush of their commuter frenzy as soon they'll be charging en masse from Market and Sansome buildings on foot and in buses and all well-dressed thru workingman Frisco of Walkup ?? truck drives and even the poor grime-bemarked Third Street of lost bums even Negroes so hopeless and long left East and meanings of responsibility and *try* that now all they do is stand there spitting in the broken glass sometimes fifty in one afternoon against one wall at Third and Howard and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and commuters of America and Steel Civilization rushing by with San Francisco *Chronicles* and green *Call-Bulletins* not even enough time to be disdainful, they've got to catch 130, 132, 134, 136 all the way up to 146 till the time of evening supper in homes of the railroad earth when high in the sky the magic stars ride above the following hotshot freight trains. —It's all in California, it's all a sea, I swim out of it in afternoons of sum hot meditation in my jeans with head on handkerchief or brakeman's lantern or (if not working) on books, I look up at blue sky of perfect lostpurity and feel the warp of wood of old America beneath me and have insane conversations with Negroes in second-story windows above and everything is pouring in, the switching moves of boxcars in that little alley which is so much like the alleys of Lowell and I hear far off in the sense of coming night that engine calling our mountains. (Jack Kerouac, *October in the Railroad Earth*).

The stanza starts with the image of the alley, then several images are sketched and, at the end of the stanza, the alley is mentioned again, but now it has been updated by those images sketched in the middle, now it has been permeated by the sky, the commuter, the Negroe, other streets, buses, mountains, etc. Other stanzas follow the same structure. Hence, while Aaron Copland compares plot in novel with melody in music, it is possible to state that images in Kerouac play the role of melody or theme (phrase) in jazz. The rhythmic repetition of images and their consequent updating of meaning lead to determine the valuation of the word contained in the poem.

The title suggests the importance of places in the poem. Places from the city are the most frequent and, as said above, places belong to the group of images related to nature, which means that they tend to keep regular feet and slow down speaking speed. The alley is a representation of those places: outside sceneries where people from different social groups interact. Places as the alley or streets

are crossing points, places of movement in which people do not stay but they just pass by. In the poem, the alley and similar places are places for dialog, for knowledge. Since the alley and streets are crossing points, they are places where everything happens, places that contain everything: heaven and earth, the commuter and the bum, day and night, all of them seem to be at the same level in the street. Crossing points are the now, the eternal present. Places from the inside, like homes or offices are just mentioned, nothing happens in there; reality can be experienced only in the outside.

Commuters do not inhabit crossing points, they do not have time for that, they just go by these places when they leave the office and take the bus or drive home; workingmen actually inhabit places from the inside; when night comes, they get home. In this sense, they do not experience real life, but real life crosses in front of them and they just do not notice it. After the first stanza, the commuter is not mentioned anymore. The commuter represents the mass culture of the post-war period which in confinement by the American Dream proposed by Corporate Liberalism. A more full picture of this mass culture is created in Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*:

the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume. (Kerouac, 2007, p. 367)

The fellahin are mainly represented by the bum and Negroe –always written in capital letters. The bum is always in a hole, without money and his relatives are dead, he is alone, and nothing in the poem indicates that this situation is going to change.

Throughout the poem there is an updating of the meaning of Negroe. In the first sketch, the Negroe is “spitting in a broken glass” beside the bum. In the second sketch, the brakeman has conversations with Negroes “in second story windows above and everything is pouring in”. Now they are not at the same level as that of the bum, they are higher. The image suggests a brakeman raising his head to the sky when having conversations with the Negroe. In the third stanza, the image of the Negroe is the image of a minister in the street “even when he has a church”. Negroes are always in the street, having contact with the real life, in fact, Negroes are the “essential Americans”. The poem places the real America at the marginality, among the excluded ones.

The brakeman is a middle-point between the commuter and the fellahin. He has a job as the commuter, but he inhabits the streets and has conversations with the people in the streets. At night he is not at home but still outside, as the bum or the Negroe. He is outside “if not working” in the railroad or “on books”: the brakeman is also a writer, he is an artist, and so, he not only proposes balance between the commuter and the fellahin, but also adds the intellectual dimension. The commuter looks like an automaton who actually does not experience real life, the bum is in a hole and reality beats him too hard, but the brakeman and the

Negroes are in a continuous updating of meaning. The brakeman is a white-negro that goes beyond the hipster, who inhabited the street but who usually did not have a job or produce anything cultural. The brakeman's balance is a melding of the commuter, the Negro, the hipster and the hobo.

The treatment of images leads to the affirmation that *October in the Railroad Earth* is a negotiation of opposites: the sky and the earth, the commuter and the bum, day and night, narration and poetry, literature and music. This negotiation embodies the principles of spontaneity: intersubjectivity and body-mind holism, both represented in the rhythmic dialogue of images sketched throughout the poem.

The mainstream is represented by the commuter, "not even enough time to be disdainful", and the excluded ones are represented by the bums and, especially, by the Negroes, always updating their meaning. The brakeman is in the middle, learning about the world by having conversations with strangers, by interacting with people. While the commuter proposes uniformity, the brakeman proposes diversity, heteroglossia, expressed in the multiplicity of voices in the text. Heteroglossia is possible due to conversation, to dialogue, and dialogue always implies listening, implies hearing. Johashim Berendt classifies people into "eye person" and "ear person". The commuter is the eye person, the kind of person proposed by Corporate Liberalism. The brakeman is an "ear person"; he is the kind of person who listens and negotiates meanings. Berendt writes:

...the seen person analyzes, takes things apart (...) The eyes are wonderful organs, but the better they are, the "sharper" they are; "sharpness" is a quality of

knives and of cutting (...) Human beings in their disproportionate emphasis on seeing have brought on excess of rationality, of analysis and abstraction (...) The highest, most admirable ideal of the "eye person" is to possess an "eagle eye" (...) western man has become accustomed to looking at the entire world as his potential prey.

(...)

Ears, on the other hand, are symbolized by a mussel or a conch, which in turn symbolizes the female sex organ, itself a symbol for receiving and engulfing –for becoming one

(...) to the ancient Chinese, the eyes constituted a *yang* type of sense organ: male, aggressive, dominant, rational, analyzing things. Ears, on the other hand, are female, receptive, careful, intuitive and spiritual, depth oriented, perceiving the whole as one.

(...)

For the ear person, synthesis is more important than analysis (...) Human beings have lost themselves in such a hypertrophy of the visual that they no longer are able to see adequately. (Berendt, 1983, p. 5)

The nature and the goal of the ear is, then, the same of harmony in music and image in poetry: to unify, to conciliate opposites, to contain plurality of meanings. Walter Ong highlights the important role that the ear plays in oral cultures, now that it is related with sound and its nature. Sound is produced by the internal structures of objects –instruments, bodies, etc. – so the ear registers the interiority of objects and bodies without forcing them. Human voice comes from the interior of our body, that's why everyone has a unique voice, with a specific tone and pitch. That's also the reason why tone and phrasing are so important in jazz: because the internal repertoire of rhythms, melodies and sounds is unique in each musician, so each phrasing, each improvisation and each repetition is unique. Interior and harmony are characteristics of human consciousness. Additionally, the eye places the spectator in front of the object or image he is seeing, while the listener does not have to see what he is listening to because sound surrounds him,



and he can know where the sound comes from and what kind of object is producing the sound, even if he is not looking at it directly. (Ong, 1982, p. 75)

Jazz composition elements allow Kerouac to express the conversation of opposites by embodying the principles of spontaneity: intersubjectivity and body-mind holism, expressed in the rhythmic treatment of images in the poem. Both jazz techniques and bop are ways to conceive artistic creation and they allowed Kerouac to express negotiation in the poem.

But as for my regular English verse, I knocked it off fast like the prose, using, get this, the size of the notebook page (...) The roll<sup>9</sup> is teletype paper which comes in sheets several hundred feet long. For the form and length of the poem, just as a musician has to get out, a jazz musician, his statement within a certain number of bars, within one chorus, which spills over into the next, but he has to stop where the chorus page stops. And finally, too, in poetry you can be completely free to say anything you want, you don't have to tell a story, you can use secret puns... (*Paris Review*, 1968)

It is clear that Kerouac structured his poetry as well as his prose by applying jazz composition techniques. Some of the secret puns he mentioned are those rhythmic features described and interpreted above: stress, sound, rhythm.

The conversation between music and literature makes Kerouac's work meaningful since jazz contributes to create dialogue among different groups in society. That dialogue is a strong critique to the way of life proposed by Corporate Liberalism and followed by the American mass culture; it is the third alternative proposed by the culture of spontaneity. This way, awareness of the culture of

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<sup>9</sup> It is well known that some of Kerouac's novels were originally written in these roll papers.

spontaneity is related to listening, not to seeing. Listening to the other means negotiating meanings.

The nature of jazz is dialogue, this is an art in which a group of people come together and “can negotiate their agendas with each other, and that negotiation is the art” (Marsalis). Bebop was the result of Harlem’s diversity, was a way of celebrating and negotiating that diversity. In *October in the Railroad Earth* Jack Kerouac negotiates and celebrates his condition as a low middle class white male who adopts habits and behaviors of the excluded ones, the fellahin in the street. The street is the place where the poet has found balance; it is the place where he can move and flow. The rhythmical movement of the poem comes from jazz and Kerouac needs that rhythm to negotiate his condition –he does not belong to the fellahin at all, but his origin is the one of migration– and his criticism of the society of his time by signifies the celebration of the diversity of that society, represented in rhythm itself. Jazz improvisation techniques allow Kerouac to take advantage of the features of the English language to orchestrate “secret puns” in order to create his critical beat-prosody.

## Conclusion

*Dialog, more than an accord, is a chord*  
Octavio Paz

The present study had lead to conclude that the treatment of rhythm in *October in the Railroad Earth* in relation to jazz composition elements is a critique –*architectural form*– of the author's time. As was shown, rhythm in the piece – *compositional form*– is determined by the sketching of images, which can be grouped in images related to nature and images related to people: the rhythm of the nature, the universe, and the rhythm of human beings. These two rhythms alternate throughout the entire poem, not as an opposition, but more like a dance. The images of nature could be divided into images of nature –the sky, the earth, the afternoon, night, air, mountains, etc.– and images of places. Images of places include both, places in the city and in the countryside. Although places related to the city –streets, the alley, etc.– include people, the people's rhythm is different from that of the places, and the rhythm of the places is closer to that of nature, even if it is in the city. the images of people include the commuter, the fellahin – bums, Negroes, drunken men, etc.– and the brakeman.

Each one of these groups of images is itself a part of the evaluation, of the *architectural form*, and contains an internal rhythm. Kerouac achieves a multiplicity of rhythms by means of several features of the *compositional form* such as the length of the phrasing –which determines feet and timing and its characteristics:

speaking speed, stress, isochrony—, punctuation, rhetorical figures and syntax. The flow of images throughout the poem creates polyrhythm and a multiplicity of voices.

Rhythmic patterns in the poem are closely related to jazz composition qualities, especially bebop rhythmic features: swing, polyrhythmic complexity, fast tempo, phrasing, improvisation, call-response structure and basso continuo. These qualities embody the principles of the aesthetics of spontaneity: intersubjectivity and body-mind holism. Intersubjectivity allows Kerouac to propose a dialog among opposites, expressed by the sketching of images and consequent alternation of rhythms throughout the piece. This is the same dialog a group of jazz musicians has when they are in a jam session. Body-mind holism allows Kerouac to place *October in the Railroad Earth* in the now, in the psychological conception of the time of swing, in the eternal present where everything is happening at the same time.

Thus, the *architectural form* in *October in the Railroad Earth* is a negotiation among different social groups in the American society in the mid-twentieth century; it is a celebration of the diversity of the United States. This negotiation is a strong critique against the establishment of his time, which promoted the homogeneity of the masses and a rejection of any idea considered different from the mainstream.

Jack Kerouac dialogues with his time while, at the same time, he anticipates social changes and philosophical debates related to diversity that would be articulated in-depth in following decades. Kerouac's negotiation anticipates all the social movements in subsequent decades.

The present work wants to dialogue with other studies that highlight the importance of jazz features in Kerouac's art, especially rhythm. At the same time, this work wants to be the starting point for further studies. Kerouac points out that his style varied from the very experimental rhythm of *October in the Railroad Earth* to more traditional style in late works like *The Vanity of Duloz*. A rhythmical analysis of other Kerouac's works will surely unveil more interesting uses of rhythm and symbolism of the sound in his works. In that sense, such an analysis will enrich the experience of reading Kerouac's works.

As David Amram wrote "he (Kerouac) left us with a better word. He continues inspiring millions to live their own lives to the fullest everyday and to be creative themselves, and to never give up purchasing their dreams" (Amram, 2002, p.20).

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## Annex 1

### ***October in the Railroad Earth***

By Jack Kerouac

There was a little alley in San Francisco back of the Southern Pacific station at Third and Townsend in redbrick of drowsy lazy afternoons with everybody at work in offices in the air you feel the impending rush of their commuter frenzy as soon they'll be charging en masse from Market and Sansome buildings on foot and in buses and all well-dresses thru workingman Frisco of Walkup ?? truck drives and even the poor grime-bemarked Third Street of lost bums even Negroes so hopeless and long left East and meanings of responsibility and *try* that now all they do is stand there spitting in the broken glass sometimes fifty in one afternoon against one wall at Third and Howard and here's all these Millbrae and San Carlos neat-necktied producers and commuters of America and Steel Civilization rushing by with San Francisco *Chronicles* and green *Call-Bulletins* not even enough time to be disdainful, they've got to catch 130, 132, 134, 136 all the way up to 146 till the time of evening supper in homes of the railroad earth when high in the sky the magic stars ride above the following hotshot freight trains. –It's all in California, it's all a sea, I swim out of it in afternoons of sum hot meditation in my jeans with head on handkerchief or brakeman's lantern or (if not working) on books, I look up at blue sky of perfect lostpurity and feel the warp of wood of old America beneath me and have insane conversations with Negroes in second-story windows above and everything is pouring in, the switching moves of boxcars in that little alley which is so much like the alleys of Lowell and I hear far off in the sense of coming night that engine calling our mountains.

But it was that beautiful cut of clouds I could always see above the little S.P. alley, puffs floating by from Oakland or the Gate of Marin to the north or San Jose south,

the clarity of Cal to break your heart. It was the fantastic drowse and drum of hum of lum mum afternoon nathin' to do, old Frisco with end of land sadness —the people— the alley full of trucks and cars of business nearabouts and nobody knew or far from cared who I was all my like three thousand five hundred miles from birth-O opened up and at last belonged to me in Great America.

Now it's night in Third Street the keen little neons and also yellow bulblights of impossible-to-believe flops with dark ruined shadows moving back of torn yellow shades like a degenerate China with no money —the cats in Annie's Alley, the flop comes on, moans, rolls, the street is loaded with darkness. Blue sky above with stars hanging high over old hotel roofs and blowers of hotels moaning out dusts of interior, the grime inside the word in mouths falling out tooth by tooth, the reading rooms tick tock bigclock with creak chair and slantboards and old faces looking up over rimless spectacles bought in some West Virginia or Florida or Liverpool England pawnshop long before I was born and across rains they've come to the end of the land sadness end of the world gladness all your San Franciscos will have to fall eventually and burn again. But I'm walking and one night a bum fell into the hole of construction job where theyre tearing a sewer by day the husky Pacific & Electric youths in torn jeans who work there often I think of going up to some of em like say blond ones with wild hair and torn shirts and say "You oughta apply for the railroad its much easier work you dont stand around the street all day and you get much more pay" but this bum fell in the hole you saw his foot stick out, a British MG also driven by some eccentric once bucked into the hole and as I came home from a long Saturday afternoon local to Hollister out of San Jose miles away across verdurous fields of prune and juice joy here's this British MG backed and legs up wheels up into a pit and bums and cops standing around right outside the coffee shop —it was the way they fenced it but he never had the nerve to do it due to the Fac. that he had no Money and nowhere to go and O his father was dead and O his mother was dead and O his sister was dead and O his whereabouts was dead was dead. —But and then at that time also I lay in my room on long Saturday afternoons listening to Jumpin' George with my fifth of tokay no tea and just under

the sheets laughed to hear the crazy music “Mama, he treats you daughter mean,” Mama, Papa, and dont you come in here I’ll kill you etc. getting high by myself in room glooms and all wondrous knowing about the Negro the essential America out there always finding his solace his meaning in the fellaheen street and not in abstract morality and even when he has a church you see the pastor out front to the ladies on the make you hear his great vibrant voice on the sunny Sunday afternoon sidewalk full of sexual vibratos saying “Why yes Mam but de gospel do say that man was born of woman’s womb—” and so and so by that time I come crawling out of my warmsock and hit the street when I see the railroad ain’t gonna call me Hill 5 am Sunday morn probable for a local out of Bayshore in fact always for a local out of Bayshore and I go to the wailbur of all the wildbars in the world the one and only Third-and-Howard and there I go in and drink with the madmen and if I get drunk I git.

The whore who come up to me in there the night I was there with Al Buckle and said to me “You wanta play with me tonight Jim, and?” and I didnt think I had enough Money and later told this to Charley Low and he laughed and said “How do you know she wanted Money always take the chance that she might be out just for love or just out for love you know what I mean man dont be a sucker.” She was a goodlooking doll and said “How would you like to oolyakoo with me mon?” and I stood there like a jerk and in fact bought drink got drink drunk that night and in the 299 Club I was hit by the proprietor the band breaking up the fight before I had a chance to decide to hit him back which I didnt do and out on the street I tried to rush back in but they had locked the door and were looking at me thru the forbidden glass in the door with faces like underseas — I should have played with her shurrouruuruuruuruuruurkdiei.

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