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The "Other Johnny": Jazz, Race, and Existentialism in Julio Cortázar's "El perseguidor" and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

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Introduction

In his 1958 interview with Jack Kerouac for *The New York Post*, reporter Mike Wallace describes the Beat author as "a tattered, forlorn young man, with the chronic exhaustion of one who eats and sleeps infrequently" (Wallace 2005, 3). Despite the huge commercial success of *On the Road*, he appeared to reject all trappings of material wealth, instead embracing a feigned poverty and forlornness. As a white, college-educated man who had recently published a best-selling novel, Kerouac's precarious living conditions seriously disagreed with his own socioeconomic reality, calling into question the legitimacy of Beats' supposedly raw and deeply personal "authenticity." The author and his contemporaries may have celebrated suffering as a "revelatory and redemptive" process (Prothero 1991, 217), but their enthusiastic performance of subaltern subjectivities manifested a highly problematic relationship with the Other.

In Kerouac's semi-autobiographical *On the Road* (1957), Beat protagonists Sal Paradise (the college student and aspiring writer) and Dean Moriarty (the novel's failed Beat icon and existentialist deity) hit the road in search of greater existential freedom, rejecting post-war capitalism and conformity, and modernity's dependence on false

"appearances" (Kerouac 265). Their cross-country quest includes numerous experimentations with abject poverty, as well as a series of racially charged encounters with minority characters, whom they construct as existential saints and gods due to their perceived freedom, spontaneity, and denunciation of American capitalism.[1] Dean constantly attempts to match and appropriate the perceived existential freedom of those he encounters, using sex, fast driving and alcohol to achieve some form of transcendence. Throughout the novel, he and Sal move from East to West and back again in a dizzying fury of recklessness and misadventure. The pair never quite finds what they are looking for, with Sal entirely abandoning his friend by the novel's end. Nevertheless, their journey proves emblematic of the angst and anxiety felt by the Beats in the wake of the Second World War. As Mark Richardson has argued, it also proves emblematic of the "blindness" exhibited by both the Beats and white liberals with regards to questions of race. Positing minority populations as free, "natural" and unhindered by the strictures of modernity, these non-conformists evidenced a consistently "'imaginary' relation to 'real' men" (Richardson 2001, 226). Their penchant for romanticizing experiences of otherness inherently made it "impossible to see what [was] really happening" in terms of racial injustice and inequality (Richardson 226). While Richardson maintains that the apparent discursive racism of Kerouac's *On the Road* should not be confused with "viciously forthright […] manifestations of American racism," he asserts that Kerouac's consciousness still "registers our national failures like a mirror" (231).

If *On the Road* lays bare national failures to address questions of racial inequality and injustice, it also speaks to the failures of the Beat and existential discourses that informed Kerouac's construction of minority characters and, more specifically, Black jazz musicians. The Beats' proximity and cautious affinity to existentialism is well documented, with the two philosophical movements sharing a similar rejection of middle-class conventions, exaltation of absolute individual freedom, and quest to provide justification for human existence.[2] The Beats and the existentialists—both American and European—also shared an interest in the transcendental qualities of jazz music, as well as a disquieting fixation with the perceived existential freedom of Black

[1] With the term "existentialist saint" I refer to those who manage to achieve a superior level of existential transcendence and in turn overcome the hegemony, consumerism and general disenchantment of post-war modernity. I distinguish between "gods" and "saints" only in order to emphasize the perceived existential superiority of certain individuals.

[2] See Gloria Murmis' "Intellectual Rejections of Established Society: The Existentialists and the Beats" (1964) for an exhaustive comparison of the two philosophical movements.

jazzmen. As I explain in detail below, Jack Kerouac, Simone de Beauvoir, Norman Mailer, and Jean-Paul Sartre all perceived of jazz in highly racialized terms, often doubting the capacity of white jazz musicians to match the instinctiveness and spontaneity of their Black counterparts. Although to varying degrees of intensity, they also convened in their construction of Black jazzmen as existential saints and gods, revealing the uncomfortable racial undertones of their various quests for universal existential freedom. In each case, the existential transcendence apparently achieved via the performance of jazz was not so much considered a result of the jazzman's genius as it was a unique byproduct of his Blackness. While *On the Road* does not encompass nor represent all of the unique ideological and philosophical bends of these actors, it does offer a stark example of the latent racism tucked beneath their shared romanticization of Blackness and otherness, particularly as expressed through jazz music. The novel, then, may be considered emblematic of white existentialist thinkers' and practitioners' awkward negotiation of questions of whiteness, privilege, and "real" authenticity.

Julio Cortázar also shared the general existential concerns of Beauvoir, Kerouac, Mailer and Sartre. In his 1947 "Teoría del túnel", the Argentine author sketches out the evolution of the novel, ultimately proposing a fusion of surrealism and existentialism that, as Saúl Yurkiévich argues, "culmina en un humanismo que no reconoce límites a la posibilidad humana" (29). Yurkiévich notes that Cortázar's brand of existentialism borrowed much from that of Jean-Paul Sartre, with his epigraph to "Teoría del túnel" proving "el apego de Cortázar al existencialismo, sobre todo al sartreano, anticipa su inquietud acerca de la condición humana, sujeta en un mundo desquiciado a un cuestionamiento radical" (18). Cortázar frontally acknowledges this "cuestionamiento radical" when, in this same text, he describes existentialism as a philosophical movement that does not "[cultiva] la soledad como condición auténtica del hombre" but rather assumes it "para transcenderla" (Cortázar 1995, 118). It is this battle to transcend human solitude that lies at the heart of his existential musings: "El hombre se angustia luciferinamente porque *sabe* que le ha sido dado ser más, ser él y también otro, ser-en otro, escapar del solipsismo. El existencialista se asume como soledad huyendo de falsas infinitudes […]" (Cortázar 1995, 118). While it is certainly true that, as Jorge Bracamonte contends, "no hay un diálogo epigonal con los existencialismos, sino una apropiación y reelaboración desde una posición propia" (95), Cortázar's early short fiction still registers the "significant formative influence" of the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (Harris 2009, 7), among others. To be sure, the Argentine

author reviewed Sartre's *Nausea* in 1948, where he extolled the heroic existential battle of the work's protagonist, Roquentin.[3] Here I do not intend to chart Cortázar's adoption of a Sartrean existentialism, as that would exceed the scope of the present work. Rather, I aim to highlight the author's intimate engagement with mid-century existentialism and, particularly, French existentialists, whose work he read almost at the moment of its publication.

Cortázar's interest in and adoption of existential philosophical currents extended to his own literary production, with his 1959 novella *El perseguidor* serving as an obvious example. The work traces the struggles of Johnny Carter, a talented Black jazz musician afflicted with a series of substance abuse and mental health issues; issues that ultimately provoke his untimely death. Narrated by Bruno, a white jazz critic who endeavors to write an authoritative biography on the musician, Johnny's own existential battle begins to take center stage, much to the chagrin of his biographer. Intent on preserving the validity of his biography—which presents the musician rather one-dimensionally—Bruno attempts to contain and suppress Johnny's desperate attempts to transcend metaphysics and chronologicity. Implicit in Bruno's quest is an attempt to characterize the musician's outstanding musical production as a byproduct of his Blackness. Doing so, as Bruno himself eventually admits, involves entirely ignoring Johnny's genius, both musical and philosophical. Despite the narrator-biographer's efforts to contain "the real" Johnny, the musician still manages to make his voice heard via a series of dialogues with Bruno that expose the extent of his existential project.[4] Cortázar's Johnny, then, radically differs from Jack Kerouac's racially charged portrayal

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[3] "Las páginas en que Roquentin se siente excedido por la náusea, signo objetivo de la destrucción de las formas hasta entonces aceptadas y vividas, y avanza de vértigo en vértigo hasta la escena terrible del jardín botánico [...] entran ya en la literatura cono uno de las más admirables esfuerzos del hombre" (Cortázar 1994, 107).

[4] Here and throughout, I will use the term "existential project" in relation to Simone de Beauvoir's conception of the project, which seems to most closely aligned with Cortázar's existential musings in *El perseguidor* as well as the existential project proposed—although never achieved—by Dean in *On the Road.* In contrast to Sartre, Beauvoir grounds the existential project in notions of community, action and "movement towards the other" (93). It is only through this intentioned engagement with the Other that, as Beauvoir's theorizations imply, the existential saint or god—here Dean Moriarty and Johnny Carter—may fully realize his/her respective projects and move towards universal existential freedom: "It is because my subjectivity is not inertia, folding in upon itself, separation, but, on the contrary, movement towards the other that the difference between me and the other is abolished, and I can call the other mine. Only I can create the tie that unites me to the other. I create it from the fact that I am not a thing, but a project of itself towards the other, a transcendence. And it is this power that Camus's Stranger is unaware of: no possession is given, but the foreign indifference of the world is not given either. I am not a thing first but a spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts. [...] One *is* not the neighbor of anyone; one makes the other a neighbor by making himself [*se faisant*] his neighbor through an act" (93).

of voiceless Black jazzmen. While the Argentine's 1959 novella may not reflect a direct response to Kerouac's novel, I argue that it does challenge both the Beats' and the existentialists' characterization of marginalized subjects as "noble savages" turned existential deities. Resurrecting the humanity and agency of Black jazzmen through his intimate portrayal of Johnny Carter, Cortázar dialogues with the existential concerns of his immediate contemporaries while simultaneously calling into question the latent racism of their fixation with Black jazz artists. Reading *El perseguidor* alongside *On the Road,* the present essay aims to tease-out Cortázar's commentary on existentialism's race problem and the clear racial imaginaries tied-up with its theorizations of jazz.

Kerouac, Mailer, and the French existentialists

Jack Kerouac contextualizes Dean and Sal's multiple cross-country journeys not with elaborate descriptions of known landmarks or common road trip tropes, but rather with the ensemble of characters that the two meet along the way. The cities and towns encountered by the friends serve as intriguing backdrops for their many misadventures, but the two derive greater significance from the communities of forlorn individuals who inhabit them. In Dean Moriarty's attempt to escape chronological time by harnessing the illusive "IT," the people who populate the road serve as obvious, although ineffective, sources of inspiration for his existential project.[5] While Dean's tragic childhood and subsequent incarceration for vehicle theft designate him a bona fide peripheral subject in his own right, he still seeks a certain union with those who have experienced an even more oppressive marginality, and who, in turn, personify a more profound existential authenticity. For Dean and, consequently, for Sal, too, subjects who represent racial minorities symbolize the most pure and authentic embodiments of Beat spirituality due to the harsh—and highly romanticized—realities of their marginal existences. In the context of Kerouac's road novel, their perceived exteriority to American capitalism and conformity offer them a decisive advantage over aspiring white rebels and existentialists. In stride with Dean's frequent veneration of Black, Chicano and Mexican characters, even Sal, who comes to parrot Moriarty's own racial imaginaries, lays bare his disillusionment with white culture and his own whiteness: "I walked with every muscle […] wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the

[5] Ben Giamo, is his book, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way*, describes "IT" in the following terms: "The only reprieve from the terminus of chronological time is a high-octane mixture of speed and desire embodied in IT. IT, a transcendent state of pure excitement, stop the felt experience of linear time screeching in its tracks" (29). Dean works to achieve "IT" by experimenting with drugs, sex and fast driving.

best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night…I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap" (96). Here whiteness opposes the "joy, kicks, darkness, music" experienced by racial minorities, rendering the white man a subject nearly incapable of achieving a state of pure existential authenticity. To this end, Kerouac seems to imply that the eventual failure of Dean's existential project is but a function of his racial inferiority.

As Douglas Malcom contends in his study of *On the Road*, Kerouac likely looked to Norman Mailer's concept of the "white negro" for his construction of Dean, which would explain the character's concern for appropriating the "ideology of the cultural dowry" of minority characters (Malcolm 1995, 94). While Mailer was not atypical among American existentialists in his belief that minority populations—and particularly Black communities—possessed an exceptional form of existential freedom due to their experiences of oppression and marginalization, he advanced the idea far beyond the more conservative musings of his contemporaries (Cotkin 2012, 125). Mailer saw cunning acts of courage and, often, violence, as the only way to combat bourgeois evil and advance one's existential freedom. His understanding of America's post-war existential crisis led him to view "black pimps and pushers," for example, as "existential rebels rejecting bourgeois notions of morality and, most importantly, living with an existential awareness of contingency and death" (Cotkin 2012, 125). Yet Mailer's celebration of these existential rebels hinged on their supposed "psychopathic" tendencies and general lack of self-control, with the American existentialist suggesting that Black men—because he limited existential possibilities to men alone— "had been transformed into the psychopathic hipster through centuries of oppressive social conditions" (Cotkin 2003, 194).[6] These "centuries of oppressive social conditions," however, were never quite contextualized nor fully taken into account by Mailer, despite his contention that no degree of assimilation or appropriation of the Black man's condition could truly replicate his experience. Mailer's blindness to the violent

[6] "Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, camp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm" (Mailer 1992, 341).

complexities of mid-century experiences of Blackness were powerfully expressed in James Baldwin's now infamous response to "The White Negro":

> The world had prepared no place for [the Black man]. Now, this is true for everyone, but in the case of a Negro, this truth is absolutely naked: if he deludes himself about it, he will die. This is not the way this truth presents itself to white men, who believe the world is their and who, albeit unconsciously, expect the world to help them in the achievement of their identity. (279)

As Baldwin makes clear, Mailer's delusion was twofold: the American existentialist was blind to the true extent of his own privilege, and it was this privilege that informed his conflation of racial marginalization with "psychotic" hipness.

If Kerouac constructs Dean as the quintessential "white negro," it is fitting that *On the Road* ends with a symbolic pilgrimage to Mexico City, where he and Sal hope to lose themselves among a sea of "great brown eyes" (Kerouac 284). The trip to Mexico marks the friends' last-ditch effort to appropriate the spiritual vitality of their would-be existential deities through a total immersion in the poverty and marginality they expect to encounter. It also provides several jarring examples of the pair's perpetual misreading and simultaneous silencing of marginalized subjects. Dean looks to Mexico, and Mexico City specifically, as potential wellsprings of extreme existential freedom and true authenticity, despite his and Sal's obvious unfamiliarity with the country and the unique challenges of its working class.[7] As Dean himself suggests, it is not so much Mexico that he finds attractive, but rather that "wailing humanity [that] stretches around the equatorial belly of the world" where you can hear "the same mournful wail by the rotted walls of Cádiz, Spain, that you hear 12,000 miles around in the depths of Benares the Capital of the World" (Kerouac 268). Mexico simply provides the Beat traveler with a convenient gateway to the Global South, which he perceives as an indistinguishable whole defined by its precarity and "essential strain of the basic primitive" (Kerouac 268). To this end, Dean conflates Mexican campesinos' scarcity of material resources with existential authenticity, evidencing his own romanticization of widespread poverty and inequality: "Real beat huts, man, the kind you only find in Death Valley and much worse. These people don't bother with appearances" (265). Reminiscent of Mailer's own theorization of Black "hipness" from afar, the travelers make no attempt to dialog with the forlorn individuals whose "real beat huts" they so admire. Ironically, they do

[7] Dean and Sal seemingly fail to distinguish Mexico from the rest of Latin America, and "the world" for that matter, as evidenced by Dean himself, who upon arriving in Mexico exclaims, "It's the world! We can go right on to South America if the road goes. Think of it! Son-of-a-bitch! Gawd-damn!" (264).

succeed in using their broken Spanish to converse with border agents (259) and brothel employees (275), proving that communication would have been possible had they only made the effort. Throughout, Dean's failure to interact with the impoverished Mexicans he so idolizes constructs them as voiceless caricatures of Beat spirituality who become mesmerizing roadside attractions for the adventuring existentialist. While observing several young girls selling crystals along the road, Sal goes to far as to explain that the children—whose "eyes of the Virgin Mother" and "forgiving gaze of Jesus" establish them as potential existential deities—are more "themselves" when silent: "Still [the girls] penetrated us with sorrowful and hypnotic gleam. When they talked they suddenly became frantic and almost silly. In their silence they were themselves" (284). Along the way, Dean fills this silence with his own descriptions of what life must be like for the Mexicans he observes, establishing his own "'imaginary' relation to 'real' men" (Richardson 2001, 226).[8]

Entirely persuaded by Dean's fanciful tales, Sal becomes convinced that Mexico City shall provide them with the sort of existential transcendence they had been seeking: "We'd made it, a total of thirteen hundred miles from the afternoon yards of Denver to these vast and *Biblical* areas of the world, and now we were about to reach the *end of the road*" (286, my emphasis). Mexico's largest urban center would have to provide the pair with an orgasmic concentration of the existential deities they had already encountered on the road, allowing for a full appropriation of their "cultural dowry" (Mailer 1992, 340) and, of course, existential freedom. Their eventual arrival promised to offer a final resolution to their "search for freedom of spontaneous action, liberation of spirit, self-willed individualism, and brotherhood" (Giamo 2002, 27), yet the pilgrimage ultimately fails to redeem Dean's disastrous existential project. Instead of finding freedom, authenticity, and enlightenment in the city, the Beat grows anxious to "get back to [his] life" (Kerouac 288). Claiming he must return to New York to divorce his estranged wife, Dean leaves Sal bedridden in Mexico with a mysterious

[8] Dean develops a particularly elaborate tale after observing a three-year old girl who gazes at him from her front yard: "'[…] *Think of it,* being born and living on this ledge—this ledge representing all you know of life. Her father is probably groping down the ravine with a rope and getting his pineapples out of a cave and hacking wood at an eighty-degree angle with all the bottom below. She'll never, never leave here and know anything outside this world. It's a nation. Think of the wild chief they must have! They probably, off the road over that bluff, miles back, must be even wilder and stranger, yeah see the Pan-American Highway partially civilizes this nation on this road. Notice the beads of sweat on her brow,' Dean pointed out with a grimace of pain. 'It's not the kind of sweat we have, it's oily and it's *always there* because it's *always* hot the year round and she knows nothing of non-sweat, she was born with sweat and dies with sweat'" (Kerouac 284-285).

fever. After realizing that his friend is in fact "a rat"—and not, then, the existential saint he thought he was—Sal reasons that he "had to understand the impossible complexity of his life" (Kerouac 288), perhaps alluding to the improbability that Dean, a white man, would ever succeed in appropriating the extraordinary existential freedom of the minority subjects he so idolizes. Instead, Sal muses, Dean will "get on with his wives and whores" (Kerouac 288), once again resorting to the cheap thrills offered by sex, substance abuse, and fast driving as he pursues a now wholly impossible transcendence of post-war modernity and chronologicity.

If Mexico City serves as a site of pilgrimage for the friends and, further, marks the decisive end of their journey, the novel's Mexican characters are not necessarily posited as its most promising existential deities. Considering Kerouac's ideological proximity to Mailer, it is perhaps unsurprising that Dean and Sal describe the multiple Jazzmen presented in *On the Road* as true existentialist gods who embody the extreme authenticity and existential freedom the friends unequivocally fail to assume in Mexico. The novel's Black musicians—who appear as only minor characters—serve as essential points of reference for our analysis of Kerouac's racialized understanding of existential freedom and authenticity. While the jazzmen's Blackness would already bestow them with an existential purity unattainable by the white man, Kerouac's similar idolization of other minority subjects inevitably complicates our reading of them.[9] Not unlike the Mexicans encountered along the road, the jazzmen appear not as fully-embodied characters, but rather as God-like subjects who are observed and worshiped from afar, in part due to their racial identities.[10] Yet their musical production incites a rapture in Dean that exceeds any joy or fascination he experiences whilst interacting with non-musician minority subjects, proving that their singularity is more than a simple function of their racial marginalization. In the context of *On the Road,* Black jazzmen are endowed with qualities perpetually unavailable to Dean, despite his unrelenting quest to attain

[9] Although George Shearing was a white jazz musician, I argue that Dean still admires his feigned Blackness and the perceived authenticity of his performance. That is, although Shearing is not Black, his ability to capture and reproduce the essence of the Black jazz artist would, in Dean's eyes, negate the complication of his whiteness. The fact that Shearing is blind further elevates his status as a potential "jazz God," both by marking him as a legitimate "sufferer" and by attributing to him the spirituality and wisdom often assigned to the "seer." To this end, Shearing may represent an example of what Mailer deemed impossible and yet surely craved: the white man's total appropriation of the freedom and suffering supposedly inherent to Blackness.

[10] Dean notably refers to George Shearing as "God" in the second part of *On the Road*: "'Sal, God has arrived.' I looked. George Shearing. And as always he leaned his blind head on his pale hands" (229).

them: the capacity to achieve prolonged existential transcendence without risking one's own life, and, most critically, communicate one's experience with others. Jazz, Blackness, and existential transcendence, then, find their ultimate conjugation in Kerouac's Black jazzmen, who advance the perceived existential authenticity of Mexican characters to new extremes.

As a highly racialized artform in the context of a post-war United States, jazz emblemized a particular mode of existential freedom derived from the assumed madness, spontaneity, and irrationality of its Black practitioners in particular. Douglas Malcolm notes that throughout Kerouac's literary career he appeared to celebrate jazzmen not for the "genius" of their artistic production, but rather for "the unavoidable implication that the audible content they create derives not from rational thought but from visceral spontaneity" (96). For Kerouac's protagonist, listening to live jazz performances takes the form of a religious experience, with the Beat trying everything possible to appropriate the existential freedom and transcendence he claims to recognize among Black jazzmen. While traveling through California, Sal narrates a particularly jarring episode at a jazz club, where he and Dean rush to hear the "wild" performance of a Black brass band:

> The behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling rift went from 'EE-yah!' to a crazier 'EE-de-lee-yah!' and blasted along the rolling crash of butt-scared drums hammered by a big brutal Negro with a bullneck who didn't give a damn about anything but punishing his busted tubs, crash, rattle-ti-boom, crash. Uproars of music and the tenorman *had it* and everybody knew he had it. Dean was clutching his head in the crowd, and it was a mad crowd. They were all urging that tenorman to hold it and keep it with cries and wild eyes, and he was raising himself from a couch and going down again with his horn, looping it up in a clear cry above the furor. A six-foot skinny Negro woman was rolling her bones at the man's hornbell, and he just jabbed it at her 'Ee! ee! ee! (Kerouac 186-187)

From the jazzman to his Black patrons, jazz and Blackness are defined in terms of violence, madness and an animalistic lack of discourse. Conjugating jazz, blackness and irrationality, Sal describes the tenorman not as a musician but rather as a "big brutal Negro" (187) who does not play the tenor but "punishes" it, all before a crowd of Black patrons who share and reflect his madness. Dean attempts to explain the significance of the jazzmen's music through an elaborate description of how they find, keep, and sustain "IT." Yet his acknowledgment of the musicians' supposed ability to transcend the constraints of linear chronologicity does not redeem his consistent objectification and animalization of Black jazzmen, who he paints as highly instinctual and wholly irrational individuals. If Dean defines the jazzmen as vaguely spiritual beings who are

"filling empty space with the substance of our lives" (195), he still reduces their music to the artless confluence of brute force and "not giv[ing] a damn" (Kerouac 187).[11] Their finding "IT," then, becomes rather accidental; it is the random consequence of "blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea" (Kerouac 186) that is not so much an "idea" as it is a burst of Blackness.

Of course, Kerouac and his Beat contemporaries were not alone in their association of jazz—and, particularly, Black jazz—with existential freedom. Norman Mailer, too, idolized Black jazz and blues artists whom he fit to his broad conceptualization of the Black "hipster psychopath." To be sure, his conception of the hipster largely stemmed from his observations of the New York jazz scene during the 1950's, with the American existentialist crediting the artform for producing the "presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American culture" (Mailer 1992, 340). Describing jazz as an orgasmic force capable of translating and communicating existential concerns to others—and even whites—Mailer's theorizations do not differ so much from Dean's own musings:

> For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, 'I feel this, and now you do too. (Mailer 1992, 341)

Unlike Kerouac's protagonists, Mailer managed to identify jazz and blues as genres intimately connected to multi-generational experiences of suffering and oppression, yet his celebration of the artforms' existential possibilities perhaps deliberately overlooked

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[11] This racist portrayal of Black jazzman stands in stark contrast to the nuanced renderings produced by many of Kerouac's Black contemporaries. In his 1952 existential novel, *Invisible Man*—published some five years before *On the Road* (1957)—Ralph Ellison "presented the blues and existentialism as complementary forms of expression: one can hear music in existential philosophy and *read philosophy in the music of blues*" (Cotkin 2003, 175, my emphasis). Writing as a Black man with intimate knowledge of the Jim Crow South, Ellison's depiction of jazz and blues took full stock of the genres' historical significance and subversive nature, as well as its ability to communicate truths relevant to humanity more generally. Moreover, in the novel's opening scene, Ellison's protagonist expresses his respect for Black trumpeter Louis Armstrong in a way that runs entirely counter to Kerouac's unhinged meditations on Black jazz artists' supposedly "psychopathic" qualities: "[Armstrong has] made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible" (8). Making poetry out of his own experience of racial marginalization and rejecting his own invisibility by refusing to construct himself as such, Ellison's Louis Armstrong—who still achieves the sort of existential freedom and transcendence yearned for in *On the Road*—is a far cry from Kerouac's jazzmen, who "blow" and rage into an inarticulable existential oblivion.

the intentionality and nuance of Black artists.[12] Worse still, he conceived of Black experiences as irreconcilable with universal human experiences, generally reducing "blues [and] black life to mere pathological categories" (Cotkin 2003, 195). Cotkin argues that Mailer only succeeded in mirroring the identity-fixing of the white racist, downplaying "acts of quiet resistance and necessary submission [and] the humanity of complex individuals attempting to cope with the black experience in Jim Crow racist America" (Cotkin 2003, 195).

Unfortunately, this uncomfortable racialization of jazz and blues music was not necessarily unique to white Americans. In his 2001 study of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and the Paris jazz Scene, Collin W. Nettelbeck contends that towards the end of his life, Jean-Paul Sartre associated jazz with "spontaneity, perpetual originality and self-renewal, and the capacity to unite musician, instrument, and music into a single future-oriented act" (173). But even in Sartre's existentialist novel *Nausea* (1938), the existentialist "linked together African-American blues and existentialism" (Cotkin 2003, 162). Roquentin's multiple encounters with Sophie Tucker's jazz record *Some of These Days* (1910) provide a haven from the protagonist's reoccurring nausea and facilitate his momentary transcendence of the temporal contingencies of existence.[13] Yet despite the song's pivotal role in the novel, Sartre confuses Russian artist Sophie Tucker for a "Negress," and Black composer Shelton Brooks for a "New York Jew." While both a "Negress" and a "New York Jew" undoubtedly represent marginalized subjects, Sartre's decision to assign the song's authorship to a white man—instead of the Black man who actually wrote the piece—seems to betray an assumed intellectual hierarchy, where the

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[12] Ted Gioia's description of the blues' employment as a vehicle of remembrance and resistance underscores the gravity of Mailer's shortcomings: "If the work song reflects rhythm as a source of discipline, the blues represents the other side of African rhythms, the Dionysian side that offered release. More than any of the other forms of early African American music, the blues allowed the performer to present an individual statement of pain, oppression, poverty, longing, and desire. Yet it achieved this without falling into self-pity and recriminations. Instead the blues offered a catharsis, an idealization of the individual's plight, and, in some strange way, an uplifting sense of mastery over the dire circumstances typically recounted in the context of these songs. In this regard, the blues offers us a psychological enigma as profound as any possessed by classical tragedy" (11-12).

[13] "She sings. So the two of them are saved: the Jew and the Negress. Saved. Maybe they thought they were lost irrevocably, drowned in existence. Yet no one could think of me as I think of them, with such gentleness. No one, not even Anny. They are a little like dead people for me, a little like the heroes of a novel; they have washed themselves of the sin of existing. Not completely, of course, but as much as any man can. The idea suddenly knocks me over, because I was not even hoping for that anymore. I feel something brush against me lightly and I dare not move because I'm afraid it will go away. Something I didn't know any more: a sort of joy / The Negress sings. Can you justify your existence then? Just a little? I feel extraordinarily intimidated" (Sartre 2007, 177).

Black man (or woman) is reduced to the spontaneous performer of jazz and not, then, the *author* of music. Sartre's subtle positioning of jazz as a function of Black spontaneity—and not, then, Black intellectual activity—speaks to the fact that both Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir deemed jazz an explicitly Black art form (Nettelbeck 2001, 177). *The Second Sex* author even went so far as to openly criticize white jazz artists, who she claimed were incapable of capturing the spontaneous "essence" of black musicians (Nettelbeck 2001, 179), a contention held by many patrons of the Paris jazz scene in the first half of the twentieth century (Strauss 1965, 584). The pair likely would have agreed with Olivier Despax who, although writing in 1959, claimed in an issue of *Hot Jazz* that "[N]egro musicians have a unique character: a spirit of their own, one which the whites lack, a kind of ferocity of rhythm, a violence which they call 'swing.' They also have a great deal of sensitivity, but a brutal sensitivity, absolutely not the sensitivity of whites" (Despax qtd. in Strauss 583).

In light of Mailer's and French existentialists' quiet racialization of jazz, Kerouac's portrayal of black artists is neither revelatory nor surprising. The jazzman's subjectivity, agency, and intentionality disappear behind the Beat author's insinuation that jazz would be but another stale (white) artform if not for the Blackness of its practitioners. For Kerouac, jazz music's perceived "capacity to unite musician, instrument, and music into a single future-oriented act" (Nettelbeck 2001, 173) is not born from musical genius nor innovation, but rather from the spontaneous conjugation of multiple racial, cultural and socioeconomic factors, over which the jazzman has almost no control. Upon encountering the trumpet or saxophone, Mailer's "negro" finds the necessary vehicle through which to express and communicate his existential freedom, thus morphing into the jazz gods so venerated by Dean and Sal. "Musician, instrument, and music" certainly form a "single future-oriented act," but for Kerouac and his contemporaries, this exhibition of existential transcendence is the result of violent spontaneity and not, as Cortázar will argue, an intentioned gesture aimed at communicating broader misgivings about race, inequality, and the crushing demands of modernity.

Corázar's Other Jazzmen

In *El perseguidor* (1959), Cortázar's Johnny Carter very closely resembles the "jazz gods" that Sal and Dean encounter on the road, including famous bop movement innovator, Charlie Parker. In his article "The Historical Dimension in Julio Cortázar's 'The Pursuer'" (1979), Robert W. Felkel painstakingly tracks the similarities between

Cortázar's Johnny and Charlie Parker, concluding that the novel's most iconic scenes—Johnny's performance of "Amorous", the fire at the hotel, Bee's death, and Tica's account of Carter's own death—very accurately depict real-life events. Charlie Parker—an American musician whom Kerouac saw perform live on multiple occasions—receives a brief mention in *On the Road* as Dean outlines the history of "great bop innovators" (Kerouac 228). Dean's surprisingly coherent explication of the history of bop posits Parker as something akin to the movement's founding father, who he describes as "that gloomy, saintly goof in whom the history of jazz was wrapped" (228).[14] Moreover, Charlie Parker's own 1949 visit to France—where he and his music were widely celebrated on the Paris jazz scene—ties him to the jazz-enthusiast French existentialists mentioned above. Parker, then, fits both chronologically and stylistically with the group of jazz artists explicitly mentioned in *On the Road*, as well as those idolized by Beauvoir, Mailer and Sartre, among others. Serving as a stand-in for the sort of black jazz artists simultaneously celebrated and poorly interpreted by existentialist thinkers from both sides of the Atlantic—including the Beats—Cortázar's Johnny Carter is nevertheless endowed with a voice and subjectivity entirely absent from the works of many (white) mid-century authors and thinkers. The Argentine author employs his fictional jazzman as a litmus test to measure the inherent racism and exploitative tendencies of his white followers, and in doing so exposes him to the sort of violence—both discursive and symbolic—likely encountered by the real Charlie Parker. Never allowing his protagonist to entirely fall victim to the malice of parasitic jazz fans and existentialists, Cortázar allows his Johnny to define himself against the

[14] Kerouac's version of Charlie Parker serves as a particularly illustrative example of the racial imaginaries of a wide variety of existentialist thinkers and creators. Despite identifying Parker as a musical innovator and obvious leader of the bop movement, *On the Road's* depiction of the jazzman's "early days" unsurprisingly celebrates the poverty and precarity of the musician's upbringing. Kerouac's narrator ultimately suggests that these conditions—and not, then, Parker's genius—produced the profoundly original jazz that would make him a music legend. Dean recalls Parker as "a kid in his mother's woodshed in Kansas City, blowing his taped-up alto among the logs, practicing on rainy days, […] his early days when he flipped and walked around in a circle while playing" and contends that "when he held his horn high and horizontal from his mouth he blew the greatest" (228). It is only later in life and, presumably, upon achieving the type of commercial success that would take him away from his mother's woodshed, that "his hair got longer and he got lazier and stretched out, his horn came down half-way; till it finally fell all the way and today he wears thick-soled shoes so that he can't feel the sidewalks of life […] and he blows cool and easy getout phrases" (228). Dean's, then, is a starkly one-dimensional Charlie Parker, whose musical authenticity only exists so long as he embodies the poverty and racial marginalization of his youth.

representations proportioned by his many "admirers," even as he still tries to help them achieve existential transcendence.[15]

Johnny Carter's most devoted and parasitic follower is undoubtedly his biographer, Bruno, who is also the narrator of *El perseguidor*. While many of Carter's other friends indulge his "madness" and reckless behavior, the jazz critic works to diffuse and contain the musician's outbursts, which we learn are not bouts of madness but rather symptoms of a prolonged search for existential freedom and the transcendence of chronologicity. Bruno may care for the jazzman's personal safety and well-being, but his primary objective is to preserve the authority of his forthcoming biography, in which he presents Johnny as a brilliant musician and jazz artist who is, however, entirely one-dimensional. His text reduces Johnny's life and work to a "plano meramente estético" (Cortázar 37), erasing all traces of his troubled behavior and wholly dissociating the musician from his music. As Bruno himself admits, the biography "no dice la verdad sobre Johnny (tampoco miente), sino que se limita a la música de Johnny" (31), with "verdad" he excludes representing the very essence of the jazzman's musical production. Bruno's reduction of Johnny's jazz to a "plano meramente estético" (37) proves wildly inappropriate, particularly since the musician's jazz—as becomes increasingly clear over the course of the novella—is but a symptom of an existential quest to exceed the confines of a suffocating post-war modernity. Yet the biographer's uncomfortable translation of Johnny is only further complicated by his frequent employment of racial slurs. Bruno refers to his subject as a "mono salvaje" (30) and "[un] chimpancé que quiere aprender a leer" (25), later stating that the musician lacked "la menor conciencia […] de las dimensiones de su obra" (36). Cortázar's protagonist is defined by Bruno as a jazz artist whose musical production is inherently entangled with mid-century notions of Blackness, with the biographer employing the

[15] In his article on the function of jazz in *El perseguidor,* Andrés González Riquelme argues that the novella not only employs jazz as its narrative motor but is actually "*maquinado* por el jazz" (33). According to this reading, jazz may be understood as a sort of "method," that in the case of *El perseguidor* "desencadenó la producción de todo un relato" (34) based, as González Riquelme contends, on a series of improvisations, "fugas" and searches for "el medio." While the present work seeks to consider the jazz's appropriation by mid-century existentialists, the article's conceptualization of the novella's underlying "máquina-musical" appears to support my reading of *El persesguidor*'s as a text that attempts to rupture existing existentialist discourses. González Riquelme's description of the potentially subversive qualities of jazz—which he likewise recognizes in Cortázar's work—proves particularly evocative: "Todo el jazz, toda su historia, es un constante abrir posibilidades para líneas de improvisación cada vez más libres. Allí donde de pronto se produce una obstrucción de los flujos, allí donde la música se estanca en formas anquilosadas, aparecen músicos revolucionarios que aseguran la fuga de la música y la apertura de nuevas y múltiples posibilidades de continuidad y proliferación" (38).

racial epithets to advance his characterization of Johnny as a wild, instinctual artist not unlike those presented in Kerouac's *On the Road*.

This notion that Black jazzmen produce music spontaneously and even mindlessly echoes Kerouac's descriptions of American jazzmen, as well as existentialist philosophers' belief in the "unique character" and "brutal sensitivity" of Black musicians (Despax qtd. in Strauss 1965, 583). Bruno's employment of racial slurs comparing Johnny to various primates—"chimpancé" (25), "mono salvaje" (30)—only compounds this characterization and produces an outright animalization of the artist. Despite Bruno's personal motivations for upholding an apocryphal portrayal of Johnny, the jazz critic seems to imply that his biography and its underlying racial imaginaries respond to larger cultural trends, trends which ultimately coopt his own bad faith.[16] Indeed, in the novella's final pages, Bruno tries to justify his publication of a misleading biography by referencing the wants and expectations of his (white) readers:

> Todo me inducía a conservar tal cual ese retrato de Johnny; no era cosa de crearse complicaciones con un público que quiere mucho jazz pero nada de análisis musicales o psicológicos, nada que no sea la satisfacción momentánea y bien recortada, las manos que marcan el ritmo, las manos que se aflojan beatíficamente, la música que se pasea por la piel, se incorpora a la sangre y a la respiración, y después basta, nada de razones profundas. (36)

According to the jazz critic, said "público" conceives of jazz as a highly physical and instinctual artform unique to Black jazzmen that invites viewers and listeners to share in the primitive, animalistic euphoria of its practitioners. According to this logic, Black jazz would hardly require the same "razones profundas" (36) necessary to interpret the more intentioned musical production of white artists. It is instead a corporeal experience that allows for the sort of escapism that, for those like Dean, proportions spontaneous bursts of existential transcendence. Bruno's biography, then, offers the public the jazzman they expect and, ultimately, clamor for. One would undoubtedly

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[16] Despite problematic nature of his biography, Bruno does makes evident his understanding of Johnny's unique brilliance, and on a few occasions even expresses his misgivings about publishing a text that fails to accurately describe the jazzman in all his complexity. The jazz critic's narration of events and transcription of Carter's commentary oscillates between an authentic celebration of the artist's genius and a series of less-than-convincing rejections of the American's intelligence. The relative transparency of *El perseguidor's* conflicted narrator—who denigrates Carter for fear of his biography's poor reception and an unwillingness to acknowledge his own bad faith—deflates the weight and believability of his most jarring criticisms. Bruno's dismissal of Johnny's artistry and true existential freedom most often appears either in the context of his stated concern that Carter may discredit his book or follow a moment of authentic reflection on the intentionality of Johnny's quest. Cortázar appears to ask his reader to peer through Bruno's most scathing critiques, whereas the descriptions of jazzmen produced by Dean and Sal in *On the Road* leave little room for alternative readings.

find the likes of Beauvoir, Kerouac, Mailer and Sartre among this ambiguous "público que quiere mucho jazz pero nada de análisis musicales o psicológicos" (36), all of whom had—to some degree—fallen into the trap of sacrificing "razones profundas" for a romanticized fantasy of Black jazz. As James Baldwin puts it in his response to Norman Mailer's "White Negro," they sought out "their romance" at the expense of ignoring the nuances of the Black experience and, in turn, Black resistance (272).

If Cortázar parodically employs Bruno as a stand-in for jazz-enthusiast existentialists who refused to grapple with "razones profundas", his Johnny Carter brings to life the many Black jazz artists silenced and dehumanized by their racially charged theorizations. While Johnny's subjectivity, voice, and penchant for action occupy the entirety of the novella, it is the work's rambling first scene where the musician most poignantly defines himself against dominant racial imaginaries. In this first major scene, Bruno visits Johnny and his partner Dédée to inquire about the musician's lost saxophone and check in on his health. Right from the start, and as if verbally combatting the one-dimensionality of the jazz critic's forthcoming biography, Johnny starts alluding to his existential project and the intentionality of his seemingly wild behavior. Anticipating his later, more extensive meditations on duration, the jazzman makes multiple references to his aversion to time, complaining that "todo el mundo sabe las fechas menos yo" (3) and that "[se] sentiría mejor si pudiera [olvidarse] del tiempo" (3). He also notes that, as a boy, "en casa el tiempo no acababa nunca" (5). From there, Cortázar's protagonist starts to articulate the role of jazz music in his transcendence of chronologicity and his understanding of time itself: "La música me sacaba del tiempo, aunque no es más que una manera de decirlo. Si quieres saber lo que realmente siento, yo creo que la música me metía en el tiempo" (5). Carter's descriptions of being removed from chronological time closely resemble Dean's own understanding of "IT"—"Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives' (Kerouac 195)—which Bem Giamo more neatly defines as "a transcendent state of pure excitement, [that stops] the felt experience of linear time screeching in its tracks" (29). Yet here it is the Black jazzman—and not, then, his white fans—who articulates a yearning to rebel against a society in which "the mechanical clock [is] the modern taskmaster that presides over every minute of our lives" (Judaken 2012, 10).

As becomes increasingly obvious over the course of the novella, the musical production of Cortázar's protagonist is but a byproduct of his larger quest to transcend the void that is modernity. Johnny's description of experiencing duration on the

metro—which appears in this same opening scene—reveals the depth of his existential project and unequivocally confirms that jazz is not the musician's only inroad:

> Apenas un minute y medio por tu tiempo, por el tiempo de esa […] Y también por el del *métro* y el de mi reloj, malditos sean. Entonces, ¿cómo puede ser que yo haya estado pensando un cuarto de hora, eh Bruno? ¿Cómo se puede pensar un cuarto de hora en un minuto y medio? Te juro que ese día no había fumado ni un pedacito ni una hojita—agrega como un chico que se excusa—. Y después me ha vuelto de suceder, ahora me empieza a suceder en todas partes. Pero—agrega astutamente—solo en el *métro* me puedo dar cuenta porque viajar en el *métro* es como estar metido en un reloj. Las estaciones son los minutos, comprendes, ese tiempo de ustedes, de ahora; pero yo sé que hay otro, he estado pensando, pensando…(9)

Johnny may struggle to articulate his experience of duration, but he undoubtedly succeeds in positing "his" time against "ese tiempo de ustedes," which he connects to the metro, "el reloj" and modernist conformity, more generally. The metro, with its uniform stations and regimented schedule, contrasts so severely with "Johnny's time" that it gives the impression of resisting the stale mechanizations of modernity from within. Yet Johnny's interactions with blatant symbols of modernity's omnipresence not only produce wonder and bewilderment—"Cómo se puede pensar un cuarto de hora en un minuto y medio?"—but full-fledged philosophical musings: "pero yo sé que hay otro […], he estado pensando, pensando…" (9). Advancing the jazzman's relatively vague references to time and being "metido en el tiempo" (5), Johnny's meditation on his experience of duration forces Bruno and the novella's reader to recognize him as a much intentioned existentialist thinker. Whereas the protagonist's "pero sé que hay otro" establishes his experiments as belonging to a general quest to escape an asfixiating modernity, "he estado pensando, pensando…" confirms that there is a method to his percieved "madness." Johnny is and has been thinking, and it is this thinking that has prompted his seemingly erradic behavior, which nevertheless stands apart from the recklessness of Kerouac's Dean, both due to its philosophical depth and the general ethical nature of the project as a whole. Johnny's experiences of duration, then, are neither functions of his jazz nor his Blackness. Instead they belong to a larger project aimed at achieving universal existential freedom and transendence.

As his description of the metro lays bare, the jazzman's rambling monologue only thinly veils his contemplation of modern existential concerns and significant misgivings about the processes of modernization that continued to transform post-war

Europe.[17] Beyond establishing the intentionality of Johnny's quest, this striking first scene also begins to construct the jazzman as an existential saint, further conflating him with the "jazz gods" of Beauvoir, Kerouac, Mailer and Sartre, among others. Amid his meandering monologue, the musician complains that "[e]mpieza a hacer calor", which becomes a convenient excuse to disrobe and reveal the "hermosa cicatriz que [tiene] entre las costillas" (10). As Robin William Fiddian afirms, "the scar recalls unequivocally the stigmata which Christ displayed on the Cross" (155), a hypothesis that responds to a plethora of textual clues signaling Carter's similarity to Christ, including, of course, his initials, J. C. If Christ sought to absolve the world of sin, Johnny launches various experiments in order to, as he himself describes, "[encontrar] la manera [en que] podríamos vivir mil veces más de lo que estamos viviendo por culpa de los relojes, de esa manía de minutos y de pasado mañana" (9). He, too, hopes to save humanity, although in this case from an unhinged modernity that privileges consumption, mechanization and "los relojes". Yet more critically, Johnny's decision to reveal the marking evidences a desire to fully assert his own existential sainthood before the jazz critic's biography diminishes his power of self-expression. Unlike Kerouac's supposedly unknowing jazz gods, Cortázar's jazzman considers his scar—and, thus, his existential sainthood—to be a defining personality trait that stands apart from the sort of "baba" and pretension that coopt bad faith: "[p]ero sí soy yo, con mi pelo, esta cicatriz" (20). This conjugation of selfhood, hair—which likely serves as shorthand for Blackness—and the stigmata-like scar proves evocative, with Johnny defining himself, his Blackness and his existential project in Christ-like terms. It is as if the protagonist, aware of the complex sanctification of the Black jazzman and his own objectification as an existential deity, appropriates the role in an attempt to present a more nuanced and complexly human jazz god. For Johnny's jazz god, Blackness is not equated with irrationality—as is the case in Kerouac's *On the Road*—but rather posited as an essential component of an identity defined by a yearning to move beyond the easy, the immediate and the superficial.

[17] In his introduction to *Situating Existentialism* (2012), Jonathan Judaken summarizes the shared concerns of mid-century existentialists who—should we accept Johnny Carter as a full-fledged existentialist—would have been his contemporaries: "Hispanic, African American, Jewish, and Christian existentialists were often dissonant voices in the midst of the freedom struggles of the colonized, women, homosexuals, and other outsiders that Ralph Waldon Emerson's termed 'invisible men.' Existentialists thus limned modernity and exposed its hollowness, revealing that it rested on a void. In reflecting on this nothingness, existentialists pulled up the anchors that ostensibly undergirded the European culture of high modernity" (11).

Johnny's declaration of selfhood and sainthood comes just after his assertion that many of his contemporaries, like the white musicians he met in Kansas City, "[s]e creen sabios porque han juntado un montón de libros y se los han comido. […] viven convencidos de que lo que estudian y lo que hacen son cosas muy difíciles y profundas" (20). Compounding the radicality of the musician's "[p]ero sí soy yo, con mi pelo, esta cicatriz" (20), this criticism of the apparent staleness and stagnation of traditional intellectualism suggests that his own penchant for action, experimentation and sacrifice may yield a superior existential project. That, in this same chain of ideas, Johnny references his encounter with a white musician who "[p]arecía esperar que me sentara en la cama, maravillado de su cara blanca y su pelo bien peinado" (19) further complicates the matter by intimating that the entitlement and privilege of white intellectuals is precisely what prevents them from moving beyond the confines of an asphyxiating modernity. Cortázar's protagonist seems to fire back at the racial imaginaries of his existentialist contemporaries, many of whom, like Mailer, registered the limitations of white existential freedom by pointing to a lack of (Black) spontaneity, irrationality and madness. Contrasting his own projects and experiments with the general inaction of his white contemporaries, Johnny defines himself and the Black jazz god as figures grounded in action, whose active engagement with the modernity they wish to transcend echoes Beauvoir's notion that "[o]nly that in which I recognize my being is mine, and I can only recognize it where it is engaged […] The only reality that belongs entirely to me is therefore my act" (93).

Yet with action comes sacrifice, as the jazzman's stigmata-like scar anticipates. If Christ, while attempting to absolve the world of sin, is crucified by a society that does not yet understand him, Cortázar's jazz god experiments with jazz, drugs, and general recklessness in order to discover a way to transcend modernity and communicate his findings with his friends and followers. The scar and its reference to Christ's martyrdom, then, foreshadows the musician's eventual death and all but confirms Johnny's awareness of the burden he must bear in service of his project. In emphasizing the beauty of the marking—"Bruno, mira que hermosa cicatriz que tengo entre las costillas" (10)—the protagonist seems to accept death as an almost inevitable consequence of his quest, celebrating martyrdom as a fair tradeoff for universal existential freedom. In this sense, Cortázar reframes and reinterprets the sort of precarity, recklessness and forlornness fetishized by his existentialist contemporaries. Far from a function of his irrationality, Johnny's alarming behavior becomes evidence of his Christ-like commitment to action, transcendence and community. Even Bruno

presents Johnny's conduct as altruistic, reflecting that "cada vez que Johnny sufre, va a la cárcel, quiere matarse, incendía un colchón o corre desnudo por los pasillos de un hotel, está pagando algo por ellos, está muriéndose por ellos" (26). If the biographer's assertion corroborates Johnny's own declaration of sainthood and eventual martyrdom, it also helps tease out the musician's equally radical rupture of traditional power dynamics between Black jazz gods and their white followers. Whereas the music of Kerouac's jazz gods is appropriated and codified by thrill-seeking Beats, in *El perseguidor* it is Johnny who consciously offers himself up to others, all in order to save his friends and followers from modernity's maladies. Even if Bruno's apocryphal biography speaks to the limitations of Johnny's agency, the intentionality of the jazzman's suffering still places him in a position of relative power, where it is he who purposefully creates, curates and communicates the experiences that Kerouac and his contemporaries write off as spontaneous, instinctual eruptions of Blackness.[18]

Johnny may not move to definitively block the publication of Bruno's text, but he does, however subtly, try to provide his biographer, his followers, and the novella's reader with an alternative set of discourses, interpretations and experiences, all of which prove the profound intentionality and seriousness of his existential sainthood. It is this commitment to communication that most radically distinguished Cortázar's protagonist from the voiceless jazz gods invented by his contemporaries. While Dean loses the last of his disciples at the end of *On the Road*, Johnny maintains the loyalty of his followers until death, even if their own bad faith prevents them from fully engaging with the jazzman's existential project. Fulfilling Simone de Beauvoir's conceptualization of the existentialist project as that which must privilege the movement "of the self towards the other, a transcendence" (Holveck 2002, 93), Cortázar's protagonist never gives up on trying to communicate the urgency of existential transcendence, even if this means

[18] Perhaps the work's most poignant example of Johnny's deliberate creation and curation is his eventual performance of "Amorous." At the recording studio, Johnny and his backing band start playing the number, with the jazzman producing three minutes of incredible music that abruptly ends with "un soplido capaz de arruinar la misma armonía celestial" (18). Despite the perceived brilliance of Johnny's solo, the jazzman begs for the recording to be destroyed—and, thus, not disseminated—precisely because it registers yet another failure to definitively exceed chronologicity, with that searing final note only marking the limitations of his jazz. Even if the jazzman's friends ultimately deny his request, the scene underlines Cortázar's polemic reframing of Johnny and his music. Firing back at his contemporaries' misreading of jazz music's spontaneity and improvisation as functions of its practitioner's Blackness, Cortázar's Johnny positions his musical production as a philosophical act of communication that must be respected as such. Just as Beauvoir, Mailer and Sartre would gawk at having an unfinished manuscript released to the public, Johnny too rejects the distribution of jazz that epitomizes an incomplete existential project and that, in turn, comes up short of communicating a road to transcendence.

that "está pagando algo por ellos, está muriéndose por ellos" (Cortázar 26). The extent to which Johnny sacrifices himself in order to advance his project—and inevitably redeem his friends and followers—similarly responds to Beauvoir's notion that the (successful) project must include "a spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts" (93). As Cortázar lays bare, the jazzman "succeeds" not because he is Black or possesses an extraordinary existential freedom, but rather due to his unwavering commitment to the concrete triumph of universal freedom.

Cortázar's representation of Johnny as an intentioned existentialist deity, who is fully aware of the implications of his existentialist project, unequivocally challenges Kerouac's quiet suggestion that Dean's quest fails due to his whiteness. It also contests white existentialists'—both French and American—belief that jazz's singularity is a function of its Blackness. In basing his protagonist on the real-life jazz artist, Charlie Parker, Cortázar's novella dialogues with the likes of Beauvoir, Kerouac, Mailer, and Sartre, rebuking their shared misreading of Black jazzmen as spontaneous and irrational individuals who only happen to achieve existential freedom. Cortázar's novella, then, presents a narrative that runs entirely counter to innumerable misinterpretations of Johnny Carter/Charlie Parker and his contemporaries written by a generation of "Brunos" incapable of seeing beyond the jazzmen's Blackness. To this end, reading *El perseguidor* against Kerouac's *On the Road* elucidates the author's less-than-explicit concern for existentialism's race problem. If Kerouac's road novel proves emblematic of an uncomfortable transatlantic conjugation of jazz, Blackness and existential godliness, *El perseguidor* offers an alternative model, outing the parasitic violence of the many Brunos of the world and, in the process, elevating Black jazzmen to a position of power. While his *El perseguidor* includes a Black jazzman from the United States as the protagonist, Cortázar's mediations on race and existentialism would have had broader implications for existentialism's treatment of and accessibility to non-whites and non-Europeans—or non-North Americans—particularly those from the Global South. With his Johnny Carter, the Argentine author advocates for alternative approaches to long-standing existential questions, one that decentralizes the voices and misreading of white practitioners, while actively combating dominant racial imaginaries and their corresponding "bad faith."

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