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ALTERED STATES OF STYLE: THE DRUG-INDUCED DEVELOPMENT OF JACK
KEROUAC'S SPONTANEOUS PROSE

by Eric Michael Izant

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Jack Kerouac's spontaneous prose method was inspired in part by his use of drugs while writing. While there is abundant biographical evidence that Kerouac used drugs frequently, little attention has been paid to their effects on the development of his style. This thesis attempts to demonstrate that the altered states of consciousness produced by Kerouac's drug use should be considered in conjunction with historical, cultural, and biographical forces in tracing the evolution of Kerouac's creative growth.

As a member of the Beat Generation, Kerouac used drugs both as a social statement of rebellion and for artistic insight. In fact, he consciously entered into a well-established tradition of writers looking to drugs as modern-day muses. Within this legacy, drugs were commonly viewed as chemical gateways to a transcendental realm of visionary truth that the artists could enter and return with, thus becoming a literary seer. Kerouac, who believed that the ossification of standardized written English into rigid forms of grammar and sentence construction curtailed its potential for complete communication, sought a prose style that would allow for a maximum of authenticity and fidelity to organic thought with a minimum of revision. Kerouac used drugs like amphetamine, marijuana, and alcohol, each of which offered unique modes of perception, to enter into new frameworks of consciousness, and then recreated these altered states in writing.

These three substances—amphetamine, marijuana, and alcohol—served as the basis in the development of Kerouac's style. Amphetamine, in the form of the over-the-counter drug Benzedrine, gave Kerouac the energy for his legendary typing marathons, allowing him to write *On the Road* in three weeks and *The Subterraneans* in three days.

While writing *On the Road* in particular, Kerouac began formulating the stylistic approach that he subsequently dubbed “spontaneous prose.” Its basic tenants, including a de-emphasis on revision, limited punctuation, and long sentences, were encouraged by Benzedrine’s stimulant properties, which tended to focus Kerouac’s attention on the exterior world of events, temporality, and movement. His amphetamine-induced texts attempt to communicate accurately by confessing the minutia of surface details. Kerouac’s spontaneous style, however, soon evolved into the “sketching” technique seen in *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*, partially as a result of his marijuana-induced desire to share subjective perceptions truthfully. Rather than focusing on the exterior world, the marijuana texts look inward for authenticity. Marijuana helped Kerouac facilitate this inner orientation by its pharmacodynamic tendency to induce dream-like, associative states; when reproduced textually, these impressions seemed to resemble the unconscious structures of Kerouac’s mind, which he shared hoping for complete communication via the universality of shared experience. Kerouac used both the amphetamine and marijuana modes to varying degrees and interchangeably for most of his career, and with the first section of *Desolation Angels*, written in sobriety, achieved their greatest synthesis, demonstrating that drugs were not the props to his style, but rather the impetus—even in the absence of drugs, Kerouac’s prose retained its own essential, idiosyncratic features. Finally, in the latter part of Kerouac’s career, alcohol proved that drugs could also negatively affect his style, as shown in *Big Sur* and *Vanity of Duluoz*. Their return to a plainer prose—some would say poorer prose—was no doubt the result of rampant alcohol abuse, and the unfortunate end to Kerouac’s life and writing.

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INTRODUCTION: GETTING UP TO SPEED

Modern-Day Muses

The notion of the Muse has always been a mainstay of the Western literary tradition. Whether or not authors actually believed in the Muse, it stood as a symbol of artistic inspiration. Perhaps its enduring popularity comes from the fact that the creative process itself is mysterious, and best explained through such metaphors. Concealed in the depths of the mind, partaking of conscious and subconscious forces, artists have hoped, chanted, and prayed to somehow tap into this elusive well of power. While we now may deny the Muse in favor of a more scientific explanation, we really are no closer to an understanding of where creativity ultimately comes from, or how to best unleash it.

It is no surprise then that in the modern age we have turned to other Muses, other sources of insight that are equally mighty and ineffable. In many ways, drugs have become our modern-day Muses. We look to them for healing, for euphoria, for transcendental enlightenment, and for inspiration. Derrida testifies that drugs gain a prestigious value when the door to the transcendental heaven previously provided by religion is shut (qtd. in Boon 209). Starting especially with the Romantics, we see the perception of drugs as visionary tools. Coleridge's introductory homage to opium in "Kubla Khan" is a modern version of Homer's invocation to the Muse at the beginning of *The Odyssey*. In both texts there is a wish to release the imagination in its purest state, unsullied by poetic manipulation.

In fact, a common trope in drugged writing is to see the writer as a sort of literary prophet. Rimbaud writes, "The poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, gigantic, and rational *derangement of all the senses*" (377). Drugs are part of the mystical tradition, alongside

methods like meditation, prayer, song, music, and dance that have been used for much of human history to achieve states of altered consciousness. While the means to achieve these states may differ, the purpose is usually similar—to unleash the god within, the creative and visionary potential often believed to reside in the collective unconsciousness.

Of course, the Muse was not only an aid, but often the actual source of poetic language, the true speaker whom the writer served as mouthpiece. The exact relationship between art and artist expressed by the concept of the Muse remains undefined even today: what is the role of the author's input in the creative process, and what forces are exterior but equally influential? Modern literary criticism recognize not only biographical but also cultural, historical, and social factors—extending this range of influences to contain drugs, what credit do we accord them as inspirational tools?

Kerouac: Fact and Fiction

One of the best examples of the enigmatic role of drugs in the creative process is Jack Kerouac. According to legend, Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in a three-week nonstop amphetamine-fueled marathon, typing on pieces of paper taped together to form one continual scroll. While much ado has been made of the actual existence of this unique 120-foot manuscript (recently published), less attention has been given to the presence of the drug amphetamine as part of the composition process. A potent stimulant, amphetamine was instrumental in giving Kerouac the energy to finish the novel in such a short time. Nor is *On the Road* alone in its unique, spontaneous genesis; Kerouac wrote *The Subterraneans*, a work of comparable length, in only three days! While there is biographical evidence verifying his use of amphetamine, perhaps the best evidence is the

text itself: elongated, overwrought sentences and an overriding theme of speed display stylistic manifestations of amphetamine's documented pharmacological effects.

Amphetamine, however, was not the only drug that inspired Kerouac's writing. He smoked marijuana throughout the writing of *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*, the styles of which differ somewhat from *On the Road*'s terse, plot-driven structure—these latter novels instead meander in dreamy webs of association and inner ruminations, echoing marijuana's proven hallucinatory properties. Likewise, in his final years of rampant alcoholism, Kerouac's writing became the literary equivalent of a drunken binge, the watered-down prose of *Big Sur* and *Vanity of Duluo*z lost in a haze of bittersweet reminiscing. In fact, perhaps the only novel Kerouac wrote completely free of drugs is the first part of *Desolation Angels*, which manages to combine the varied modes of his earlier work into a style that is the most complete embodiment of his self-termed "spontaneous prose."

Although Kerouac undoubtedly developed his spontaneous method according to his own aesthetic goals, and was influenced by a multitude of cultural and historical forces, there is a thorough correlation between the established effects of the drugs he took and the tenets of spontaneous prose. This connection suggests that drugs played a significant role in shaping Kerouac's style. Furthermore, the three substances that Kerouac used most often while writing—amphetamine, marijuana, and alcohol—each affected his style in unique ways, and served as stepping stones in the evolution of his prose style. Kerouac's incorporation of drugs into his composition process was both artistic posing and self-reinforcing. On the one hand, he deliberately placed himself within a tradition of drug-using writers to achieve what he deemed a "visionary" state of

mind and to cultivate a “drugged style.” On the other hand, I believe that these substances exerted a real if subtle influence on Kerouac’s style, and that he returned to them throughout his career because they reinforced the aesthetic modes he wished to create.

However, despite the crucial role drugs played Kerouac’s composition process, their link with his style remains relatively unexplored. One reason for this topic’s lack of exploration among critics is the lack of conclusive biographical material to work with—Kerouac seldom wrote directly about his drug use, and they appear only as minor incidents in his novels and autobiographical records. When drugs are mentioned, Kerouac’s motives in taking them seems chiefly recreational; there is little direct indication that he used them intentionally as writing aids. I will return to Kerouac’s reluctance to acknowledge his drug use throughout this thesis, but suffice it for now to suggest that he was hesitant to admit his dependency on drugs not only because they were often illegal (with the exception of alcohol), but also because they might have been viewed as artistic crutches, conflicting with Kerouac’s self-propagated image as a spontaneous writer who relied solely on his own inherent genius.

Kerouac’s continuing role as a countercultural icon may also be to blame for the lack of critical commentary on the subject of drugs—as a “popular” author, the lurid details of Kerouac’s life have often overshadowed his actual writing; the tendency to idolize Kerouac is further exaggerated by the fact that the majority of his fiction is largely autobiographical. Critics have often countered these biographical readings of Kerouac by attempting to distance his life from his texts. Thus, when drugs are mentioned in connection with Kerouac, they are usually examined through a set of contrasting cultural narratives—their presence is either sensationalized (a la “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll”) or

marginalized (“say no to drugs”), if not outright ignored. The end result of Kerouac’s popularity is that works about him tend to be polarized—they either read like a celebrity biography, or lean just as hard in the opposite direction, displacing him from cultural/biographical elements and focusing on his texts in isolation. As a result, the crucial link between Kerouac’s life and art, particularly in the form of drugs, has often been ignored.

Amongst Kerouac’s biographers, there is at most the acknowledgment that he took drugs during the writing of a text; however, the implications of this drug use on his work is largely ignored. Ann Charters, in her foundational *Kerouac: A Biography* (1973), gestures towards a causal relation between certain Kerouac texts and substances, but does not explore these connections in detail, offering only vague summaries. Charters surmises, “Each of Kerouac's books was written on something and each of the books has some of the feel of what he was on most as he wrote it” (159). Gerald Nicosia, whose has written perhaps the most extensive of Kerouac biographies, *Memory Babe* (1983), also has surprisingly little to say on the subject of drugs and creativity, which is surprising given the book’s lengthy textual analyses of each of Kerouac’s works. However, Nicosia does recognize that a central purpose of Kerouac’s style is the representation of various modes of perception and consciousness, noting Kerouac’s use of marijuana to uncover subconscious images; he also establishes ample biographical evidence of Kerouac drug habits, especially his early period of amphetamine abuse (324).

While Charters and Nicosia represent the general trend among Kerouac biographers in failing to link his drug use with his writing, there are a few articles that focus exclusively on the subject. Erik Mortensen’s “High Off the Page: Representing the

Drug Experience in the Work of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg” (2004) examines the changes in consciousness drugs induce and their variable textual representations in Kerouac’s work. Mortenson’s main contribution, although limited in scope, is the recognition that “the ‘truth’ about the drug state comes to reside not simply in overt content, but in the form of the work itself” (56-57). In other words, Kerouac does not employ traditional objective means of representing the effects of drug (i.e. plot, factual description), but communicates their subjective experience through his prose style.

Another notable article, Tom Bierowski’s “The Nadiral Ecstasy: Kerouac and Shamanic Decadence” (2001), explores the role of narcotics as a shamanic experience for Kerouac, and therefore a means of artistic inspiration similar to the concept of the Muse. Bierowski recognizes the mystical importance of the drug ritual as part of Kerouac’s composition process, as well as the connection between Kerouac’s drug use and his writing: Bierowski notes, “Clearly, and perhaps more than most authors, literary style and lifestyle are intertwined in Kerouac's writing” (4). While the article is a good introduction to the alteration of consciousness recorded in Kerouac’s writing, Bierowski’s study does not follow the implications of Kerouac’s experimentation very far into the texts themselves, nor does it clearly delineate the effects of the individual drugs Kerouac utilized while writing.

The only book-length work to focus on Kerouac’s drug use is John Long’s *Drugs and the 'Beats': The Role of Drugs in the Lives and Writings of Kerouac, Burroughs, and Ginsberg* (2005). Long studies the key texts and favorite drugs of the three best-known Beat authors, and realizes the need for a “grammar” of drugged writing, which he divides into three aspects: syntax, semantics, and thematics (36, 218). While noteworthy for

exploring new critical terrain, Long's study reads more like a casual overview, not affording the rigorous analysis Kerouac's works require. Long himself acknowledges, "What is missing is a study of the effects of drugs in the life or lifestyle of authors and on their capacity to write" (8), suggesting the inability of his work to establish a definitive relationship between drug use and style. While I will focus on Kerouac exclusively, at times I will follow Long's approach and look at the works of Ginsberg and Burroughs. Because all three authors shared similar drug habits and literary ideas, there is a considerable overlap in their aesthetics despite their remarkably distinct styles, suggesting to some extent the presence of a recurring set of drug-induced textual features.

Because of the lack of books/articles dwelling solely on Kerouac and his drug use, the best available texts tend to be more general examinations of the wider history of drugs and literature. While even these types of studies are noticeable lacking, by far the most rigorous and comprehensive is Marcus Boon's *A History of Writers on Drugs* (2002). Boon surveys drugs and literature in chapters divided by specific substances, covering opiates, anesthetics, cannabis, stimulants, and psychedelics. This organizational method affords each substance the detailed profile it deserves. While Boon's work is valuable for its extreme breadth, the Beats and Kerouac in particular receive only a few pages of analysis. Boon theorizes "the possibility that a part of what we call literature is chemically configured in quite specific ways—and that this notion is quite compatible with more traditional ways of understanding a text" (10). An investigation similar to Boon's but centering exclusively on Kerouac's work would yield important insights on the role drugs played in Kerouac's stylistic development, and by extension the benefits/detriments of altered states of consciousness on creativity in general.

It remains then for a scholarly work to comprehensively examine the influence of drugs on Kerouac's style. In part, because of the societal taboo drugs carry, honest, critical investigation of their nature is hampered by bias. Another reason for this lack of scrutiny is the inherent difficulty of studying the effects of drugs on writing, because both drugs and creativity involve subjective, internal processes. While the pharmacodynamic effects of most drugs are established, their more subjective means of altering individual perception necessarily lie outside the domain of objective science; hence, a humanistic examination of drugs requires a good understanding of both their physiological *and* psychological aspects. Perhaps then it is appropriate to study the subjective effects of drugs within the framework of literature, because literary studies by its nature attempts to explicate the intricacies of creative human endeavor. Such difficulties may be why writers often bestow on the creative process a mystical aura; while we no longer take the Muses seriously, we have not come up with much better of a solution to explain where artistic inspiration comes from.

Overview of Project. Because Kerouac used multiple drugs for inspiration while writing, we must first establish what primary substance(s) lies behind each text. Such a direct correlation between text and drug is made possible by the fact that Kerouac usually completed entire novels in brief, measurable writing sessions. At the same time, we must remember that drugs function differently in their immediate vs. long-term influences. Although physiologically speaking drugs are usually eliminated from the body from within a few hours, because their effects are experienced largely as mental/emotional states, drugs can leave enduring traces on memory and behavior (while much exaggerated, the "acid flashback" does have a physiological basis). In other words, we

must not only look at how drugs affected Kerouac's writing during their window of pharmacological activity, but also how their long-term usage permanently altered his mindset and aesthetic.

After conclusively linking a text to any one drug (troubled too by the multiple drugs used during some works), we must next establish a "profile" or "voice" for each substance. Quite often, there is enough pharmacological data to provide a good sense of a drug's expected effects. Long suggests, "Since each drug has characteristics that are in some sense transmitted to the user, knowing the psychopharmacology of the preferred drug can contribute to understanding the user" (15). The more difficult part becomes determining what textual elements are drug-influenced, and which are, so to speak, "original," or native to Kerouac's mind. Of course, this is assuming that we can even create such a dichotomy; it is naive to attribute sole credit to either Kerouac or a drug, because in reality his writing is the result of an ever-shifting output between these two forces. Indeed, much of the value of the investigation will be to question what elements of style are shaped by forces (whether chemical, social, historical, etc.) exterior to the author, versus how the author chooses to internally manipulate these forces into a distinct style and text. In any case, in order to proceed at all we must first establish a "personality" for each drug; by recording the occurrence frequency of a drug's pharmacological characteristics in a text, we can then determine what if any stylistic features correspond to that drug's usage. If a writer has a certain "voice," then perhaps each drug has a voice of its own that it temporarily (or permanently) imparts on its subject and through that subject the text.

A prime example of drug profiling, as well as its inherent utility and oversimplification, is the frequent classification of a wide range of diverse substances into the narrow divisions of “uppers” and “downers.” Gender is a popular categorization schema as well; some drugs like amphetamine are “hard” while other like marijuana are “soft.” Pittel and Hofer, in “The Transition to Amphetamine Abuse” (1973), performed a study based on this gender axis; they found that accounts of amphetamine focused on description, the frenetic activities of the user, and sexual prowess, while records of marijuana and other psychedelic drug experiences were more subjective and emotionally oriented. Consequently, they divide these two broad classes of drugs among gender lines: amphetamine becomes connected with power, speed, and the exterior masculine world of events, while psychedelics become associated with passivity, receptivity, interiority, and femininity (68, 70). While it is misleading to categorize drugs in such a reductive fashion, the male/female binary can serve as a useful initial guide to a generalized understanding of the differences in these drugs, particularly in Kerouac’s work.

Erik Mortenson’s “High Off the Page” also approaches drugs and Kerouac’s work along dualistic lines. In this article, Mortenson locates two primary emphases of Kerouac’s drug-induced writing. Kerouac’s first concern is on conveying the distorted temporal nature of the drug experience. Mortenson comments, “[Kerouac’s] works become studies in speed, concerned with the increases, decreases, and stoppages in the perception of time that drug use enacts” (54). Connected to this unique state of perception, Kerouac’s second objective is “to explore the interstice between the drugged state and the Other who stands outside that experience;” that is, his writing is an attempt to communicate the altered self truthfully to another person (54). Kerouac’s work is

therefore not only a recording of various states of drug-induced subjectivity, but also the means of sharing these states through the medium of the text. Mortenson divides Kerouac's work along dualistic lines, focusing on amphetamine and marijuana as isolated substances informing different aesthetic methods. Mortenson shows the shift in emphasis from Kerouac's amphetamine-inspired works, which focus primarily on elements of temporal perception, to his marijuana-induced texts, which are more concerned with the possibility of truthfully communicating subjectivity. While Mortenson's methodology takes into account the unique aesthetic effects of amphetamine and marijuana on Kerouac's prose, it also risks hermetically isolating each text by disregarding the mutual interplay of these substances in shaping Kerouac's work.

Without oversimplifying the evolution of Kerouac's writing style, it can be understood in one sense as going a process of variation, synthesis, and finally dissolution. My thesis is that the change in aesthetics from each stage is in part accountable to drugs, as well as a continuation of Kerouac's natural growth as a writer. We will look then at Kerouac's creative growth in three periods. The first was his rejection of a more traditional, ornate literary style that imitated Thomas Wolfe (as seen in *The Town and the City*) in favor of the more naturalistic, off-the-cuff spontaneous prose of *On the Road*. The development of spontaneous prose can in part be linked to Kerouac's search for his own "authentic" inner voice, as well as an insight culminating from multiple sessions of amphetamine-induced writing. The qualities of spontaneous prose (which we will examine in chapter two) went on to define the rest of Kerouac's writing career, shaping the majority of his remaining texts; we will look particularly at *The Subterraneans* as the summation of the early spontaneous style. For now it is sufficient to deem spontaneous

prose an attempt to narrate events with increased concern for detail and fidelity while maintaining a conventional, horizontal approach to plot. Description is intricately related to time, which is revealed as shifting and subjective.

The second phase of Kerouac's aesthetic development might be termed his "sketching" period, and will be looked at in *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*. Its primary innovation was transforming the more outward-oriented prose of *On the Road* to the more interior-oriented style of *Visions of Cody*. That this interior focus was a result of marijuana use as well as the logical culmination of spontaneous prose is what I hope to demonstrate in chapter 3. Nor should it be assumed that Kerouac abandoned spontaneous prose or stopped using amphetamine to write. The sketching process is better viewed as an outgrowth of spontaneous prose, and not a rejection or abrupt division of technique.

While I have broken down Kerouac's creative growth into two modes—"spontaneous prose" and "sketching,"—and linked the former to amphetamine and the exterior world and the latter to marijuana and the interior realm, it should not be supposed that these are mutually exclusive methods. Kerouac's inward and outward styles both appear in differing quantities during a period in the mid-fifties of his most productive output, fusing together most significantly in *Desolation Angels*. In many ways this novel was the climax of Kerouac's creative career, and its first section is unique for being written while sober; the fact that the text still retains drug-induced features suggests that, by this point in his creative development, Kerouac had fully incorporated the stylistic effects of amphetamine and marijuana into his prose.

Desolation Angels might also be viewed as the link to the final section of Kerouac's writing career, and sadly his life, which was brought on by alcohol abuse. We

will briefly look at a few of his final works, primarily *Big Sur* and *Vanity of Duluoz*, in chapter four. While Kerouac rarely used alcohol while writing, it is indirectly linked to the decline in his literary technique, its return to a plainer style, and a tendency to dwell thematically on alcohol-related issues. Alcohol not only impaired Kerouac's discipline, but also had ruinous effects on his health.

Finally, in chapter five we will conclude by looking at Kerouac's drug use, and the insights this brings to an examination of his career. We will also look at the potential applications of this study towards any writer who uses drugs, as well as on creativity in general.

The Visionary Tradition: The Formation of Kerouac's Spontaneous Prose

In order to better understand why Kerouac took drugs to write, it is essential to explore the cultural background that influenced his choice to do so. People take drugs for a variety of reasons—pleasure, escape, addiction, enlightenment—and placing this usage within some sort of contextual framework is helpful in anticipating the expected results. Timothy Leary coined the terms “set” and “setting” to refer to these considerations and explain the mindset and circumstantial factors that color any drug experience.

Of course, at times it is difficult to frame the drug usage of Kerouac and the Beats, simply because their motives often spanned multiple contexts. That is, drugs were used not only for enjoyment, but also practiced as an artistic pursuit, an attempt to achieve new frames of consciousness. Mind-altering substances allowed deliberate transformation of conventional ways of thinking. The Beats took Benzedrine, an amphetamine, frequently, as well as a range of psychedelics. They especially liked marijuana: outlawed by the society, prevalent among racial and social outcasts, marijuana

was both a subversive social statement and literary tool. Discontent with the postwar American status quo, drugs offered the Beats a radical paradigm shift through which to reinterpret standard modes of living. Drugs became not only a symbol or rebellion against a stultified society but also the means to change it; they offered visionary solutions of an idealized world.

The Beats not only sought to live alternatively, attempting to break down barriers of drug use, sexuality, and lifestyles considered taboo, but also appropriated these “forbidden” practices into their art as part of a fight against reigning literary conventions, which they saw as essentially elitist and disconnected from the full experience of modern life. Rebelling against the academic tenets of literary formalism as well as the comparatively prudish tastes of the middle-class, the Beats celebrated the Whitmanesque “self” in their writing and poetry. They confessed acts polite society considered unmentionable—drug use, homosexuality, criminal activities—openly and unabashedly. There was a tendency to romanticize the commonplace and even the so-called base elements of life, which gave rise to the eponymous literary label “beat.” Although the term varied in usage, Kerouac initially used “beat” to refer to individuals living on the margins of society—bums, drug users, and criminals—who by virtue of their freedom from the corruptions of civilized culture had been beaten down to a sort of raw, purified “essence.”

As mentioned, connected with elevation of the commonplace was a large amount of “confessional” writing. In fact, the major Beat works—*On the Road*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Howl*—are all notable for their autobiographical bases. Part of this emphasis on confession, which often tended towards the lewd and offensive, was a reaction against

postwar American propriety: viewing American repression as the result of shame, the Beats opted for complete honesty; they attempted to unleash the entirety of their actions, emotions, and thoughts, no matter how forbidden, onto the page. Ginsberg and Burroughs both celebrated their homosexuality in their writing—in the latter’s case graphically enough to bring his revolutionary *Naked Lunch* on trial for obscenity—while Kerouac would go on to record his complete deterioration through alcoholism. As part of his aesthetics, Kerouac stated in an interview, “FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS and the hiding of feelings” (Berrigan 54). Craft, at least as Kerouac seemed to understand it, was the attempt to hide the “truth” of life under the polished veneer of manipulated thought, denying the real inner self.

If craft was the result of control, then for the Beats, spontaneity seemed the key to openness. By avoiding excessive over-thinking and careful living, they felt that they could cultivate original, uncorrupted impulses and achieve greater emotional honesty and joy. In order to engage in more improvisational living, they sought out activities that allowed for a minimum of forethought—everything from hitchhiking to jazz to drugs. Emphasizing in-the-moment-reactions allowed the self to come out more completely. The Beat concept of spontaneity could also be applied to writing: Kerouac sought a technique to break through conventional representations of language and express uncrafted thought. He believed that standard English sentence construction limited his ability to accurately record himself. In Kerouac’s opinion, because the human mind does not think in terms of formal, punctuated sentences, then the grammatical rules imposed by society were limiting freedom of expression. Kerouac reveals, “I got so sick and tired of the conventional English sentence which seemed to me to be so ironbound in its rules, so

inadmissible with reference to the actual format of my mind” (qtd. in Weinreich 2).

Kerouac’s creation of spontaneous prose was an attempt to construct a style of language that he deemed to be closer to the actual flow of the uncensored mind.

Integral to his idea of spontaneity was Kerouac’s insistence upon not revising. In an interview with Ted Berrigan, Kerouac attested, “By not revising what you’ve already written you simply give the reader the actual workings of your mind during the writing itself: you confess your thoughts about events in your own unchangeable way” (53).

Kerouac viewed revision as altering—for the worse—the unadulterated, original form of the mind. Revision became tantamount to shame or repression. Ginsberg’s agreement with Kerouac, as recorded in Jane Kramer’s *Paterfamilias: Allen Ginsberg in America* (1970), reiterates this notion of the purity of the original thought: “Once you wrote something you couldn’t really change it, because that was the manifestation of the mind’s moving in time and the attempt to change and revise and restructure and reorient was, in a sense, a lie. Or a covering. A *thought* covering” (140). For Ginsberg as well as Kerouac, the first thought was the best thought because it was the most honest, even if not the most aesthetically pleasing.

By abandoning revision, Kerouac rebelled against a key component of literary practice. Nonetheless, Kerouac did revise; his insistence against revision should be seen as a general aesthetic guideline rather than a strict literary practice. I will examine Kerouac’s often-contradictory views on revision throughout this thesis, but suffice it to say for now that Kerouac’s doctrine of anti-revision places him within a well-established literary mode—in particular, a Romantic tradition—of seeing the writer as a type of seer

or prophet. In his eyes, Kerouac felt that he was responding to a truer, inner voice, the pulse of universal experience that revision could not help but corrupt.

The inner voice Kerouac sought suggests that he believed in an inspirational power similar to the Muse, although situated within the unconscious mind rather than outside of it. Bierowski likens Kerouac's drug use to a shaman seeking "ecstasy," which he defines as "a trance-like singularity of thought and feeling so intense as to cut him free from his mundane reality and bring him face-to-face with an ultimate reality" (1).

Although what this "ultimate reality" is goes undefined, it can be interpreted as the seat of the uncrafted language that Kerouac and others sought to capture. By deregulating the conscious mind's normal filtering process, a drug user could theoretically tap into vast regions of internal power. Bierowski goes on to list both drugs and spontaneous composition as means Kerouac used to heed this ecstatic imperative, the journey into the self that corresponds to an encounter with the divine (3). Drugs became a key to spontaneity, tools to shatter the artificial constructs of the ego and release the authentic inner self. By releasing the id from inhibiting forms, drugs also enabled a connection with a preverbal ultimate reality. The desire to return to a natural, more expressive language, what I will call an "original" or "authentic" voice, became a literary goal of the Beats.

I do not wish to suggest that drugs were the only means for Kerouac to find his "true" voice, nor do I think we can safely establish such a thing as a "true" or "authentic" voice. Even if drugs do allow an inner monologue to become unrepressed, there is no indication that this unconscious language is any better than deliberately crafted prose. However, I will show that Kerouac follows an established literary practice of viewing

drugs as instrumental and sometimes even sacred tools for writing, and that he consciously positioned himself in this visionary framework of drug-using writers.

The Drugged Writer

There is a long tradition of artists trying to reach a “pure” language through the use of drugs. Whether or not drug use could achieve this goal is debatable, but it certainly was common to frame this activity in mystical terms; many drug-using artists portrayed themselves as some sort of medium who could use drugs as tools that granted access to divine realms of truth, which was then brought back and shared with the reader. Perhaps the most infamous example is Coleridge, who claimed that his poem “Kubla Khan” was written after an opium-induced vision. Boon establishes the historical precedence of Coleridge’s act for future generation of writers seeking chemical inspiration:

“Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ gave first expression to one of the fundamental literary tropes of drug use, that of dictation: the sense that words or thoughts are being dictated to the writer by some unknown agency, without conscious effort on his or her part” (35). While the actual circumstances behind the composition of “Kubla Khan” were probably not so magical, the tendency to romanticize a connection between drugs and inspired writing is apparent. Another Romantic opiate-user, Sir Walter Scott, claimed that he did not recognize any characters, incidents, or conversation when he read the proofs of his novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) (Boon 35). That the tradition of drugs providing an unseen inspiration continued is apparent over a century later: William S. Burroughs, the most notable Beat opiate user, could not remember writing the notes later published as *Naked Lunch* (199).

Not all Romantic writers have been as keen as Coleridge to play up their role as drug-induced prophets. Indeed, the history of drug use refuses to be defined by any one motive. Although every user has their own reasons, certain broad historical and cultural trends do seem to come and go. Coleridge later became ashamed of his opium use when he discovered that with its visions came addiction (although the term “addiction” did not yet exist in the early 19th-century, which reveals a lot about their differing attitude from our own towards these substances), revealing another common trope of drug use (Boon 35-36). De Quincey, who was also addicted to opium, invented the concept of recreational drugs use with his popular *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822); although not the first person to use the drug for pleasure, he was the first to write about it in this way. By constructing a myth around his opium use, De Quincey offered the fantasy, true or not, of a mystical substance allowing “transport to the realms of imagination” that any one could partake of (Boon 37). Thus, different conceptual frames of drug-use span the spectrum from positive to negative; even today, drugs are alternatively/simultaneously enlightening, healing, recreational, addictive, and/or evil.

Often times, two opposing motivations for drug use will characterize an author’s work. Once the addictive properties of drugs became better known, subsequent 19th-century writers, among them Poe and Baudelaire, used opiates without acknowledging their influence on their writing. Boon sees this move as the intentional establishment of yet another drug trope:

The absence of explicit mention of opium in itself contributes to a certain literary myth regarding narcotics [...] Opium provided a new mythology on which to base aesthetic practice. Since this aesthetic practice [...] was

concerned with the autonomy of the writer, his independence from material conditions, it could not be linked too directly to drugs. (45)

For many writers, there was a desire to benefit from the visionary qualities of drugs without admitting their reliance on an outside source of inspiration. I have already hinted at this paradox as one of the reasons that Kerouac's literary drug use remains relatively unacknowledged, even by himself, and will return to it later. Most likely, Kerouac downplayed the creative powers drugs possibly instilled in him in order to give precedence to a creation of his own genius: spontaneous prose.

The Romantics were not the only writers to dabble in chemicals substances, or opiates the only drug of choice. Anesthetics were especially popular with the Surrealists, allowing the user to shut down their body and give free reign to the mind. William James and Oscar Wilde had "mystical anesthetic revelations" experimenting with nitrous oxide, which seemed to allow them to transcend language (temporarily) to something more fundamental underneath it (Boon 109, 121-22). The problem was that once language was left behind, there was no way to write about the mysteries discovered! William James dabbled with nitrous oxide and experienced moments of illumination while intoxicated, but forgot upon the fleeting epiphanies upon awaking. Finally managing to scribble down his monumental impressions just before losing consciousness, upon arising James found the following "profound" insight:

Hogamous, Higamous

Man is polygamous,

Higamous, Hogamous

Woman is monogamous. (qtd. in Leavitt 334)

James' failure to bring back anything of significance from his altered state does not necessarily deny its value; he may have experienced then or at other times "true" drug-inspired revelations. The point is that the transcendental realm, even if it does exist and can be "visited," by its very definition defies concrete expression. However, the fact that James felt what he had written was important is interesting, because it shows that drugs act much more on our perception of reality than on reality itself. The history of drugged writing shows time and time again that although drugs may inspire one to write, they by no means guarantee "inspired writing."

Drugs were often coupled with other questionable techniques to achieve revelation. Yeats smoked hashish and practiced automatic writing, in which the writer, often in a trance or acting as a medium, writes down impressions that seemingly do not come from their conscious mind (145). Although largely since discredited, Kerouac seems to have based much of his own idea of spontaneous prose on Yeats' process, even trying his own hand at automatic writing (see Chapter 3). Kerouac, revealing Yeat's influence on his own spontaneous technique, declares in his "Essential of Spontaneous Prose": "If possible write 'without consciousness' in semitrance (as Yeats' later 'trance writing') allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so 'modern' language what conscious art would censor" (485). Whatever its influence, both Yeats' automatic writing and Kerouac's spontaneous prose emphasize achieving a type of detached state in which thoughts flow freely, supposedly from the unconscious mind, and are immediately recorded. There is significant methodological overlap between these writing practices and the literary tradition of drug use, and it comes as no surprise that they were often used concurrently. In the article "Rimbaud—Father of Surrealism?"

(1964), Gwendolyn M. Bays recognizes the similar means—and difficulties—shared by these various methods of breaching the unconscious mind: “Whether it has been done by means of drugs, debauchery, automatic writing or hypnosis, the barrier between the conscious and the unconscious has never—and this probably is fortunate—been easily crossed” (51). Bays makes clear that drug use and writing both belong to a set of techniques commonly practiced to gain access to the idealized realm of unconscious

Of course, writing does not have to be automatic, or coupled with drug use, to effectively explore the unconscious, as made evident by the work of James Joyce (one of Kerouac’s primary influences). Joyce’s voyages into the unconscious in *Ulysses* and more particularly *Finnegan’s Wake* are attempts to express the actual ebb and flow of the mind accurately. That these works (especially the latter) are as rapturous as they are chaotic is perhaps testament to the inherent difficulty of the task. The quality (and even existence) of the unconscious mind—knowledge of which might be posited as one of the goals of the transcendental drug experience—may be by its quiescent nature impossible to recreate in words. In fact, Boon sees literature and drug use as similar, at least in their potential to create states of meaning: “Language can offer only an approximation of the limit states produced by psychedelics, and these limit states are themselves only an approximation of something more fundamental [. . .] Literature explores terrain similar to that in which the drug user finds himself or herself” (256). In other words, both language and certain drug-inspired states of consciousness (typically the psychedelics) can be understood as signifiers of an elusive but “essential” reality. While this sense of ultimate meaning they point to is theoretical, drugs and words are both means of revealing and/or constructing reality.

Bays comments on the inherent difficulty experienced by multiple writers in trying to represent the unconscious: “One cold fact emerges from the experiences of Rimbaud and the Surrealists: an esthetic made to depend upon the conscious utilization of the forces of the unconscious was doomed to defeat unless some reliable method could be found for making entry into the unconscious feasible” (50). For many writers, the most reliable method seems to have been drugs. As quoted earlier (pg. 2), Rimbaud proposes that a poet becomes a seer (that is, someone who can see into the unconscious) through a massive, systematic derangement of all the senses (377). Although Rimbaud does not spell out here the means to derange the senses, certainly drugs have been a popular method. Rimbaud himself used hashish to try and arrive at direct knowledge of the “unknown” through alchemical self-transformation (Boon 143). This “unknown” is another term for the transcendental, ultimate, or preverbal state that drug-using writers have consistently tried to reach, and corresponds in many ways to the unconscious mind or even the concept of divine inspiration. While each of the previous terms has specific meaning depending on the user, there is a similar goal among all of these chemical voyagers into the unknown: to discover (and hopefully bring back) the truth.

All of this history is but touching the tip of the iceberg; we have barely mentioned the psychedelics (LSD, psilocybin mushrooms) and cannabis, nor even referred to the stimulants. These latter two drugs will each receive fuller treatment in their respective chapters, as will alcohol, as we analyze their pharmacological properties and cultural frames of use. Like the authors discussed above, Kerouac too made use of the many myths surrounding the drugs he took. Nor has the trend of utilizing the different tropes of drugs ceased today; look at the Hippies and the counterculture of the Sixties, who sought

universal pacifism in marijuana and collective enlightenment in LSD. Witness the glorification of drug use today in movies like *Scarface* (1983) and gangsta rap music as something fun, hip, and profitable. Opposing the veneration of drugs is the most prevalent (and state-sponsored) drug trope of them all: "Say no to drugs!" The government's anti-drug efforts attempt as much as possible to make this negative, dangerous frame the only one drugs should have; ironically, by advocating drugs as dangerous, they also open up another framework for drug users to inhabit: that of the rebel, the anti-authoritarian who courts danger. Writers have been more than willing to engage in this mode of social rebellion, writing about their drug experiences to appear hip; certainly there is are elements of this trend in Beat writing. As we have seen though, the Beats were not the first historical group to celebrate drugs, nor are they the last. The abiding popularity of the Beats reveals that we as readers are also attracted to anti-authoritarian symbols, and perhaps feel a degree pleasurable complicity in transgressing social boundaries with them, albeit safely behind the boundaries of the page.

CHAPTER ONE: ON THE ROAD OR ON BENZEDRINE?

A Quick History of Speed

Kerouac took amphetamine in the form of Benzedrine, a medication introduced in 1932 for the treatment of bronchial problems (amphetamine works as a bronchodilator, making it easier to breathe), and sold over-the-counter as an inhaler in any pharmacy. “Benny” users, who could obtain the drug legally (until 1959, when widespread abuse made it prescription only), would simply buy a Benzedrine tube, crack it open, and consume the amphetamine-soaked wad of paper inside, usually in a cup of coffee or Coke.

It is difficult to conclude what literary credit to give Benzedrine in the formation of spontaneous prose. Long argues that amphetamine shares some sort of authorial role with Kerouac: “What Kerouac did not understand is that he was not completely free to exercise his judgment on the style in which he wrote *On the Road* and the other books. In fact, he was subtly but surely influenced by the amphetamine that was circulating in his body” (69). I will examine the effects Benzedrine exerted on Kerouac’s style in this chapter, after first showing that he used it consciously as a writing tool during the production of *On the Road*. It gave him energy to write and fundamentally shaped the style of spontaneous prose. As the story goes, when Kerouac sat down to write *On the Road* in April 1951, he typed its 35,000 words onto sheets of Teletype paper taped together to form a 120-foot scroll. Working nearly nonstop for twenty days, Kerouac rarely slept, drank a lot of coffee, and ate only pea soup, sweating so badly that he went through dozens of shirts a day (Nicosia 343). This veritable marathon of writing, coupled with the lack of sleep, are both compelling indicators of Benzedrine’s alleged

involvement. However, before establishing its role, it is necessary to detail the curious nature of this original three-week's work.

Revising Kerouac's Revision

In 2007, the first draft was published as *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. Prior to that time, the only version available was the edited 1957 text. A comparative reading reveals not only the limited extent of later editing, but also Kerouac's remarkable initial vision. For instance, the original manuscript is written as a single paragraph; Kerouac's editors broke this staggering monolith of words into paragraphs for the 1957 publication to make it more accessible to readers. They also standardized much of Kerouac's original punctuation (or lack thereof) and replaced the real names of the participants with pseudonyms out of fear of libel. Because the original 1951 manuscript gives a clearer picture of Kerouac's spontaneous style at its very moment of conception, and thus offers more direct evidence of amphetamine's influence, I will use this version of the text for my analysis. I should also note that, following the formatting of *The Original Scroll*, I have replaced the character names Kerouac uses in the 1957 edition with the actual names of the individuals involved (i.e. Sal Paradise is Jack Kerouac, Dean Moriarty is Neal Cassady); I will also refer to the real characters by their first name, as the novel does, to distinguish them from their nonfiction counterparts.

The original manuscript also gives evidence that, despite his statements to the contrary, Kerouac did revise, although perhaps not to the same extent as other writers. Malcolm Cowley, Kerouac's editor on the novel, claims that Kerouac made substantial revisions to the original manuscript before its publication in 1957 (Brinkley xxv). Unfortunately, there is little evidence documenting which changes Kerouac made and

which were the responsibly of his editors, although the original scroll shows words added and/or deleted in Kerouac's handwriting. These alterations, however, are not major rewrites so much as tweaks; Kerouac would insert new words and/or phrases to the text, refining it to greater levels of perfection, while simultaneously seeking to undo changes made by his editors. Although as an early writer he was often contractually at the mercy of his editors, he grieved at their efforts to clean up his punctuation.

Despite the adjustments made, there is often a startling consistency between the original manuscript of *On the Road* and the text as finally published. Rather than calling Kerouac an author who refused to revise, the truth is that he resisted revision, but did it well when he had to. Like his drug use, Kerouac's spontaneous credo against revision was part of the larger mythos he established for himself as a gifted writer. Benzedrine's infamous role in *On the Road*'s three-week composition, while technically true, ignores the larger history, the years of aborted attempts and revisions behind the novel. On its own, amphetamine is no shortcut to great writing; it was only one of Kerouac's influences, and probably inferior to his years of practice at writing, a deliberate method of composition, and conscious aesthetic purposes. Both spontaneous prose and drug use capitalize on facilities already present, and in Kerouac's case, he had paid the price in hard toil by the time he began accomplishing his major work. Kerouac was a talented writer who happened to use drugs, not a talented writer because he used drugs.

In fact, one way in which Kerouac avoided the necessity of revision was by spending years "practicing." Douglas Brinkley, who edited Kerouac's early journals covering the period of *On the Road*'s gestation and composition, downplays the myth behind the novel's spontaneous birth: "This tale of *On the Road* as the product of a

fevered burst of divine inspiration is exaggerated” (xxiii). He shows that the manuscript Kerouac seemed to only take three weeks to write was the result of years of outlines, character sketches, and aborted false starts; it also incorporated portions and key phrases from these earlier efforts (xxiii-xxiv). By the time he actually sat down to write the full first draft, Kerouac had enough prepared enough to avoid gross narrative errors. If we do not often think of writing like an athletic event, in which the participant practices for years in order to achieve a perfect performance, in Kerouac’s case we should. The three weeks he took to write *On the Road* were an aesthetic decathlon made possible by years of preparatory work.

The Drug of Choice. Kerouac’s public stance as an anti-revisionist shows the work he went through to cultivate a mythical self-image. The contradictory history of his methodology is even more conspicuous in the ambiguous involvement of amphetamine in the production of *On the Road*. The legend that Kerouac took Benzedrine to write *On the Road* probably stems from Charter’s biography of Kerouac; she states, “He [Kerouac] was still drinking wine and taking bennies to retype *On the Road* in Richmond Hill, taping his legs with long bandages when they began to swell after too much benzedrine” (202). Charters does not directly document her sources, so there is no way to gauge the accuracy of this statement. She did, however, know Kerouac somewhat personally, and also edited his letters. Because Charter’s Kerouac biography was the first to be published, it held somewhat of an authoritative spell for years over those that followed, establishing the Benzedrine myth firmly in Kerouac criticism.

On the other hand, Ellis Amburn, Kerouac’s late associate and publisher, is the one biographer to maintain that Kerouac did not use Benzedrine to write *On the Road*.

Amburn asserts, “Perhaps the main reason for the pristine quality of the prose was that, despite legends to the contrary, Jack remained relatively drug-free while writing *On the Road*” (165). Amburn bases his conclusion on a letter Kerouac wrote to Cassady; in it, Kerouac mentions that he wrote *On the Road* so quickly by drinking coffee, adding, “Benny, tea [marijuana], anything I KNOW none as good as coffee for real mental kicks” (*Selected Letters* 318-19). However, Kerouac does not specifically deny using Benzedrine here—he simply praises coffee as superior, which is interesting given that coffee is in the same class of stimulants as amphetamine, less potent but more socially acceptable. Because there is a lack of direct evidence to the contrary, and relying on Charters’ credibility, my conclusion is that Kerouac did in fact use Benzedrine while writing *On the Road*. This chapter will analyze the text itself for traces of amphetamine’s involvement, but before beginning this examination, we must consider why Kerouac would not admit his use of amphetamine to write *On the Road* (especially to Cassady, with whom he frequently took the drug).

In fact, throughout his entire writing career, Kerouac frequently downplayed his use of drugs. Even as a narrative element, Benzedrine is barely mentioned in *On the Road*, despite ample historical evidence that it inspired many of the novel’s wild moments. However, Kerouac is not the only writer to conceal his literary drug use; Boon affirms, “A crucial element in the association of narcotics and literature is that most authors deny the creative value of the substance that they are talking about” (40). No doubt Kerouac was wary of cultural taboos condemning drug use—society is hesitant to imbue drugs with beneficial qualities, preferring to label drug-induced visions as hallucinations rather than epiphanies—to say nothing of legal consequences. Kerouac

preferred to emphasize the spontaneous nature of his work, carefully concealing the care and preparation that went into it, in order to cultivate his public image as a genius capable of writing a masterpiece at a moment's notice. "Anybody can write," he once commented, "but not everybody invents new forms of writing" ("Are Writers Made or Born?" 489). Thus, although Kerouac drew on the long tradition of drug-inspired writing as indicated in Chapter 1, he chose to take part in another myth: that of the self-inspired writer, who relied solely on his own talent.

There is concrete evidence of Kerouac's Benzedrine use documented in many of his other novels as well. After *On the Road*, he used Benzedrine to help write *The Subterraneans* (Nicosia 445), *Maggie Cassidy* (Amburn 181-82), *Visions of Gerard* (236), *Tristessa* (Charters 260), and *Big Sur* (326-27). His life-long romance with amphetamine was a result not only of its usefulness as a writing tool (which I will show), but also its addictive nature. In this chapter I will just look at *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans* as examples of amphetamine-influenced texts, because they not only bear the plainest stylistic and thematic evidence of its presence, but were written at an early period in Kerouac's career while his aesthetic was still forming. As a result, I will demonstrate that Kerouac's early use of amphetamine shaped the direction his style would take in later works, even while not under its influence. However, more than biographical records, the best indication that Kerouac used amphetamine to write these novels is their comparable style. By analyzing the pharmacological effects of amphetamine on consciousness and language and locating these elements in the texts, we can more definitively ascertain the nature of its role in Kerouac's work.

Amphetamines: The Chemistry of Change

Because drug use occurs as part of culturally-constructed frameworks, it is essential to understand the basic history and belief structure associated with amphetamine. In both the inside community of users and the outside public mindset exist variable drug tropes of meaning, often contradictory but managing to coexist. For instance, opiates traditionally have been associated with pleasure and/or with images of death and sleep; more recently, their use has been co-opted by the medical establishment on one hand as tools of pain relief, and by the legal system on the other as health threats due to their physically addictive nature. The divine status once accorded to opiates by Coleridge and the Romantics has largely been transferred to the psychedelics like marijuana, LSD, and psilocybin mushrooms; for the Beats and then the counterculture, these latter substances became the symbols as well as the means to usher in a more enlightened age. It is no coincidence that hallucinogenic mushrooms are often called “magic;” in fact the term “hallucinogen” is unfavorable to many avid users of psychedelics because it suggests falsehood and deceit (images more favorable to drug opposition groups, who prefer framing these substances in a more negative light). Hence the inside group of users prefer the name “psychedelics” (“mind-manifesting”), or even better, entheogens (“creating the divine within”), because of their positive connotations.

Amphetamine, or “speed” as it is commonly known, belongs to a class of drugs known as stimulants. Pharmacodynamically, amphetamine works by increasing levels of norepinephrine (a neurotransmitter related to adrenalin), serotonin, and dopamine in the brain, all of which help to enhance awareness and response. Terrence Cox, in *Drugs and Drug Abuse* (1985), correlates the augmented release of these neurotransmitters to

increased levels of alertness and energy as well as a reduction in fatigue (157); likewise, in *Drugs and Human Behavior* (1994), Davis Grilly stresses amphetamine's ability to facilitate performance on tasks requiring sustained attention or quickness, leading to its present use to treat ADHD (198). As a result of its vitalizing properties, amphetamine (in the form of Benzedrine) allowed Kerouac to write without a break for extended periods of time, and often through the night; it also stimulated his intellect and focus, allowing him to type faster and achieve the mental state he deemed necessary for spontaneous prose. However, beyond its stylistic effects, amphetamine was principally an auxiliary aid for Kerouac's arduous compositional regiment.

Kerouac was not the first person to take advantage of amphetamine's utilitarian nature; amphetamine has historically been perceived as a tool, a facilitator of already-present abilities. Unlike natural drugs like opium or marijuana, amphetamine is a manufactured chemical product, and thus a form of technology. Almost immediately after its synthesis in 1887, amphetamine began to occupy a functional niche in the fast-paced modern age. Leslie Iversen, writing in *Speed, Ecstasy, Ritalin: The Science of Amphetamines* (2006), affirms that amphetamine was given to both sides of soldiers in WW2 to push them past their ordinary capacities, and soon became a welcome presence in the workplace to increase output (71). Boon cites stimulants as antidotes to the fatigue brought on by the mechanization of society, "the machinic hyperdrive of twentieth century culture, a world of exponential development of potentialities and fatalities, of shining machines and traumatized human bodies, struggling to keep up with them" (186). Increasing technological innovation proved both dehumanizing and enabling in the twentieth century; the world seemed to become more artificial, but also allowed

individuals to “catch up” and transcend their physiological limits by relying on exterior mechanizing aids, including drugs.

In fact, Kerouac’s spontaneous prose was made possible by advanced technology, and not just amphetamine: he also depended on the typewriter. Together, these inventions allowed a synergistic work-state that served as the precursor to Kerouac’s spontaneous method. The peculiar form of *The Original Scroll*—sparse punctuation, no paragraph breaks, and sheets of paper taped together—are directly attributable to the mechanics of the typewriter; they enabled Kerouac to focus uninterrupted on words while ignoring what he saw as compositional distractions—loading more paper, for instance, or even pausing to insert a comma. Truman Capote infamously remarked that Kerouac’s work was typing, not writing; although Capote meant this statement as an insult, there is an ironic truth to his statement. Boon shows that no writer is immune from the tools of modernity:

And let us not overlook the importance of the typewriter in all of this [...] The typist is another kind of man-machine and amphetamines act as fuel or lubrication to facilitate the interface of human brain and the machinery of production [...] We still think of the high culture writers of the twentieth century as existing beyond the hybrid world of mediating machines—hence Capote’s “insults.” But inevitably, the actual writing practices of the high modernists bear witness to the same reliance on material “aids” to writing true of everybody else. (199)

Boon suggests that the machinery of the typewriter was as essential to Kerouac’s composition process as amphetamine; both are artificial products that can accelerate

biochemical human processes. That Kerouac relied on the typewriter and amphetamine as tools (one mechanical, the other chemical) does not deny his personal voice, but simply admits the dependency of a writer on the available means of production. The same is true of pen and paper, or in our day the computer; a writer by definition utilizes forms of technology to communicate. Furthermore, new inventions allow new modes of communication to flourish; thus my main argument—that drugs like amphetamine were crucial components in formulating Kerouac’s aesthetic—appears valid, inasmuch as Kerouac’s style grew out of the spontaneous processes enabled by technology.

These two exterior bases of Kerouac’s composition method—the typewriter and amphetamine—both enabled an increased capacity for speed, not only physically, but also mentally. It comes as no surprise then that Kerouac’s amphetamine-induced work is fundamentally concerned with issues of speed and its effects on temporality and mobility. Of course, these are themes of twentieth century America, especially following World War II, as the country experienced unprecedented growth. Geographically, the US population was rapidly moving westward, especially during the Great Depression. Technologically, this expansion was made possible in large measure by inventions like the automobile and improved transportation networks, culminating in the embarkation of the nation highway system in the fifties, all of which artificially increased the human capabilities of speed and movement past their previous organic limits. Both the automobile and the road are central symbols in *On the Road*, and along with the typewriter and amphetamine, expanded modern perceptions of movement by altering possibilities of time and space, allowing for greater personal autonomy.

We see these concerns with time, space, and possibility in Kerouac's first published work, *The Town and the City* (1950), which explores the tension between the limited rural past, represented by the town, and a diversified modern civilization, represented by the city. Stylistically, this novel is a sprawling, lyrical saga more in the flavor of Thomas Wolfe. We have already discussed Beat discontentment with the postwar status quo and its rigid social values. John Tytell, in his study of the Beat Generation, *Naked Angels* (1976), describes *On the Road* as "characteristically American in its search for a fluid, unshaped life, free of preimposed patterns, fearing most the horrors of stasis, of staying in the same place without the possibility of change" (23). Ironically, Kerouac made use of mechanized possibility to access the comparatively antiquated, often rural world; he complicates themes of the natural, or authentic, and the artificial, ascribing the latter negatively to modern society, even while making use of its fabricated technological offerings in *On the Road* to flee from the city back to the "purity" of the countryside.

Kerouac saw the increased mobility of modern life as engendering new modes of rebellion and change, especially among those living outside the bounds of conventional society—its criminals, vagrants, and drug users—who through a lack of social obligations coupled with increasingly accessible technologies attained a sort of personal freedom heretofore impossible. It was now possible for those on the bottom economic rung of society to achieve historically unprecedented options for movement and alternative lifestyles. In "Mobility as Resistance," Timothy Cresswell links these social outcasts (which included the Beats, although often by their own choice rather than by necessity) to modes of rebellion against US complacency: "Mobility is also a deeply

threatening and transgressive form of behaviour [*sic*] often described as 'deviant' (think of the threat in the term 'drifter')" (250). In fact, the drug user has commonly been labeled as the very model of deviance, a scapegoat of society's collective anxiety. Often, multiple forms of perceived deviance will be linked together to form a compound threat: for instance, in the early twentieth century, propaganda associated fears about marijuana with Mexican immigrants, victims of racial stereotypes and perceived as competition in the scarce US job-market during the Depression, by spelling the drug in the newspapers as "marihuana" and characterizing it as a foreign invader (Boon 154-56). Kerouac turns these models of terror upside down in his writing, glorifying the homeless, the immigrants, and the drug users, turning them into authentic Americans who have retained the "true" pioneering spirit of early U.S history. Cresswell argues that at a thematic level, "Mobility represents a search for an American essence; haunted by the spirit of the outlaw, the hobo and the pioneer rather than the settlers, the farmers, and the townspeople" (260). The freedom to move through time and space unrestrained thus functions at a narrative and conceptual level in the text, inscribed into *On the Road* not only in its depiction of cross-continental journeys, but also in its belief in new modes of "authentic" existence.

It comes as no surprise that authenticity is a main theme in *On the Road*. As discussed in the "Introduction," authenticity was key to the Beat perception of reality, both in terms of lifestyle and writing. As a predominantly white, middle-class group, the Beats could comfortably glorify life on the margins of society, often ignoring its harsh realities. To their credit, the Beats seemed to genuinely disdain conventional middle-class existence and enjoy moving among its outer edge, but at any rate, their conception of

social reality was, like all others, constructed. Thus, the presence of social themes in *On the Road* is secondary to its exploration of perception itself, in which any critique of reality is grounded. Kerouac examines the possibility of altering perception offered by technology like amphetamine, as well as more conventional methods like the automobile and the typewriter, and the resultant possibilities, both social and aesthetic, these new frames of experience offer. *On the Road*, then, is more concerned with the *perception* of speed, with time and movement as subjective phenomena rather than objective forces. Boon questions the possibility of textual representations of speed: “The speed of literature itself, however, is hard to quantify. We can talk about how fast a book was written, printed, or distributed, but this tells us little about the speed of the text itself. How does an increase or decrease in the speed of cognitive functioning inscribe itself in the writing or reading of a text?” (171). Boon points to the possibility of representing speed on a textual level, which is exactly what Kerouac attempts to convey in *On the Road*. The perception of speed is the defining characteristic of the novel on a number of levels—inspirationally, as the Benzedrine used to write the text as well as during many of its scenes (although often unacknowledged); literally, in the constant movement of cars across the country; symbolically, as part of the modern American identity; thematically, as a concern with the experience of temporality; and stylistically, through the spontaneous energy of the brisk prose. As opposed to *The Town and the City*, which explored these concepts on a narrative level, Kerouac sought in *On the Road* to create a style that could act as a direct embodiment of his technologically altered sense of time and space.

While Kerouac utilized the typewriter and had access to Benzedrine during the writing of *The Town and the City*, it took a further impetus to crystallize these technological aids into Kerouac's unique compositional technique, spontaneous prose, which in turn resulted in the production of *On the Road*. I believe that Kerouac's decision to use Benzedrine consistently over a short time frame (twenty-one days), as opposed to its periodic use during the multi-year composition of *The Town and the City*, is what gives *On the Road* its unique style. Spontaneous prose was not so much an a priori invention as a byproduct of intense Benzedrine use and the typewriter, the combination of which allowed for the linguistic outpouring that became *On the Road*. However, it was Kerouac's choice to use these instruments of production, and certainly others have used them with remarkably differing effects (although Boon's study on amphetamine and writing, in "Chapter 4," reveals that fundamental themes are common to the otherwise diverse texts of many amphetamine-using writers). Likewise, Kerouac and his style were influenced by other personal and social factors, all of which contribute to the exceptional genotype that is *On the Road*. Looming among these various factors, and playing as great of a role as amphetamine, was Neal Cassady.

Neal Cassady: The Essential American

In Kerouac's estimation, no one expressed speed better than Neal Cassady. Kerouac met Cassady in 1946 and traveled with him in 1948, one of their many trips together that inspired *On the Road*. Growing up on the streets of Denver, Cassady possessed a street-smart quality that he used to transform himself into an almost infinite variety of roles—to many people he was little other than a conman—but in Kerouac's eyes, Cassady represented the protean frontiersman spirit of the West. Above all else,

Cassady was spontaneous, boundlessly energetic, and supremely enthusiastic. He was also a veteran Bensedrine user. Tytell asserts that Neal's "defining quality is speed—in conversation, in a car, in his lifestyle. Kerouac, depicting Dean [Neal] as a function of speed, has saliently tapped the distinguishing strain of American life in the second half of the twentieth century" (24). To Kerouac, Cassady was symbol of American velocity and possibility.

The most noticeable thing about Neal in *On the Road* is his silver-tongue. He can talk almost nonstop, and is depicted in the text making frequent monologues. That his loquaciousness stemmed from Bensedrine abuse is both historically and pharmalogically documented. Charter notes that during a road-trip in 1949, Cassady and Kerouac took Bensedrine and talked virtually nonstop for the entire journey (104); while this incident appears in *On the Road*, drugs are not mentioned. As noted before, Kerouac seldom made admission of his drug use, in part for legal concerns of his own as well as his editors (*The Original Scroll* is a bit more revealing in this regard), although if one makes a side-by-side analysis of his texts and biographical records, drug use appears much more often in the latter. Numerous authorities have remarked upon amphetamine's ability to cause periods of intense garrulousness (Cox, et al. 158; Iversen 18). In the text, Neal rarely pauses to reflect on what he was saying or even if it needs to be said; Neal's language reflects a constant mood of exhilaration, indicated in the text by the abundant use of exclamation points and his frequent monosyllabic utterances of delight: "Yes! Yass! Hee! Ee-yah! Yeah! Whee! Wow! Go! Blow! Mad! Ah-haa! Lessgo! Hooee! etcetera" (Long 227). These primal shouts of joy function on an almost pre-literary level, caught halfway between pure elation and conscious enthusiasm, and might be taken as representatives of

Kerouac's "authentic" language of the unconscious. As Weinreich observes in *Kerouac's Spontaneous Poetics* (1987), Kerouac is tapping into a prose tradition that harkens back to the Romantic view of the vitality of the living voice, a Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," that uses common, every-day language to capture the exuberance of "natural" speech (7). However, Neal's recurring outbursts ("Yes! yes! yes!" for example) might suggest more than unbridled enthusiasm; Connell's *Amphetamine Psychosis* links compulsive repetition of single words and/or phrases to "amphetamine psychosis," brought on by chronic high-dose use of the drug (qtd. in Leavitt 333). Thus, while we can examine Neal's symbolic function as a literary character, we must keep in mind the factual, as well as the pharmacological, basis for his actions.

As such, it is important to differentiate between Neal Cassady as a real individual and Dean Moriarty as his literary alter ego. Although Kerouac based his fiction on actual episodes of his life, he still shaped his material with an eye towards effect. In terms of Kerouac's own life, *On the Road* contains only the portion of his cross-country trips that seemed most interesting; Kerouac's journals reveal a far different, often less exciting story. Nor is there very much material in the text about Kerouac's life at home, perhaps because he was often living with his mother—hardly suitable material for the rebellious Beat image. The point is that Kerouac was a mythmaker, creating fiction out of the clay of his real life. Like any storyteller, he wanted to entertain, but Kerouac also had something of the Romantic prophet in him, and wanted to preach the Beat doctrine of freedom and spontaneity. So too is the real Neal Cassady made into a symbol of speed, adaptability, and change: he becomes the Huckleberry Finn to Kerouac's Tom Sawyer,

urging him on to greater adventures. In fact, although Kerouac is the narrator, it is Neal who is the book's hero, and like most great heroes, he embodies certain myths.

Of the many myths that Neal embodies—among them the myth of the Frontier, and the myth of the self-made man—perhaps least obvious, but just as important, is the myth that glorifies drug use, transforming it into a hallowed, divine pursuit. We have already discussed how Kerouac made himself a part of the literary tradition of drug use and its belief in the inspirational powers of these substances; so too in *On the Road* does Neal's poly-drug use bestow upon him his remarkable abilities, whether the stamina to drive from coast to coast with little sleep or his powers of speech. In one scene in text, Ginsberg's character attributes his revelatory conversations with Neal to Benzedrine: "We're trying to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on our minds. Sometimes we stay up two days getting down to the bottom of our mind. We've had to take benny" (145). Kerouac depicts Neal as a type of spiritual guru, "the HOLY GOOF," as Jack calls him (292), Neal's words taking on a prophetic air of authenticity and truth, which Kerouac emulates in the novel's style. Like any myth, there is much that is falsely attributed to amphetamine in *On the Road*, but there are elements of truth shown in it as well.

Making Good Time: The Perception of Speed in *On the Road*

In its ability to bestow industriousness and enlarge the scope of possibilities, amphetamine is in many ways the quintessential drug of the American Dream. Appropriately, *On the Road*, and most of all Neal, embodies the quest for the American Dream, and its concomitant goals of wealth, happiness, and success. Amphetamine also brings these results, its dopaminergic flooding of the brain's reward pathways creating

feelings of intense euphoria (Cox, et al. 157; Iversen 17). Not surprisingly, the search for the American Dream in *On the Road* is transformed into the pursuit of pleasure, whether in jazz, drugs, sex, or a fast car. The fulfillment of self, which Neal calls “IT,” is the ultimate purpose he and Jack are always racing towards. However, more than just hedonism, these objectives are part of a search for authentic meaning. This sense of transcendence is apparent in Neal’s response to Jack’s request to define IT:

All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he GETS IT—
everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries.
Time stops. He’s filling empty space with the substance of our lives. He
has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite
feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows
it’s not the tune that counts but IT— (304)

This passage not only defines IT, but shows its relation to Kerouac’s writing technique, which was modeled in part on jazz—also a spontaneous art form. Neal’s explanation reveals that IT, more than just a goal, is a heightened moment of being. Like jazz, Kerouac’s prose moves forward temporally, following a certain rhythm or beat; when IT occurs, “time stops” moving forward and instead expands infinitely into the now. Into this “empty space” is poured “the substance of our lives”—a metaphor for the artist’s ability to communicate truth authentically, to fill the void of time with meaning. IT then is the climax of the text on both a narrative and aesthetic level; thematically, it is the main object of pursuit, authenticity of existence, while stylistically it represents the ideal mode of connection between author and reader that Kerouac sought to make possible through spontaneous prose. Like the jazz performer, Jack and Neal seek IT to

find something eternal and timeless, something permanent to contrast with the incessant searching and vanishing moments of their temporal-bound lives.

Neal's description of IT is also similar to the amphetamine rush— Iversen affirms that with larger doses of amphetamine, “thoughts cascade rapidly through the mind and the capacity to concentrate is diminished” (18). During IT as well as the amphetamine-induced state, mental input increases; this acceleration leads to a sense that objective time has slowed down or stopped, when really only subjective perception has sped up. In addition, objects take on a hyper-significance as they are noticed more intently, but concentration is simultaneously lessened, leading to a constant shifting of attention. Jack, referring to this state of sensory engorgement, notes how Neal “was tremendously excited about everything he saw, everything he talked about, every detail of every moment that transpired” (221). Neal is so aware of every second of existence that he does not notice the passage of time—this produces a sense of time having ceased, when in reality it continues to pass the same as always. The same paradox is apparent in someone rushing around with a busy schedule—in their haste to perform multiple tasks, time seems to vanish more quickly, almost inversely in comparison to their increasing amount of action. Thus, as greater amounts of speed are experienced (whether through drugs or activity), time seems to shorten. For the amphetamine user, however, time does not so much stop as it is lost, because the drug user is too caught up in the moment to notice that it is always ending. While left vague by Kerouac, it seems likely that Neal's altered sense of temporal progression in the novel is often the direct result of amphetamine intoxication.

Neal constantly seeks to transcend time in *On the Road* through the pursuit of IT, finding these atemporal, joyful moments in activities like drugs, jazz, sex, or a fast car.

His perpetual attempt to escape temporal constrictions first becomes obvious to Jack when he visits Neal in Denver shortly after their introduction: Jack finds Neal operating at a frantic pace, bound to a schedule of unending activity (including three nightly sexual liaisons) but little rest. “What’s the schedule?” Jack asks, and then confesses, “There was always a schedule in Neal’s life and it was growing more complicated every year” (145). Neal is so busy running all over Denver that Jack barely sees him during this early visit. Explaining himself to Jack, Neal hurriedly states, “‘It is now’ (looking at his watch) ‘exactly one-fourteen—I shall be back at exactly THREE fourteen, for one hour of reverie together [...] so now in this exact minute I must dress, put on my pants, go back to life, that is to outside life, streets and whatnot, as we agreed, it is now one-FIFTEEN and time’s running, running’” (146-47). The irony of Neal’s race against time, his attempt to transcend temporality by taking part in every possible activity, is that he becomes time’s prisoner, subject to its relentless demands. There is a similar obsession with making good time on the road. After a trip, Jack recounts, “We had come from Denver to Chicago, 1028 miles [...] in exactly 23 hours counting the two hours we wasted in the Colorado ditch and at the Ed Uhl ranch eating, and the hour with the police in Iowa, for a mean total of 20 averaging 51 across the land with one driver, and 59 counting the extra 150 miles out of the way for Sterling. (or 1178 mis. in all)” (335). As with Neal’s schedule, there is a focus on numbers, measurements, and distances in their travels together; in the obsession to beat time, time becomes the sole concern. In fact, it is largely through the use of modern technology, which seems to promise to increase speed and shorten the time required for things, that time becomes objectively measured; Neal represents a

return to a primitive, timeless state, despite the irony that he relies on cars and drugs to get there more quickly.

Traveling to a Timeless Age

It is only in the climax of the novel, as Neal and Jack approach Mexico City, that Neal seems to truly do away with technology and the modern need for objectively measured time. Coming upon some Indian girls selling crystals by the roadside (where Jack fantasizes they have always lived, motionless onlookers of the road and the acceleration of history and civilization that it brings), Neal give his wristwatch to a young girl in exchange for a crystal (398). The symbolism of the gesture is clear: Neal has traded the mechanized world of 20th-century technology for the timeless creations of nature. In doing so he has escaped time; without the technology to delineate time into hours and minutes, it can be subjectively experienced through direct interaction with “reality” (i.e. the sun). Like the amphetamine user for whom the passage of time is altered, Neal is now free to move through history at his whim, in this case backwards into the primordial times of ancient Mexico, without being worried by the constraints of clocks and calendars.

Of course, Kerouac purposefully romanticizes the inhabitants of Mexico, primitivizing and imbuing them with a timeless natural quality to make them living symbols of IT. Through the eyes of Jack and Neal, Kerouac transforms Mexico’s occupants into an ageless, eternal tribe: “They were great grave Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it [...] For when destruction comes to the world people will still stare with the same eyes from the caves of Mexico as well as from the caves of Bali, where it all began and where Adam was suckled and taught to know”

(381). That this description is not meant to be taken literally is somewhat apparent by the inclusion of Adam; while Adam is a historical person to many Christian believers, Kerouac makes him into a mythical figure by not only placing his birthplace in Mexico, but by even giving him a natural birth, since Adam was traditionally created directly by God. Linking Adam to the natives of Mexico includes them in a divine tradition: both are the offspring of God and the natural heirs of the earth. The ancient heritage of these people is suggested even more clearly as Jack and Neal approach Mexico City—Jack compares passing shepherds to Biblical figures: “Great maguey plants showered out of the strange Judean earth. ‘Man, man’ I yelled to Neal ‘wake up and see the shepherds, wake up and see the golden world that Jesus came from’” (399). Kerouac was educated and well read; it is doubtful that he meant such grossly inaccurate statements literally. While the character of Jack in *On the Road* is drawn notably more naïve than Kerouac himself, part of the novel’s thematic progression is Jack’s education under Neal into a more street-wise person. Since the arrival to Mexico City represents the climax of the literal and figurative journey Jack undertakes in the book, it seems clear that the Biblical imagery is symbolic, meant to invoke the recurring trope of temporality. Jack and Neal have traveled so far and so fast that they have not only escaped time but history as well; they have metaphorically gone back through time to a mythical, purer age. The world they find at the end of the road is the antithesis to the book’s portrait of the mechanized, time-bound US postwar era.

Arriving at the distant goal of their journey, Jack and Neal in a sense have arrived home, to the center of a reality that matches their own idealized perceptions of the speed

of life. However, compared to the unhurried, antediluvian inhabitants they have already passed, the citizens of Mexico City are notable for their frenzied speed:

Kids played soccer in enormous sad fields and threw up dust. Taxi drivers overtook us and wanted to know if we wanted girls. No, we didn't want girls now. Long ragged dobe [*sic*] slums stretched out on the plain; we saw lonely figures in the dimming alleys. Soon night would come. Then the city roared in and suddenly we were passing crowded cafes and theaters and many lights. Newsboys yelled at us. Mechanics slouched by barefoot with a wrench and a rag. Mad barefoot Indian drivers cut across us and surrounded us and tooted and made frantic traffic. The noise was incredible. No mufflers are used on Mexican cars. Horns are batted with glee continual. (400)

The sentences here are short, tense, almost fragmentary. Strung together in rapid succession they suggest a sense of haste—hardly is one detail noticed before another one must be digested. It is not only Jack and Neal who are moving swiftly here but the city itself. There is a barrage of sensory stimuli, of sights and sounds rushing at the reader that mimic what the experience must have *felt like* to Kerouac—his writing techniques push the reader across the page at as fast a pace as the characters race about.

Kerouac is also contrasting a state of barely managed chaos against the more sedate impressions of US society earlier depicted. The disorder of Mexico City's occupants matches earlier descriptions of the jazz musicians and their audience, or even Neal and his seemingly haphazard movement through life. Creswell, citing Lewis Mumford, suggests that the counterculture the Beats initiated was rebelling against the

rigid mechanized order of modern society, and that this insurgency is best captured in *On the Road* by “undirected mobility,” whether in the random motion Neal or by the populace of Mexico City (254). Like amphetamine, technology seems to promise an escape from the demands of time by increasing the speed of labor. Inevitably, however, by creating time to do more, the tempo of life seems to quicken and become busier, often prompting backlashes like that seen in the Beat movement and ensuing counterculture, in which there is a desire to return to a more “natural,” slower-paced (often rural) lifestyle.

Kerouac’s concern with the tension between nature and civilization is apparent even before *On the Road*; his first novel, *The Town and the City*, explores the conflict between rural small-town life and the technological constructs of the city. In *On the Road*, Jack frequently voices his exhilaration to leave the city behind: “And he [Neal] hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved!” (234). While Kerouac seems to equate movement with fleeing technology, this comparison is contradicted by the fact that movement is often aided by technology (i.e. the automobile). Kerouac further complicates this relationship by revealing his ultimate disenchantment with the inactivity of the natural life. Early in the novel Jack has an affair with a Mexican immigrant named Bea (Terry in the revised text), and spends a few days working the land with her, dreaming that he has found life’s work (197). However, the slow manual labor of “authentic” immigrant existence proves to be too much for Jack, who soon ditches the girl and returns to the excitement of fast-paced New York City.

Ultimately, Jack always returns to civilization in the novel, which establishes a recurring cycle in the novel leading from drifting confusion to purposeful motion but eventual exhaustion, ennui, and an eventual return to the road.

Crashing at the End of the Road. The tension between movement and exhaustion forms the structural basis of the *On the Road*. While Kerouac rarely correlates this oscillation to Benzedrine in the text, he used the drug enough to be familiar with perhaps the most common of drug tropes—the euphoric high followed by the crash of the inevitable low. More than most drugs even, amphetamine, intimately connected with speed and energy, is especially prone to this cycle; as one of the most powerful reinforcing drugs (see Julien's *A Primer of Drug Action* 340), once the effects wear off it is not uncommon for the user to take more, sometimes for days on end. The prolonged use of amphetamine inevitably leads from frenzied activity to depression, lethargy, and exhaustion (Inaba, Darryl, and Cohen 72, Iversen 19). While Neal rarely comes off as somber, Kerouac is careful to note the vacillations in Neal's temperament, no doubt often the result of Benzedrine abuse. For instance, after a bout of turbulent conversation, Jack witnesses Neal instantly fall asleep: "His face was a light—'Oh yes man, dear God, yes, yes!' Suddenly he collapsed. I turned and saw him huddled in the corner of the seat sleeping" (308-09). While this remarkable instant transformation from hyperactivity to somnolence seems a bit unreal, when interpreted in light of the amphetamine high/crash cycle it makes a bit more sense. Using such incidents, Kerouac constructs the theme of temporality around the high/low binary to present the America of *On the Road* as a place of speed, pleasure, and progression as well as of decay, despair, and abandonment.

That amphetamine was as much boon as bane to Neal becomes more apparent as the novel progresses. For example, after the climactic arrival into Mexico City, Neal becomes a symbol of disillusionment; he abandons Jack, who has come down with dysentery, in abject squalor and loneliness (404). When Neal defends his decision to return alone back to New York City and then continue on to San Francisco, Jack wearily cries, "All that again?" (404). Jack has realized Neal's inescapable, senseless need to move. The real William S. Burroughs once compared Cassady's pointless driving back and forth across America "to the mass migrations of the Mayans [...] Neal is, of course, the very soul of this voyage into pure, abstract, meaningless motion [...] Neal must move" (Charters 104-05). The last time Jack sees Neal in the text, Neal, scheduled to help Jack and his new wife move across the country, shows up five-and-a-half-weeks early with no explanation (405). Jack sadly watches Neal turn right around after his long journey east and travel 3,000 miles back to San Francisco "over that awful land," Neal no wiser to his own motives for coming and going (408). By the novel's end, Neal's overbearing need for speed has transcended the bounds of time so profoundly that he is unable to function within any rational system of temporal measurement. Days, weeks, and schedules have become meaningless numbers for him, disassociated from the objective measuring of time that ordinarily dominates most people's perception of reality. The irony of *On the Road* is that, for all the good time on the road the heroes make, they frequently get lost along the way. Neal's speedy flight gets the duo into all sorts of mishaps, detours, accidents, and tangents. Perhaps getting lost is the point however; it is the experience of movement itself, of pure unfettered mobility, that seems to matter most

to Neal, whose life is encapsulated in the novel's frequent exclamation to "Go, go, go!" (295).

Neal's contraction into the subjectivity of his own temporal perceptions is also matched by the silencing of his voice. The last time Jack sees Neal, "He [Neal] couldn't talk any more [...] We listened. But he forgot what he wanted to say" (405). Neal's former gift of language is gone. Once the symbol of his spontaneity and vocal omnipresence, Neal's voice, full of transformative potential, now finds nothing to say and loses the power of action. While I hesitate to conclude that Neal's final state is a diatribe against drug use (certainly not for Kerouac himself, who continued to use them, or for the real-life Cassady, who went on to talk as much as always), it functions to bring Neal's character arc full circle. Just as he was once an embodiment of life and possibility, by the end of the novel Neal has become a mute cipher, incapable of useful action. "But why did you come so soon Neal?" Jack asks him, to which Neal responds, "I don't know," revealing the final absurdity of Neal's character (406). In the end Neal is left in the dust as Jack drives off without him.

On the Road thus ends on an ambivalent note towards the possibility of transcending temporal perception. In a 151-word eulogy that flows without the interruption of a single period, Jack sits watching the setting sun, alluding once more to the theme of the passage of time. He senses "all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast," invoking the mythos of the frontier, of the still unshaped clay of transformation as well as its eventual limits where the land meets the ocean. He links this image to the "the coming of complete night" and to death, but also to the stars and "all the people dreaming in the immensity of it," reiterating the

theme of America's dual identity: a place of both decay and growth, limits and possibilities, past and future, nature and technology. The antithetical images of America also mirror the double meaning of the term "beat," which Kerouac later indicated suggests not only "down and out" but also "beatific" (*Selected Letters* 434). The final triple litany of Neal's name hints at a sense of renewal, of life somewhere still existing and ultimately to come again in its never-ending temporal cycle (408).

In fact the real Neal Cassady did go on the road again, only this time leaving the pages of a text and stepping into the realm of history. Largely because of *On the Road*, Cassady became an icon of the Sixties counterculture, reentering literary fame as the speed-eating driver of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' psychedelic school bus "Furthur" [*sic*] (as recounted in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*). In a sense, the real-life Cassady became his fictional counterpart, ensuring the legacy of his mythic status, his speed, and the infamous role of amphetamine in it all.

The Subterraneans: Confessing the Story "Ere Time's Up"

Kerouac's amphetamine-altered perception of time is even more noticeable in *The Subterraneans* (1953). Written immediately after the end of a turbulent relationship, Kerouac again made use of the typewriter and amphetamine to produce the text in just three days (Charters 185). The novel is remarkable for its overwhelming need for complete disclosure. Mortenson attributes Kerouac's obsession to spill his guts with amphetamines, which "create a feeling that time is always running out. Kerouac's frantic confession in *The Subterraneans* is an attempt by an author to describe everything desperately, to tell the whole story, to unburden all of his problems on the sympathetic ear of another 'ere time's up'" (64). Grilly notes that amphetamine users often become

fascinated or preoccupied with their own thought processes, turning these into philosophical concerns on a grand scale (199). Kerouac's relentless self-analyzing, plunging into the naked depths of his mind to find out where his relationship went wrong, seems to have been exaggerated, if not brought on, by the Benzedrine he took while writing. Kerouac felt that the longer he took to get his experiences all down on paper, the further away from the truth of the events they would be. In his haste, he felt he must recollect every memory, no matter how minute, to provide the most truthful account possible.

Even more than in *On the Road*, a profundity of details becomes the key to "authenticity." Kerouac's aesthetic rationale seems to be that truth, while necessarily tenuous, resides in the connection between events. Thus, the more actions recorded and the more detailed the accounts, the more complete and accurate the picture. That this belief was urged on by amphetamine seems likely, since it increases attention to external sensory phenomena; the exterior world of stimuli takes on a more profound meaning to the amphetamine user, the connection between things thickening with meaning. In extreme cases of amphetamine psychosis, this hyper-focus turns into paranoia, as imaginary casualties are inferred between unrelated events. While Kerouac maintains a moderate level of rationality throughout *The Subterraneans*, at times he is plagued with feelings of suspicion. The ultimate rift in his relationship results from his overwhelming jealousy; Kerouac accuses his lover of infidelity based on a sparsity of observations, which are nonetheless turned meaningful by his own specious mind. His erratic behavior actually ends up driving his lover into the arms of another man, ironically transforming Kerouac's doubts into truth.

For the most part though, Kerouac's spontaneous prose in *The Subterraneans* offers a fascinating sequence of events, which in their comprehensive detailing of Kerouac's experience recreate an authentic feeling of meaning. To accomplish this sense, Kerouac pushes the sentence past its normal boundaries (even compared to *On the Road*), extending it in *The Subterraneans* into entire paragraphs and in some cases pages. In the following passage, Kerouac's prose replicates the speed of his perception as it take in a multiplicity of subjects:

So there we were at the Red Drum, a tableful of beers a few that is and all the gangs cutting in and out, paying a dollar quarter at the door, the little hip-pretending weazel there taking tickets, Paddy Cordavan floating in as prophesied (a big tall blond brakeman type subterranean from Eastern Washington cowboy-looking in jeans coming in to a wild generation party all smoky and mad and I yelled "Paddy Cordavan?" and "Yeah?" and he'd come over)—all sitting together, interesting groups at various tables. (13)

The entire passage continues on for another three pages before a period. The influence of amphetamine on Kerouac's writing seeps into the text as a sense of excess, with the lack of punctuation creating an almost out-of-breath sensation. Kerouac still controls the prose from becoming over-burdensome through a variety of linguistic constraints, the most important of these tools being the dash. While periods and commas are commonly used to signify a termination, the dash suggests an extension; like a saxophone player taking a breath while playing an otherwise uninterrupted performance, so too does the dash in Kerouac's hand become an instrument that simultaneously divides and connects a chain of sentences. By limiting the use of the period as a grammatical

marker, which by its very name suggests a temporal unit marking a beginning and an end, Kerouac creates a sense of unified action; we are more prone to relate the linked ideas to each other by their collective syntactical connection, to view them meaningfully as an organic whole. Kerouac uses the dash to impel the reader's eye to take in a series of linked sentences at once, causing the entire picture to be seen in whole as a panoramic vision, rather than piecemeal as detail heaped upon detail (Weinreich 27). Kerouac also facilitates the sensation of unabridged movement by using verbs in the present participle: "cutting," "paying," "pretending," "taking," and "floating" (136-37). The unique stylings of spontaneous prose allow Kerouac to authentically replicate his subjective perception of time; the reader is able to experience the events as Kerouac must have while on Benzedrine.

By reducing the temporal gap between thought and pen, Kerouac felt there was less chance for detour, for the truth to be muddled by revisionary afterthought. In his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," composed around the time he began incorporating amphetamine into his writing, Kerouac advises, "No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained" (484-85). Kerouac was of the opinion that the more time spent on choosing the "proper" word, the more false it would be by virtue of straying from the unconscious mind's original selection; he suggests an implicit correlation between speed and authenticity. According to this formula, faster linguistic output mirrors more closely the pre-verbalized purity of thought. Ginsberg also espoused the connection between the unconscious and genuine expression: "If you talk fast and excitedly you get weird syntax and rhythms, just like you think, or nearer to what you think" (Kramer 140). Kerouac's notion of the unconscious

suggests his belief in a Freudian contrast between the unconscious and conscious mind. In modern psychology, however, there remain fundamentally different ideas on the nature of the unconscious and even its existence; Lacan argues that the unconscious is not primitive at all but actually structured like a language. Nonetheless, there seem to be a general recognition in modern psychology that certain thought processes happen outside the scope of cognitive awareness while still influencing behavior. The unconscious mind is perhaps best viewed as a social construct, and Kerouac's concept of it as a metaphor for a hidden level of awareness and automatism, similar to the idea of the Muse, that he used in the hope of attaining greater levels of authenticity.

Spontaneous prose is not of course a more authentic language per se, but certainly a method designed to allow for dynamism and variability. It is also an attempt to be more in keeping with the oral rather than the written literary tradition, the latter of which the Beats were rebelling against. The vitality of the oral tradition is also what attracted Kerouac to the vagrants of America and the inhabitants of Mexico, whom he deemed to have preserved an adaptive capacity to the inherent flux of existence—they were closer to the land, and thus at once both timeless and every-evolving. In contrast, the “city-folk” of the civilized world had been frozen in time by relying too heedlessly on technology, which cut them off from the growing “soul” of the earth. Of course, as earlier noted, the irony is that Kerouac used the technology of the modern world (cars, drugs, and typing) to approach the so-deemed natural realm of the “Beat,” or common-folk. Speed for Kerouac—enabled by technologies like the typewriters and amphetamine—allowed for the static written word to more closely match the ever-changing oral mode, and thus in his estimation to better embody the “living” force of real language.

If Benzedrine helped enhance Kerouac's literary output, it was often at the risk of his clarity. In trying to capture the rapid flux of the mind honestly, Kerouac's spontaneous prose at times leans perilously towards being long-winded and overwrought. Among amphetamine's detrimental effects is an increase in motor activity known as "logorrhea," the flow of useless words coupled with an irresistible and sometimes morbid need to speak (Long 63). This description certainly sounds like Cassady. Amburn recalls that during 1945, Kerouac "was perpetually loaded on Benzedrine because it enabled him to write huge quantities of prose. But [...] Benzedrine made him turn out worthless 'gibberish'" (101-02). Amburn's observation is based on Kerouac's early career, before Kerouac mastered his stylistic proclivities into the functional form of spontaneous prose; like any beginning writer, he had to develop his art through years of practice and discipline. Once again, let me reiterate my belief that amphetamine was secondary to Kerouac's own skills as a writer. While amphetamine may have helped shape the formulation of spontaneous prose, Amburn's quote reveals that it is not inherently a helpful substance. Its quality depends entirely on the person taking it, the context they take it in, and its frequency and quantity use. If amphetamine could build upon Kerouac's mental faculties, it could also destroy them. While Kerouac would continue to use amphetamine throughout the rest of his life as a compositional incentive, he also began experimenting with other drugs and literary techniques as he further developed his aesthetic. As we will look at in the next chapter, Kerouac, aided by marijuana, sought to explore the interiority of experience, rather than the comparatively outer narrative modes of *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*.

CHAPTER TWO: A STYLE TRULY HALLUCINATED

Visions of Cody: Sketching the Mind on Marijuana

Although Benzedrine was by far Kerouac's favorite writing tool, he was also quite fond of marijuana. The books Kerouac produced under its influence, *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*, are often considered to be two of Kerouac's best works. We have already discussed at length Kerouac's utilization of speed, time, and the external world of details as a means of creating what he felt to be a more honest language. However, as part of his artistic quest to communicate his mind authentically, Kerouac pushed his style into new realms, exploring the interior structure of consciousness through associative techniques designed to allow a more direct transfer of meaning to the reader. This new approach to his fiction, which came to be called "sketching," was part of Kerouac's natural stylistic growth, but as before, a drug also played a key part: in this case, marijuana.

Kerouac began working on *Visions of Cody* after completing the first full draft of *On the Road* in April 1951. There is reliable evidence that Kerouac smoked marijuana constantly while writing *Visions of Cody* (written during 1951-52, but not published in its entirety until 1973), although since it was written over an indefinite time frame and in separate sittings (versus *On the Road*'s three-week spontaneous outburst), we cannot be sure of the exact scope of the drug's involvement. However, Kerouac's friend John Clellon Holmes witnessed Kerouac's frequent marijuana use while writing the text, as recorded in Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee's oral history, *Jack's Book* (1978): "He'd blast, get high, and then he'd write all night. And the reason why those sentences are so long and exfoliating and so incredible is because of pot" (77). *Visions of Cody* is a series

of vignettes and prose experiments that jump around in time and place, much more so than the comparatively linear *On the Road*. It is unique among Kerouac's novels for its lack of a controlling plot. Rethinking his first examination of Cassady in *On the Road*, Kerouac wanted to pay homage to his friend in a way that the former book had not. *Visions of Cody* became a way to get to the heart of the matter, to push Kerouac's attempts at an authentic language past the exterior body of events and into the subconscious spirit of the story.

Ironically, for an author who so vehemently disparaged the idea of revision, Kerouac tells the same story twice—albeit each time in a different way. Particularly towards its final section, *Visions of Cody* recycles the exact same source material from the conclusion of *On the Road* (the trip to Mexico). As Weinreich puts it, “Significantly, the insistence upon further clarification, to get to the truth about things, forced Kerouac's mind over the material again and forces the reader to recognize that by such repetition a stage of revision is already built into the supposedly ‘spontaneous’ prose. Repetition in fact becomes Kerouac's control” (5). Much like the jazz that Kerouac modeled his style after, each of his works work is a variation on the same theme. Kerouac filtered each text through a distinct state of consciousness—in part the result of amphetamine and marijuana's divergent effects—to produce unique visions of the same subject.

This is not to say that drugs were the deciding factor in shaping each work's style. Just like amphetamine was in some measure responsible for *On the Road*'s unswerving interest in temporality and motion, so too was *Visions of Cody*'s inimitable aesthetic partially urged on by Kerouac's marijuana use, colored and molded by the drug's unique pharmacology. However, *Visions of Cody*'s style was the also natural result of Kerouac's

continual growth as a writer and his fascination with experimentation. In any case, perhaps the best evidence of the differing roles played by amphetamine and marijuana in shaping Kerouac's aesthetic is the remarkable contrast in style between the two texts, especially since they were written roughly within a year of each other. Such a rapid progression in Kerouac's aesthetics, from the relative linearity of *On the Road* to the almost complete collapse of order in *Visions of Cody*, is not surprising given the well-documented power of drugs to induce quick behavioral transformations. *On the Road* speeds along at an abrupt pace fueled by amphetamine, skimming the surface of events while the narrative progresses in a straight fashion. Kerouac considered it a "horizontal" version of the story. *Visions of Cody*, by contrast, moves vertically; it abandons narrative coherence in favor of poetic expansion, jumping around in time and space, expounding on the infinitesimal, and truncating traditional storytelling, which causes it to read like a hallucinated, inner road-trip into the realms of the unconscious mind.

Rather than abandoning *On the Road*'s spontaneous prose, however, Kerouac was continuing to refine it, utilizing a new "sketching" technique suggested by his friend Ed White, who asked Kerouac, "Why don't you just sketch in the streets like a painter but with words?" (*Selected Letters* 356). Sketching can be seen as the next step of spontaneous prose, its creative evolution. While Kerouac's continual stylistic development would doubtless have occurred without marijuana, there are enough similarities between its proven effects and the textual features produced with the sketching technique to suggest that THC played a definite contribution to the style's genesis. It is fitting that Kerouac used a term from the visual arts, "sketching," to describe his evolved spontaneous method, because his sketching process bears some resemblance

to art forms like cubism that likewise drastically alter conventional perceptions of reality. Kerouac found that his perception could be further modified by marijuana, as we see in Ginsberg's description of its effects:

Marijuana consciousness is one that, ever so gently, shifts the center of attention from habitual shallow purely verbal guidelines and repetitive secondhand ideological interpretations of experience to more direct, slower, absorbing, occasionally microscopically minute, engagement with sensing phenomena during the high moments or hours after one has smoked. ("The Great Marijuana Hoax," par. 1)

In other words, THC sharpens sensitivity, renewing and increasing the awareness of the minutiae of existence usually filtered out by the conscious mind. While this increase in awareness sounds superficially like the effects of amphetamine, in actual experience the two drugs greatly differ; while the subjective experience of each is necessarily difficult to accurately describe, it is again helpful to use the metaphor of orientation: Amphetamine focuses the senses outwards and onto objects, where it tends to remain, while marijuana brings these same objects into the mind's eye, building an internal framework of reality. Cox affirms increased auditory and visual acuity to be common results of smoking marijuana (217)—as a result, ordinary objects often take on magnified importance, although once again, this heightening of significance is fundamentally dissimilar from amphetamine, which tends to project its own connections out and between objects, while marijuana isolates these objects in the mind, where they become the center of attention and thus amplified in their meaning. Long describes marijuana's ability to bestow consequence to things in a similar light: "Disturbance in the

perception of length and passage of time [. . .] The most banal objects take on new dimensions, and sometimes an extraordinary significance” (172-73). These two attributes, altered sensory/temporal perception and an exaggerated sense of importance in the commonplace, are related, and produce of the most significant marijuana-induced elements in *Visions of Cody*. Kerouac attests to these common effects in his own description of marijuana, or “tea” he often called it:

At Danny’s I got hi true, but just so as to say “Time hasn’t moved though of course I know it has”—and actually it *was* ten o’clock before I knew it. Walking forth from D’s the real high began [. . .] The highness first manifested itself in an exaggerated sense of the importance [...] of what I recounted—utter contempt for ordinary connectives, so that Danny wanted to have explanations to be conversive—I plunged into the bottom of my subject.... (88-89)

Kerouac’s comment that “time hasn’t moved although of course I know it has” reveals his altered perception of the passage of time. Similar to amphetamine, THC leads to a sort of temporal transcendence, although their means of doing so vary. Amphetamine creates the illusion of the hands of the clock ticking faster and faster until they disappear in a blur of speed, while marijuana creates the feeling that time has slowed down or expanded, growing in scope. Since the experience of time on both drugs is subjective, however, a user may interpret the effects as similar, or at least overlapping. Nonetheless, establishing clear differentiation between their respective pharmacodynamic effects is possible if we look for consistency of experience among multiple users, even though at the level of the individual, perception may vary drastically.

In any case, the slower subjective experience of time marijuana induces allows for a heightened level of awareness—the user notices more objects, including data that the mind normally filters out. Kerouac mentions in the above passage that “the highness first manifested itself in an exaggerated sense of the importance [...] of what I recounted” (89). Marijuana’s ability to open the doors of perception is exhibited textually in *Visions of Cody* as great catalogs of the senses:

But I haven’t even mentioned the best of all—the cold cuts and sandwiches and salad counter—with pans of mountainous spreads of all kinds that have cream cheese coverings sprinkled with chives and other bright spices, the lovely pink looking lox—cold ham—Swiss cheese—the whole counter gleaming with icy joy which is salty and nourishing—cold fish, herrings, onions—great loaves of rye bread sliced—so on—spreads of all kinds, egg salads big enough for a giant decorated and sprigged on a pan—in great sensuous shapes—salmon salads. (11)

This description is not even half of the entire section, which continues to detail the complete contents of the counter in microscopic detail. We see here evidence of the enhanced appreciation of taste, smell, and sight (and possibly increased appetite) that THC produces; *A Primer of Drug Action* lists among the attributes of THC: “Increased visual and auditory perception [...] Taste, touch, and smell may be enhanced” (Julien 275). This scene functions as a literal description of excess—this food is the first sight that Cody (Cassady) sees upon arriving in New York City, and hence a symbol (presumably to both him and Kerouac) of its bounteous possibilities—as well as a subjective experience of increased sensory intake. Stylistically, this engorgement of

perception occurs both through the wealth of associated ideas and images as well as in the multiplication of words (and subsequent lack of punctuation)—both lead to a feeling of overflowing abundance. While this level of detail may be seen as overindulgence, or a failure to wean out the best ideas, Kerouac saw it as verbal richness, a way to capture life in its entirety. Certainly it goes beyond the bounds of narrative necessity, but that's exactly the point for Kerouac: it is a textual representation of excess, favored by the Beats—whether in drugs, sex, “kicks,” or language—no doubt amplified by cannabis.

Marijuana's ability to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary made cannabis central to the Beat aesthetic, which was a turning away from the “high” (no pun intended) literary tradition in favor of the low-down: drug users, criminals, and vagrants. Marijuana helped develop the Beat vision that the overlooked was worthy of attention, that someone like Cassady was as deserving a subject as any hero or king. Not surprisingly, *Visions of Cody* tends to focus on the more mundane aspects of life; however, far from glorifying the prosaic, Kerouac is celebrating the commonplace for its universally relatable aspects. One good example Kerouac's ability to gleam the eternal out of the everyday is the description of Cassady (called Cody Pomeray in the novel) playing football (67-70). On the surface, this section is about Cassady throwing a football with his friend Earl Johnson. At a deeper level, however, it depicts a contest for authority. Kerouac turns the match into an archetypal battle of dominance, a masculine rite of leadership. Cody “wins” at football and is accepted as head of his gang of friends. Another part of *Visions of Cody* that highlights the pedestrian is the tape transcription. Roughly a third of the book is a series of real recorded conversations between Kerouac and Cassady. Kerouac selected lengthy passages from these sessions for inclusion in the text. Naturally, the two

smoked marijuana throughout the entire recording. Through this method Kerouac is able to capture language in its most organic form; Cassady's voice especially becomes "the model of the common urge to communicate ordinary experience in a natural, unpretentious voice" (Weinreich 81). The colloquial becomes the epitome of authenticity.

Sharing an Unspeakable Vision

"The unspeakable visions of the individual" is number nine on Kerouac's thirty-point "Lists of Essentials" for "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose" (483).

Unsurprisingly, number fourteen is: "Like Proust be an old teahead [pothead] of time" (483). Both beliefs shared a fundamental and related impact on the evolution of Kerouac's style. Their importance as part of his writing process is evident in Kerouac's description of the sketching technique:

I began sketching everything in sight, so that *On the Road* [originally Kerouac considered *Visions of Cody* a literal rewrite of the former text] took its turn from conventional narrative survey of road trip etc. into a big multi-dimensional conscious and subconscious character invocation of Neal [...] Everything activates in front of you in myriad profusion, you just have to purify your mind and let it pour the words [...] and write with 100% personal honesty both psychic and social etc. and slap it all down shameless, willynilly, rapidly until sometimes I got so inspired I lost consciousness I was writing. Traditional source: Yeat's trance writing, of course. It's the *only way to write*. (356)

Visions of Cody acts more as a study of "multi-dimensional consciousness" than conventional plot. Its interior orientation can be linked in part to THC's documented

ability to produce a “more inner-focused” perspective, as noted by Inaba, Darryl, and Cohen’s 1989 text, *Uppers, Downer, All Arounders* (151). In fact, *Visions of Cody* is more an examination of Kerouac’s mind than Cassady’s, although focused on the latter’s actions. Kerouac above also mentions Yeat’s practice of trance writing, linking himself to Yeat’s visionary legacy. Yeats, no surprise, smoked hashish (a purified cannabis resin), and was himself a member of a literary group, The Rhymers Club, that in turn imitated the infamous 19th-century Club des Hashishins, a Parisian society dedicated to the exploration of drug-induced experiences, and whose members included Balzac, Gautier, and Baudelaire (Boon 134, 145). Yeats used hashish to write as well as to conduct experiments in extrasensory communication (145), an ideal Kerouac replicated in his literary credo to “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” (“Essentials” 484). Kerouac’s goal of a “telepathic shock” advocates the unimpeded transferring of conscious from writer to reader, and while it is perhaps a metaphor for the artist’s need to communicate with complete honesty, Kerouac is clearly framing himself in a mystical continuum of drug-using writers, including Yeats. Like Yeat’s trance writing, Kerouac sketching technique was to write without consciousness—he notes in the passage above that he “lost consciousness while I was writing”—the resultant state “allowing subconscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so ‘modern’ language what conscious art would censor” (485). Kerouac gives preference to the subconscious mind (he seemed to use the term interchangeably with unconscious, as we do here), presupposing it to be the inspired seat of language, which becomes filtered out by the conscious tendency towards self-

revision— hence his emphasis here on purification and honesty, elements he deemed essential to authentic writing and central to the spontaneous process.

Kerouac's stress on unconscious modes of communications is a direct result of his literary goal to connect more closely to the reader; the creative evolution of spontaneous prose into the practice of sketching was an attempt to communicate even more effectively than allowed by the exterior mode of *On the Road*. Erik Mortenson, in his study of Kerouac's drug-induced writing, remarks, "Communication between the reader and the drugged Other can only take place when writing attains the status of original speech" (55). Mortenson's concept of "original speech" is synonymous with Kerouac's idea of an authentic language, a silencing of the critical, revisionary voice. Commenting on Kerouac's concept of the telepathic transference of states of consciousness, Mortenson explains that as Kerouac composed while in his drug-altered state, the effects of the drug became inscribed on the page, "not simply in overt content, but in the form of the work itself;" the experience of taking the drug is buried in the text and then activated by the reader (56-57). The point Mortenson makes is that it is not enough to simply record the drug experience in writing; the text itself must become a medium for those very sensations and allow their authentic transmission via the style. In other words, Kerouac could not hope to smoke marijuana and capture its subjective effects truthfully unless he could recreate them via prose. Sketching was Kerouac's attempt to convey his perceptions accurately, whether or not they concerned marijuana, although Kerouac did seem to regard marijuana as enabling the proper state of mind needed for genuine communication. Even as early as *On the Road*, Kerouac records an encounter with some Mexicans with whom he and Neal smoke marijuana; Neal exclaims, "'Will you d-i-g that

weird brother in the back [...] And they're talking and wondering about us, like see? Just like we are but with a difference of their own'" (283-84). Despite the barriers of language and culture, Kerouac emphasizes marijuana's ability to build a bridge from one's self to an Other.

Of course, whether or not marijuana actually facilitated a telepathic trance state for Kerouac is not so important as his belief that it did, and his deliberate intent to place himself in that tradition. Whatever its real biochemical impact, Kerouac's marijuana use certainly had a placebo effect on how he tried to write. The question remains, however, how Kerouac's mind and aesthetic would have developed without these chemical precursors. While in many ways it's a moot point, I believe that Kerouac's style would have turned out markedly different without drugs—in any case, it is difficult to imagine the Beat movement without them. We could pose the same question with little effect about the role that drugs played in the formation of the counterculture of the sixties—a generation that incidentally borrowed the mythos of the Beats, claiming them as their predecessors and Kerouac as their father. The counterculture generally seemed to regard drugs, whatever their real worth, as a central tenant of their revolution: psychedelics like LSD were crucial to “turn on, tune in, drop out” (as espoused by another drug proponent, Timothy Leary), and marijuana's mellowing qualities seems linked to their ideal of a universal spirit of pacifism. Of course it is a fruitless endeavor to attempt to rethink history, but the comparison is instructive: whatever their true role, drugs like marijuana were one of many cultural forces that shaped Kerouac and his distinct style—and I would argue a crucial one—just as they played an essential part in the birth of the

counterculture. That drugs were a cause in shaping both is indisputable—but their precise effects are debatable, if ultimately unanswerable.

While it is tempting to ascribe drugs like cannabis powers of creation, even of authorship, we must remind ourselves that they could only work with the material that Kerouac's mind provided. The visions of drugs are only as fascinating as the imagination that inspires these revelations. Boon, commenting on Gautier's insistence that hashish is in and of itself powerless to give visions, but merely build on or exaggerate what already exists in the consciousness, attests:

The limits of the drug-induced state are the limits of subjectivity itself [. . .] If subjectivity itself were porous, if "visions" spontaneously appeared that had no preexisting basis in the psyche, then drugs would cease to be of interest, since drug visions would be no more remarkable than any other kind of mental visitation, whatever its source. (136-37)

Ironically, any belief that Kerouac did have in marijuana's ability to help accurately render the unconscious mind via writing was undermined by his failure to claim responsibility for his own authorial authority. Regardless of whether marijuana was used or not, Kerouac fails at times in *Visions of Cody* to communicate coherently, privileging the subjective mind and its rambling mental associations. By attempting to use marijuana to produce an "authentic" vision of his mind, and expecting the reader to receive and comprehend it via "telepathic shock," Kerouac proves the impossibility of truly shared subjectivity, because ultimately all marijuana did was drive him deeper into his own head and away from mutual communication.

Kerouac's chief communication breakdown happens in "Imitations of the Tape"

(249-74), a streaming interior monologue of his unconsciousness that is arguably *Visions of Cody*'s most complex section. In it, Kerouac channels a multitude of subconscious voices, parodying his own life, past books and characters (*The Town and the City* and *On the Road*), other literary genres (Western novels), writers (including Yeats), and historical figures: "LADY GODIVA. (*clad*) Thev [*sic*] knocked me out on a stone of hemp the other—AT THIS POINT IN HIS DREAM DULUOZ WOKE UP" (253). Kerouac jumps from voice to voice as quickly as he bring them to the surface of his mind; however, as Nicosia aptly points out in his own analysis, this section quickly ends, because once Kerouac has successfully unleashed the torrent of his own unconscious onto the page it overwhelms the bounds of coherency, drowning any meaning in pure textual gibberish (372-73). Kerouac produces sentences the likes of, "Di fyoun don't wash out an dkwhekek dhowowh" (271). In the end the conscious mind resurfaces, because the supposed preverbal unconscious is exactly that—unwriteable. To Kerouac's credit, he is aware of the failure of his technique here, and in the end turns wryly against Yeat's automatism: "I lost it again [...] I saw one thing about yea y old Yeats and I say that he is a great man because he learned how to write oatutomatically [*sic*] [...] The only thing is you've got to explain yourself clearly or not at all" (271). For all of Kerouac's resistance to revision, the truth is that craft often equals more coherent writing. Because of the inherent difficulty in truly capturing and conveying the unconscious, *Visions of Cody* at times seems unyieldingly obscure. Kerouac willingly sacrifices clarity for the purity of the thought process, but ultimately (and fortunately for the reader) realizes the impossibility of his telepathic literary vision.

Dr. Sax: Picturing the Unconscious

Despite its moments of obscurity, *Visions of Cody* features some of Kerouac's best writing. However, it does not always succeed in his goal to communicate his own subjective conscious clearly. Kerouac's next project, *Dr. Sax* (1952), was also drafted while on marijuana, and in some ways improves upon *Visions of Cody*'s occasional failings to convey his unconscious coherently. Likewise, while every work that follows *Visions of Cody* has its own unique style and content, they generally are variations on the aesthetic scheme Kerouac formulated in his establishment of spontaneous prose and the sketching procedure. Even when he returned to amphetamine to write, Kerouac continued in a more interior-oriented mode, rather than the external narrative structuring of earlier amphetamine-induced works like *On the Road*. While Kerouac's recurrent use of sketching does not confirm marijuana's continual involvement in his writing (besides *Dr. Sax*, it is difficult to establish any consistent patterns of its usage, although Kerouac certainly continued to smoke it from time to time throughout his life), *Dr. Sax* does seem to indicate that marijuana was part of Kerouac's aesthetic decision to turn towards an interior style and make the communication of subjectivity a primary concern.

Dr. Sax reads like the literary equivalent of a drug experience—at various times surreal, confusing, terrifying, and beautiful. The idea behind it had evidently been floating around in Kerouac's head for a while—he mentions the story in *On the Road*, and attempted several starts at it unsuccessfully in his pre-cannabis style. Finally written in 1952 while Kerouac stayed with Burroughs in Mexico City, *Dr. Sax* is an elaboration of the sketching method practiced in *Visions of Cody*. In a letter to Holmes composed shortly before Kerouac began work on the novel, he wrote that he was beginning to

discover “something beyond the novel and beyond the arbitrary confines of the story . . . into the realms of the revealed Picture,” and admitted an irrational lust to say something about every about image and memory in his mind (*Selected Letters* 371). The emphasis on “the revealed Picture,” achieved by associating images and memories, allowed Kerouac to share his mind authentically and with more lucidity than *Visions of Cody*. After *Dr. Sax*, Kerouac would have a workable style that fulfilled his aesthetic goals; he went on to use his mature style over the first half of the fifties, produce much of his best work.

Kerouac’s progression to a more functional style in *Dr. Sax* was a result of not only his natural growth as a writer and the desire to correct past weaknesses, but perhaps also due to his increased volume of marijuana use. Kerouac smoked marijuana constantly while writing *Dr. Sax* and completed the novel at a rapid pace compared to the long, intermittent composition history and periodic cannabis use of *Visions of Cody*. According to Charters. *Dr. Sax* was written in a three-week burst (159), while *Nicosia* extends the timeframe slightly longer, from May until June of 1952 (410). Kerouac’s biographers all agree though that he used cannabis almost nonstop while writing *Dr. Sax*. Charters confirms Kerouac’s marijuana use with an interesting anecdote, “When he had been in Burroughs' apartment a few days, Kerouac decided that the best place to write *Doctor Sax* was in the toilet. Jack was smoking marijuana as he wrote, and Bill was sensitive about the smoke” (156). Kerouac himself, when interviewed about the book, remarked, “There incidentally is a style truly hallucinated as I wrote it all on pot” (Berrigan 67). The cheap and abundant supply of marijuana available in Mexico allowed Kerouac an unparalleled opportunity to use the drug without constraint as a writing aid.

However, more than cannabis use molded *Dr. Sax*. Aztec mythology—Mexico City was built on top of the ruins of the Aztec Empire—plays a role in the imagery of the novel. Incidentally, Tytell notes that another drug Kerouac took around this time, the psychedelic peyote, may have influenced Kerouac’s decision to come write in “the encircling timelessness of Mexico;” Kerouac attributed Mexico as possessing the power to “free the imagination from conditioning,” perhaps because it represented a more natural, primitive place to him (70). Kerouac also shot morphine and took more peyote during while staying with Burroughs (Amburn 175). While these substances seem to have been used less frequently than marijuana, particularly peyote, they also may have contributed to the text’s uncanny design. Although I will not attempt here to distinguish their presumably minor traces in *Dr. Sax*, it is worth noting their contributions, however small, to the text’s hyper-imagery; peyote is well known for causing vivid visual hallucinations, and opiates for increasing access to dream imagery (Julien 249; Burroughs, “Deposition” 149). Tytell writes that “the delirium of heroin, of constant marijuana and little food had allowed him [Kerouac] to experience, like Rimbaud, the derangement of the senses” (71). By shattering his normal framework of consciousness, Kerouac felt better able to access his unconscious and its reservoir of symbolic imagery.

Kerouac begins *Dr. Sax* by describing a dream of his hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts: “The other night I had a dream that I was sitting on the sidewalk on Moody Street, Pawtucketville, Lowell, Mass. [...] dont [*sic*] stop to think of words when you do stop, just stop to think of the picture better—and let your mind off yourself in this work” (3). In his dream, Kerouac reminds himself not to stop and “think in words,” but to

“think of the picture better.” By doing so, Kerouac establishes two motifs central to the narrative structure of *Dr. Sax*: imagery and dreams.

Writing Without Words

In prioritizing images over words, Kerouac was mirroring a long tradition of writers with a similar approach. Of course, the idea of the Jungian archetype—the proverbial picture worth a thousand words—is no new concept, and has been sought after without drugs just as often as with drugs. The notion that archetypes are part of a shared collective unconscious would have been especially appealing to Kerouac, given his aesthetic goal of telepathically transferring his individual visions. By smoking marijuana to try and facilitate entry into this seemingly wordless realm of shared unconscious imagery, Kerouac joined a long list of artists who used cannabis for similar purposes. We have already mentioned marijuana’s documented ability to amplify internal processes—certainly Kerouac was not alone among writers for using it to try and peek into the unconscious. Perhaps Kerouac hoped, like the writer Henri Michaux, to find out what was “behind words,” calling hashish a “first-class spy” (qtd. in Boon 147). Kerouac shared much in common with writers like Michaux’s who sought to look beyond words, as if words were mere shadows of some far more essential, preverbal image of reality, as well as with the Saussurean system of the signifiers and signified, or even Plato’s idea of multiple temporal substances mirroring the ideal, perfect Form. Writers have used marijuana because they felt that it revealed language as a system of external signs that covered something far more essential and meaningful—but intangible. The irony of the insights marijuana gave these writers is that even if there did exist some sort of a priori images deep within the unconscious from which all language derived as lesser

reflections, and even if it could be glanced at with our without drugs, there was no way to record such transcendent visions without the use of words. Kerouac, for all of his insistence on thinking in pictures, had no choice but to utilize words to create his images. However, Kerouac reasoned that by stylistically restructuring the traditional patterns of image construction, new pictures could be created that better matched the mind's original representations.

One of the better demonstrations of a method to deconstruct standard prose to reveal new images is Burroughs's "cutup" technique. The simplest description of the cutup is calling it an arbitrary combination of two sentences. In a *Writers at Work* article, Burroughs explains, "Cutups establish new connections between images, and one's range of vision consequently expands" (154). The cutup allows the reader "to think in association blocks rather than words" (150). Burroughs's "association block" is best thought of as a mental picture, similar to Kerouac's goal to think in pictures rather than words. Burroughs even praised language systems like Egyptian hieroglyphics as superior to the English alphabet for communicating through an image-based system; his reasoning was that while it took multiple letters and even words in English to form one thought, while in Egyptian a whole block of associations could be communicated through the use of a single image (150). Of course, the letters of the English alphabet are also symbols, at least phonetic ones. While Burroughs often employed the cutup technique purposefully, he reasoned that even a random pairing that seemed initially illogical or nonsensical at first could still produce novel insights. If nothing else, he believed that abnormal word pairings could free the mind from its typical linear conditioning, what he called "a sort of superstitious reverence for the word" (153). Burroughs compared the results of the cutup

to an increased range of perception, to being aware of what is going around through one's peripheral vision rather than focusing one's gaze on a limited central point (156-57). This description of the cutup is similar to Grilly's finding that marijuana allows ideas extraneous to an individual's focus to enter the field of consciousness and thereby loosen association (274).

Although Burroughs was a heavy opiate user, he ate majoun (a Moroccan candy in which cannabis is mixed with dried fruits, nuts, and spices) while writing *Naked Lunch*, his first novel to utilize the cutup technique. He found both drugs useful in writing for their ability to turn off the mind's filtering process, easing access into an unconscious sea of imagery that could be linked together to form new modes of perception. Since Kerouac lived with Burroughs while writing *Dr. Sax*, it can be reasoned that he also had recourse to a steady supply of morphine, although Kerouac seems to have only used it occasionally. Kerouac, familiar with the Coleridgean legacy of opiates and open to Burroughs' literary tutelage and free drugs, would likely have become an heir of the opiate tradition in his aesthetic vision to "think of the picture better" (*Dr. Sax* 3).

Kerouac uses a variety of novel literary techniques in *Dr. Sax* in an attempt to draw on what he saw as the visionary powers of imagery. For instance, Kerouac found that by rearranging words in unexpected ways, he could some times create word-images, verbal "short-cuts" worth many sentences of meaning. In *Dr. Sax*, Kerouac frequently joins two previously unrelated words, like "respectable" and "suburban," to create a new term like "respectaburban," used to succinctly describe a rich neighborhood in a wry way (5). Kerouac also uses his native French-Canadian patois (both of his parents came from families that emigrated to New England from Quebec) as a means of typifying the

preverbal. In *Dr. Sax*, Kerouac frequently employs French-Canadian to utter a phrase—or sometimes throughout an entire passage—before providing an English translation. As a literary tool, the use of his childhood tongue endows the novel with an air of authenticity—we feel somewhat young Kerouac’s linguistic isolation (English was a second language spoken outside the home), the sense that he is trapped in his head—but the use of French-Canadian also seems an attempt to emboss his memories with a preverbal quality. Since the majority of Kerouac’s American readers presumably do not know French-Canadian well enough to read these passages in the original language, they likely skip over them to the translations provided. For the reader, the indecipherable phrases act metaphorically as a kind of preverbal language; the significance is there yet removed, mysterious, hidden in symbols. While the English glosses provided contain Kerouac’s intended meaning, they are at most second best, reconciliatory attempts at understanding and connection. Something seems missing for the reader who does not know French-Canadian; something is lost in translation. This “something” is as close as we can come to the concept of a preverbal, meaningful reality. Even for Kerouac, the French-Canadian passages must have brought him back in time to a point when he was still learning to speak, and perhaps reminded him of the infant’s proximity to the preverbal world that is forever lost upon attainment of adulthood and its system of linguistic symbols.

In fact, Kerouac called such these French passages the “Pre-Literary” (*Selected Letters* 383). To Kerouac, English seemed a disparate attempt to get at the heart of truth. It is often forgotten that English was a second language for Kerouac, no matter how well he eventually mastered it. Perhaps in some sense he always felt removed from the purity

of his childhood French, no matter how much he tried to cover that gap through English. Interestingly, in “Fast This Time” (2007), Howard Cunnell reports, “Kerouac wrote that when he was smoking marijuana his ‘deep subconscious thoughts’ often came to him in his native Franco-American French” (17). Like his literary, cannabis-smoking forbearers, Kerouac seemed to find marijuana an effective tool to peek into the unconscious realm he deemed words to come from. That these words often came in French, especially when he smoked marijuana, argues not only for their proximity to the unconscious archetypes of meaning (in Kerouac’s view at least), but also lends credibility to the idea that Kerouac was inclined to use marijuana as a writing aid for *Dr. Sax*.

Along with his use of French, Kerouac’s main technique to approximate the preverbal is *Dr. Sax*’s abundant wealth of archetypal imagery. Charters sustains that Kerouac’s heavy marijuana use while writing allowed him to extract a horde of iconic images and memories of his past (158). From these he created characters like the eponymous Doctor Sax, who was inspired by cherished boyhood detective comics like *The Shadow*. Kerouac the child is a hero of the novel, fighting evil as seen through the phantasmal eyes of youth. Kerouac recreates his childhood home of Lowell as a place of Eden-like bliss, but also contrasts this purity against darker scenarios of the Fall, detailing an expulsion from innocence into adult experience and eventual death. There is an abundance of archetypal symbolism in the text, including the flood that ravages the town, the evil snake that threatens to destroy the world, and the husk of doves that ultimately ushers in peace. These Biblical motifs came not only from Kerouac’s Catholic background, but also from the visionary effects of THC. The novel is populated by imaginary creatures like the vampire Count Condu, the Wizard, and their association of

gnomes, giant insect men, and monsters. Despite being based on real memories of Kerouac's childhood, *Dr. Sax* reads more like myth than history; it brings to life the fantasies of boy, recalled by Kerouac through the magnifying lens of marijuana, allowing Kerouac to examine his early imagination from a more mature perspective.

Kerouac's first description of Doctor Sax is a good example of his ability to shape seemingly disjointed images from his childhood into a unified, if elusive pattern of meaning:

Doctor Sax I first saw in his earlier lineaments in the early Catholic childhood of Centralville—deaths, funerals, the shroud of that, the dark figure in the corner when you look at the dead man coffin in the dolorous parlor of the open house with a horrible purple wreath on the door. Figures of coffinbearers emerging from a house on a rainy night bearing a box with dead old Mr. Yipe inside. The statue of Ste. Thérèse turning her head in an antique Catholic twenties film with Ste. Thérèse dashing across town in a car with W.C. Fieldsian close shaves by the young religious hero while the doll (not Ste. Thérèse herself but the young lady hero symbolic thereof) heads for her saintliness with wide eyes of disbelief. We had a statue of Ste. Thérèse in my house—on West Street I saw it turn its head at me—in the dark. Earlier, two, horrors of the Jesus Christ of passion plays in his shrouds and vestments of saddest doom mankind in the Cross Weep for Thieves and Poverty—he was at the foot of my bed pushing it one dark Saturday night (on Hildreth and Lilley secondfloor flat full of Eternity

outside)—either He or the Virgin Mary stooped with phosphorescent profile and horror pushing my bed. (4)

Kerouac begins his description of Doctor Sax with a metaphor depicting the typical features of a funeral, a fairly predictable connection that links Doctor Sax with death and makes him a symbol of experience and age. From here though the prose unreels in multiplying layers of association that defy expectations. After Kerouac links Doctor Sax with funerals, a whole flood of childhood memories burst forth with little connection other than Kerouac's subjective recollection; these memories reveal more about Kerouac than Doctor Sax, reminding us that the text is firmly rooted in Kerouac's consciousness, despite its apparent trappings as a fictional, plot-driven narrative. Funerals remind Kerouac of a statue of Ste. Thérèse in a film he saw, which in turn leads to musing upon movies and even celebrities of the time. This ultimately brings us back to Kerouac's haunted childhood and horrific fantasies, once again mixing dream and reality. A strangely cohesive vision of Doctors Sax emerges from these disparate threads, more suggestive in its totality than pages of conventional description. While at every moment the narrative threatens to spin out into disassociated tangents, Kerouac manages to wield them all together into a unified picture that is not quite plot but more than mere description. The real story here becomes the structure of Kerouac's memory and the shape of his imagination.

If we are to connect Kerouac's style in *Dr. Sax* to marijuana use, we must also allow for the possibility that it was detrimental to his writing. THC is commonly linked to memory loss, reduced attention span, fragmented speech, and disjointed thought patterns (certainly marijuana smokers often hold this stereotype) (Inaba and Cohen 152; Cox, et

al. 217; Grilly 274). Perhaps Kerouac's mind simply wandered as he wrote the passage above, causing him to go off on pointless tangents. I would argue, however, that Kerouac purposefully incorporated these effects of marijuana, commonly construed as negative, into his style for aesthetic reasons. A closer analysis of *Dr. Sax* reveals that, rather than indulging in the chaos of unbridled association, Kerouac is breaking apart and rearranging typical images to create connections between previously unrelated concepts. This forms new ideas, new outlooks, etc., resulting in a widening of perspective.

That marijuana actually aided, or at the very least supplemented Kerouac's stylistic developments in *Dr. Sax* seems likely; Grilly confirms THC's ability to produce "new and unrelated intrusions into thought, the loosening of traditional or learned associations among stimuli and responses," all of which "result in novel experiences, feelings of creativity, and insight" (276). While Kerouac experimented with association in *Visions of Cody* with often incoherent results, in *Dr. Sax* he refines this method, which I am calling the associative process, to produce uncannily discerning insights. He included this technique in his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose": "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" (484). Throughout *Dr. Sax* and thereafter as a fundamental component of spontaneous prose, Kerouac uses the associative process to great effect, pulling together disparate threads of memory, imagery, and dreams to produce insights greater than the sum of their parts.

Association and Sa/ex. Early on in the text, Kerouac remarks that "memory and dream are intermixed in this mad universe" (5), revealing that *Dr. Sax* is not so much an

autobiography as it is the memoir or a child's dreams and nightmares. Kerouac was always fascinated with his own dreams—he later recorded a collection of them in *Book of Dreams* (1961)—perhaps because they represent our most tangible encounter with the surreal nature of the associative process. Similar to his reshaping of familiar imagery to form new patterns, Kerouac approximates the associative language of dreams in *Dr. Sax* as part of his aesthetic to communicate his subjective self—his thoughts, memories, fantasies, and fears—as directly as possible to the reader.

Boon finds the associative process to be a fundamental motif to cannabis literature: “Many of the cannabis-inspired short stories bring together an associational block and give it narrative continuity in much the same way that a dream, recalled and described the morning after, gives shape to the dream material” (167). The connection Boon makes between association, cannabis, and dreams is interesting, because while each of these distinct phenomena may produce mental states that seem incoherent to the rational waking mind, they can also possess an underlying intuitive significance. Just as it may have inspired his restructuring of imagery, marijuana seems to have played a role in Kerouac's utilization of dream association; whatever marijuana's real effect on his prose, evidence suggests that Kerouac at least thought it capable of bestowing visionary powers. THC's connection to hypnotic states is well documented; common descriptions of these range from “subtle mood alterations that resemble daydreaming” (Julien 276), to a “dreamlike effect” (Inaba and Cohen 151), and even pseduohallucinations (Cox, et. al 217). Nicosia directly links a THC-induced trance state to the novel's composition: “The constant use of marijuana made him like a man waking from a nightmare—when, half asleep, he considers what he's dreamed, and it all seems weirdly real. Sweating, pencil in

hand, Jack recorded the visions of those 'dim regions' with the attention of a scientist" (325). There are two noticeable elements to Nicosia's depiction of Kerouac's marijuana usage: first, an emphasis on the visionary aspects of the experience, suggesting the common linkage between hallucinogens like cannabis and divine inspiration. Secondly, Nicosia also characterizes Kerouac as a scientist, indicating the experimental nature of Kerouac's marijuana-induced writing process. There seems to have been a deliberate attempt on Kerouac's part to systematically record the contents of his mind in their native purity—perhaps even their bizarreness—out of the belief that they would reveal some sort of personal self-revelation.

As previously mentioned, Kerouac begins *Dr. Sax* by describing a dream of his childhood (3). While the early introduction of dream material may have been a fictional construct to establish the mood, place, and time frame of the story that follows, there is no overt indication that Kerouac is making any of this up. In fact, the mixture of dream, fantasy, and memory becomes the controlling metaphor of the text. In one sequence Kerouac begins by recounting "the dream of the wrinkly tar corner," which brings back memories of the neighborhood of his youth; next, in the dream he passes a corner tenement that leads to a dream within the dream, in which he recalls the dream he had as a boy of living in that building. Kerouac then launches into a description of the last actual trip he made to his hometown of Lowell where he gazes upon "the scenes of my childhood," the reminiscings of which return us back to the original dream sequence (5-7). There are a number of ways to interpret Kerouac's narrative disjunction and atemporal storytelling. Cox attributes such confusion of past, present, and future to marijuana use (218). Much like his association of previously unrelated ideas, however, Kerouac is

playing with temporality (although in a much different manner than in *On the Road*) in a highly suggestive way, connecting nonlinear memories to quickly reveal things about his character that would typically takes pages of conventional exposition, as the following passage demonstrates:

So one night, from the Phebe house, we walked Blanche (who later in such a walk insisted on bringing my dog Beauty because she's afraid of the dark and as the little beast escorted her home it rushed out and got run over by Roger Carrufel of Pawtucketville who was somehow driving an Austin tinycar that night and the low bumper killed it, previously on Salem Street at Joe's lawn door it got run over by an ordinary car but rolled with the wheels and never got hurt—I heard the news of its death at precisely that moment in my life when I was lying in bed finding out that my tool had sensations in the tip—they yelled it up to me thru the transom, "*Ton chien est mort!* (Your dog is dead!)" and they brought it home dying—on the kitchen floor we and Blanche and Carrufel with hat in hand watch Beauty die, Beauty dies the night I discover sex, they wonder why I'm mad—)—So now Blanche (this is before Beauty was born, 2 years earlier) wants me and ma to walk her home.... (120-21)

Kerouac begins by telling the story of walking a neighbor home. This reminds him of a later incident (which he reveals at the end of the passage to have occurred two years later) in which his dog Beauty accompanied this neighbor, only to be run over. Kerouac then proceeds to explain how he received the news of her death, and then links this to the discovery of his own sexuality. Finally Kerouac returns to the original

memory, completing the story that opened the entire digression. In just one short passage (and most of it an aside enclosed in parentheses, indicating its tangential nature), Kerouac has jumped back and forth in time over a period of two years while covering four different temporal occasions and places, another instance of chronological displacement that mimics the atemporal effects of marijuana. While in terms of plot Kerouac may seem to be spinning a tale at random, his nonsequential approach to narrative is actually functional. While his dog's death brings up the expected emotions of, pain, suffering and sadness, Kerouac diverges from conventionality by connecting these somber feelings with the memory of his first sexual experience. On the surface, sex and death seem illogical bedmates, but by combining these two antithetical images, Kerouac gives birth to a new insight, collapsing a traditional dichotomy to produce a joint symbol loaded with meaning: death becomes equivalent to sex, leading to a broader, holistic understanding of the life cycle.

As a result of this associative process, death and sex become intimately bonded in *Dr. Sax*. Later on in the passage above, while walking Blanche home, they stop at the "Grotto," a site containing the Twelve Stations of the Cross (122). There Kerouac focuses in on "the gigantic pyramid of steps upon which the Cross itself poked phallically up with its poor Burden the Son of Man all skewered across it in his Agony and Fright" (123). Again we see the joined image of death (the suffering Christ) and sex/life (the erected cross not only in its symbolically phallic shape but also in its deeper religious connotations of life and the resurrection). In fact, the theme of death/sex is central to *Dr. Sax*, which in many ways is about the loss (or death) of childhood innocence with the onset of puberty and sexual maturity, which in turn leads to further cycles of birth (sex as

reproduction) and eventual mortal death. Even in his later writing, we see Kerouac's continued preoccupation with this sex/life/death cycle, as when in *The Dharma Bums* he glumly quips, "Pretty girls make graves"—that is, beautiful woman, by inspiring lust in men, get pregnant and produce babies doomed to eventually suffer and die (29). The character of *Dr Sax*, initially a shadow hiding in the woods (and at the periphery of the child Kerouac's mind), only appears to him as Kerouac starts to grow up, and notably in the spring, a season of rebirth and maturation. Doctor Sax eventually tells him, "You'll look at a wall of blank flesh and fritter to explain yourself—that is known as Love [...] —that is known as Maturity—but you'll never be as happy as you are now in your quiltish innocent book-devouring boyhood immortal night" (202-03). At the end of the book, the pair witness the destruction of the great world snake (itself a phallic symbol and dark Edenic image suggesting the loss of sexual innocence), and the novel closes with the Easter church bells ringing out "ding dong," an obvious homonym and sexual pun, while the world is reborn and "Spring is free to fallow and grow wild in its own green juices" (244). Nicosia deems *Dr. Sax* a "puberty myth" about growing up (394). While the discovery of sex promises a continuance of life, the certitude of death means that all things must come to an end. By linking death with life, Kerouac accepts not only their mutual partnership but also their natural inevitability

By restructuring the linearity of experience, the associative process allows for new modes of perceiving, understanding, and thinking about life. Of course, associative techniques are by no means exclusive to marijuana; while THC may facilitate the process, association is a fairly standard cognitive feat. Kerouac could probably have come up with most of the connections in *Dr. Sax* without the drug; likewise, the insights

it produces are not necessarily worth keeping (for instance, the book's chapter on death, "The Night the Man with the Watermelon Died," which has an association with food, could just be a result of marijuana's infamous ability to produce the "munchies"). However, THC has been scientifically proven to increase the mind's associative process, and since we know Kerouac smoked it constantly while writing *Dr. Sax*, it stands to reason that the drug is in part responsible for the thorough presence of this stylistic feature in the novel. If nothing else, Kerouac believed in cannabis's mythic history as a writing tool for peeking into the unconscious, and would likely have incorporated the drug's effects into his own aesthetic.

As in *Visions of Cody*, Kerouac seems to be toying with the possibility of sharing subjective impressions in *Dr. Sax*. While smoking marijuana and working on *Dr. Sax*, Kerouac wrote Ed White a letter, stating that he wanted "to work in revelations [. . .] I want to fish as deep as possible into my own subconscious in the belief that once that far down, everyone will understand because they are the same that far down" (qtd. in Nicosia 324). In a way, Kerouac's use of association is just that—if he can build the chain of connections far enough, there is a chance that the reader will have something in common with Kerouac's memories and thus share his meaning. In a sense, the association process is an attempt to lessen the physical boundaries of space and time that separate us as individuals; despite their seeming objectivity, modern science has proven even space and time to be relative. As Nicosia puts it, Kerouac illuminates "the subjective nature of reality [...] Time and space collapses become especially important because they permit Kerouac to speak without the limit of any single point of view" (396). Objectivity is a

shared illusion of the senses; finding common ground through our associated subjective impressions seems to be our one hope of mutual understanding and communication.

At one point in *Dr. Sax*, Kerouac describes such a shared moment of connection that transcends space and time: “My father and I stand in that immobile instant communicating telepathic thought-paralysis, suspended in the void together, understanding something that’s always already happened, wondering where we were now, joint reveries in a dumb stun in the cellar of men and smoke” (96). Kerouac’s memory of being telepathically linked together with his dad in an eternal moment seems to fulfill one of the central tenants of sketching: an authentically communicated state of subjectivity. Marijuana has been proven to cause a “loss of sense of time” and distortions in body image and distance, which sounds similar to the depiction in the scene above (Inaba and Cohen 151; Cox, et al. 217). For Kerouac, this altered sense of existence THC induces is transcendent rather than chaotic. Despite our differences, Kerouac seems to be saying that are patterns underlying life, reoccurring archetypes of existence that we all experience both as individuals and collective humanity. These transcendent occasions are essential for mutual understanding, because as Nicosia writes, “The closest we can come to true communication with another is when a moment is triggered in someone else by the same occasion that triggers it in us” (398). I would argue that Kerouac achieves such moments in *Dr. Sax* through the connective power of his style.

CHAPTER THREE: HIGH ON A MOUNTAINTOP

A More Sober Analysis

While Kerouac's two aesthetic key developments, spontaneous prose and sketching, have thus far been distinguished as "inner" and "outer" modes for purposes of comparison, they are perhaps better understood as variations of approach, rather than contrasting practices. Beginning with the publication of *On the Road* in 1951, Kerouac entered the most productive phase of his literary career; during the first half of the decade, he would go on to produce *The Subterraneans*, *Visions of Cody*, and *Dr. Sax*, experimenting with different drugs and styles without ever fully abandoning his previous aesthetic innovations. By the time he wrote *Desolation Angels* in 1956, Kerouac had developed his style to its logical conclusion, blending his various writing methods into a comprehensive approach oriented both inwards and outwards, which combined the best of amphetamine-induced spontaneity and marijuana-induced sketching. However, I am interested in looking at *Desolation Angels* not only because it is in many ways Kerouac's aesthetic climax, but also because it is the only work where we have reliable evidence that Kerouac wrote while completely sober. After *Desolation Angels*, Kerouac went on to achieve fame, but his most productive period had ended; while he wrote minor gems like *Big Sur* (1961) and *Vanity of Duluo* (1968), his style and health deteriorated as he began to drink heavily, leading to his death in 1969. I wish to examine what effect if any sobriety had on Kerouac's aesthetic growth, and how alcohol may have contributed to the decline of his writing.

Desolation Angels: A Synthesis of Styles

In the summer of 1956, Kerouac spent two months in the Northern Cascades working as a fire lookout. He was essentially cut off from civilization, and because he did not bring any alcohol or other drugs with him, this is perhaps the only period of time in his adult life that we can reasonably assume Kerouac was completely clean and sober. Charters confirms this, noting, "He'd brought everything with him that he needed to write. Only the benzedrine and marijuana had been left behind" (252). Unfortunately, not a lot of writing came out of his sojourn; maybe there was little to write about in such solitude, or maybe Kerouac had become overly reliant on drugs to spur composition. The only writing covering this period, besides the ending of *The Dharma Bums* (1958), which was written years later, is the first part of *Desolation Angels*, "Desolation in Solitude." Since the second half of *Desolation Angels*, "Passing Through," was not written until five years later in 1961, we can leave it out of this study, especially because Kerouac used marijuana, seconals, and Benzedrine trying to finish it (Charters 326). The first part of *Desolation Angels* is Kerouac's only proven sober work, in the sense that he used absolutely no drugs or alcohol while writing it.

However, between the time of this section's composition and its publication years later, Kerouac could certainly have used drugs and altered the text. Kerouac kept a diary while atop Desolation Peak, which forms the basis of the first section in *Desolation Angels*. However, this diary was not adapted into novelistic form until months later in Mexico City, when Kerouac presumably had access to a large supply of drugs again. Since the original journal has not found its way into print, there is no way to compare it with the published text for any obvious drug-induced differences. Certainly this first

section of the novel bears distinct stylistic characteristics, but these differences may come from the fact that “Desolation in Solitude” takes place on a lonely mountaintop, whereas the rest of the narrative occurs back among more conventional scenes of civilization. I will proceed with the assumption that at least some of the diary’s source material found its way into the finished text; at any rate, “Desolation in Solitude” is as close as we can come to a proven “sober” text.

There is also the question of whether or not we can classify a certain aesthetic mode as sober, because this thesis is grounded on the very notion that amphetamine and marijuana have specific “personalities” that spurred the development of spontaneous prose. Sobriety, however, is notable for its very lack of a “personality;” it implies an absence rather than a drug-induced presence. Thus, examining Kerouac’s sobriety-induced work may be a contradiction in terms, unless we suppose that the characteristics imparted to Kerouac’s style by his previous drug use faded with their non-presence, leading to a new stylistic “sober” mode. However, it is my opinion that amphetamine and marijuana-induced features were permanent alterations to Kerouac’s aesthetic; whatever effects drugs played in the development of his style, by this point it had become *his* style. Indeed, pharmacological studies have proven that drugs, while temporal agents, can leave enduring psychological changes; even when their physical presence in the body has vanished, the psycho-emotional experiences altered states provide are often retained, at least in memory. As a result, in this latter phase of his career, Kerouac would not be likely to write radically differently in the absence of an outside chemical influence. Since his style also would presumably not regress to a “pre-drug” phase, the real question then becomes what direction his prose might take next. It is my contention that without any

new drugs to inspire Kerouac, his style developed fairly naturally, which is to say, it underwent no fundamental changes during this period. However, Kerouac was able to successfully combine the features of his former aesthetic modes, amphetamine and marijuana-induced prose, into a hybrid, inner/outer style. If sobriety played any part in this synthesis, it was perhaps by endowing on Kerouac the clarity of mind that allowed him to consciously take this next stylistic step.

Early on in his vigil atop Desolation Peak, Kerouac yearns for human contact, realizing the dearth of available subjects: “Let there be rain on redbrick walls and I got a place to go and poems to write about hearts not just rocks—Desolation Adventure finds me finding at the bottom of myself abysmal nothingness worse than that no illusion even—my mind’s in rags—“ (68). Without a story to tell Kerouac’s attention turned inwards. While this may have been a byproduct of solitude, it may also have been a result of sobriety, forcing Kerouac to look deep inside himself. Although marijuana also produces interior visions, tending towards the whimsical, abstract, or hallucinatory, sobriety seems to encourage stern, honest self-confrontation. Indeed, Kerouac writes about this period in *The Dharma Bums* in an almost brutal fashion: “No liquor, no drugs, no chance of faking it but face to face with ole Hateful Duluoz Me” (4). Certainly the epiphanies of sobriety were not nearly as ecstatic as those of marijuana.

Due to the lack of external stimuli, the inward experience of language as a subject in and of itself becomes predominant: “What did I learn on Gwaddawackamblack? I learned that I hate myself because by myself I am only myself and not even that and how monotonous it is to be monostonos—ponos—purt—pi tariant—hor por por” (68).

We see Kerouac relentlessly whittling words down to their core, examining the structure of his speech. However, unlike *Visions of Cody*, such passages are not literary experimentation. They function as brief outbursts of feeling, indecipherable expressions of anguish from an isolated man with little to write about. In the previous chapter, I looked at how marijuana amplified Kerouac's inner monologue; his mind, both at a subjective, personal level, and at a collective, unconscious level, became his key to authentic communication. I also showed how these attempts failed when Kerouac remained too inwardly focused, and worked best when he found ways to connect his prose to the more common experiences of humankind. Kerouac's admission above that "by myself I am only myself" indicates his realization of his previous aesthetic failings; he recognizes the importance of looking outside himself and connecting to a wider audience.

Accordingly, rather than labeling *Desolation Angels* as a contemplative, inner-oriented exploration, it is better to describe the style as exteriorizing Kerouac's inner search for meaning into a relatable narrative. As previously discussed, the drugs underlying *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody* shaped opposite ways of telling the same tale—the former is a concrete, linear set of events sped along by amphetamine, while the latter is more interested in meandering abstractly through space and time, no doubt aided by marijuana. *Desolation Angels* is able to combine both of these methods—the narrative moves both outwards and inwards:

One morning I find bear stool and signs of where the unseen monster has taken cans of frozen hardened can-milk and squeezed it in his apocalyptic paws and bit with one insane sharp tooth in, trying to suck

out the sour paste— Never seen, and in the foggy dusk I sit and look down the mysterious Ridge of Starvation with its foglost firs and humping-into-invisibility hills, and the fog-wind blowing by like a faint blizzard, and somewhere in that Zen Mystery Fog stalks the Bear, the Primordial Bear—all of it, his house, his yard, his domain, King Bear who could crush my head in his paws and crack my spines like a stick. (61-62)

Kerouac begins this passage with an exterior description that progresses the plot; time advances tangibly as he discovers evidence of the bear that visited his hut overnight. From there he launches into an internal meditation on the bear, turning it from a material entity into an archetypal symbol. Without drugs pushing his consciousness to either extremity of style, Kerouac finds balance by combining his previous narrative approaches into a more inclusive totality. While his earlier drug-induced works were each stabs in the conceptual dark towards new modes of expression, the prose here seems at rest, satisfied, the aesthetic culmination of earlier efforts. On the surface, the writing here may not seem much different from *On the Road* or *Dr. Sax*—which is exactly the point. The mode is a distillation, rather than a transformation, of the fundamental tenets of spontaneous prose and sketching.

Desolation Angels reiterates that Kerouac's *Duluoz Legend* (what he called the major body of his work), rather than being focused on his life, is more concerned with stylistic progression, an attempt to discover how best to tell the tale. That is, Kerouac was always more concerned about the "how" of the story rather than the "what," and this becomes more apparent over the course of his aesthetic career. Each drug Kerouac used allowed him a unique opportunity to experiment with and further refine his developing

method, and perhaps it was sobriety in part that finally allowed Kerouac to integrate these divergent techniques into a balanced, synthesized prose. One wonders if Kerouac would have reached this point in his stylistic career sooner had he not dabbled so much in drugs and alcohol early on, or whether his aesthetic would have developed in a different way entirely.

Coming Down: Kerouac's Descent Into Alcoholism

There is a remarkable deterioration in Kerouac's life and writing after he came down from the mountaintop in 1956. He had hoped that enforced isolation would grant him insight and discipline, but soon descended into increasingly violent bouts of alcoholism. Kerouac's remaining works, among them *Big Sur* and *Vanity of Duluoaz*, are much more self-focused and surprisingly somber compared to his ecstatic narration in *On the Road*. While still worth reading, many critics regard these texts as stylistically marred. Tytell comments, "The last novels reveal the strain of fatigued imagination, the fact that the discipline of writing had become almost intolerable [. . .] The sense of detail, the memory for the minute and particular that distinguished his best efforts had now faded" (208). Perhaps in comparison to the stylistic bravado of Kerouac's earlier endeavors these works suffer, but they are not completely lacking in merit. In many ways they are more accessible than the experimental *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*, returning to the more conventional style of *The Town and the City*, as well as standard punctuation and structuring.

Perhaps Kerouac had simply have run out of ways to continually innovate, but no doubt a chief factor behind his aesthetic decline was alcoholism. As early as 1955, Kerouac was battling the despair brought on by his addiction; he writes in *Some of the*

Dharma, “I spent all 1955 tryna [sic] figure out why I was so sad and hangovery” (287).

However, it was Kerouac’s meteoric rise to fame and subsequent critical dousing after the publication of *On the Road* in 1957 that really sent him to the bottle; while Kerouac welcomed recognition, he was dismayed at becoming “King of the Beatniks,” in his mind a dishonor, rather than being praised for his literary genius. He reacted to his celebrity status and its attendant pressures by drinking heavily. His most fertile creative period was ending. After completing *The Dharma Bums* in 1957, Kerouac did not write a new book until 1961. This was *Big Sur*.

Kerouac was not the first writer to battle alcoholism; in fact, many experts posit a relationship between creative work and drinking. Long concludes, “If there is anything in the human psyche that favors alcoholism, it may also be related to creative writing. As we have already seen, alcoholism is not uncommon among writers” (76). Albert Rothenberg, in his study of alcoholism among writers, *Creativity and Madness* (1990), found that five of the eight U.S. winners of the Nobel Prize in literature all suffered at some point from severe alcohol dependency and/or abuse (115). As Rothenberg’s study dates from 1990, the ratio has probably increased since then. While many experts agree that writers are often drawn to alcohol, there are various explanations as to why.

One explanation for the popularity of alcohol among writers is its tradition as a ritual. Like other drugs, alcohol has a long history of use—quite possibly the longest. While drinking is enjoyed in an overwhelming variety of contexts and settings, writers have often used it as part of an oral storytelling tradition. Most heavy liquors are referred to as “spirits,” suggesting that attributing aspects of divinity to drinking has a long history. Questioning the relationship between divine inspiration and storytelling,

Rothenberg asks, “Is there, so to speak, a muse of inspiration in a bottle of gin, whiskey, or vodka? Or, reaching back to a mythical image that for some reason we all hold in our minds, does the storyteller always have a glass of spirits in hand while spinning the tale?” (115). Alcohol then belongs to the same literary tradition as other drugs, which are commonly imbued with mystical powers of creativity. Since alcohol has a much wider usage base, however, this divine role has probably been downplayed in comparison to, say, the psychedelics, which by virtue of their comparative rarity of use take on a more special, quite often holy status. While alcohol has traditionally been connected to storytelling, it no doubt carried its inspirational status into the realm of writing. D. W. Goodwin, in his article “The Muse and the Martini” (1973), confirms the importance many writers place on having a specific ritual to begin the writing process; in many cases, drinking is the impetus, whether superstition or factual, to finding the proper “inspiration” (36). The importance of ritual in writing, or for that matter in any difficult practice, cannot be overlooked. Just as some writers need a drink to get started, so too do many people, from athletes to artists, perform some sort of ritual for good luck. These fortune-based customs can be personal or part of wider cultural superstitions. Likewise, Kerouac feel that he needed drugs to, so to speak, get the creative juices flowing.

While writing is often a solitary practice, storytelling by its nature is a group activity, and historically often took place in some sort of tavern or other social setting where drinking was the predominant pastime. Thus, just as writing inherited storytelling’s ritualistic use of alcohol, it may also have retained its tendency towards social drinking, unconnected with the actual act of writing. For example, Ludwig attributes alcohol’s ubiquitous presence among writers in part to the fact that many artists

have traditionally met in cafes or bars; although they did not often write in these settings, they met to discuss ideas about art, thus connecting the occupation of writing (if not the actual act) to social drinking. Ludwig also links drinking to another social role of the writer: fame. As a writer becomes a celebrity, they are often presented with increased opportunities to drink—at parties for instance (961). While Ludwig does not expound on the connection between fame and drinking in detail, it is interesting to note that Kerouac's life confirms Ludwig's hypothesis: Kerouac's heaviest period of drinking began after the publication of *On the Road* skyrocketed him to stardom. As a celebrity, Kerouac was never at a loss for friends or fans to drink with (he often did the buying), and he carried this habit from the social domain into the private realm. As alcoholism increasingly consumed his life, Kerouac drank even more to cope with the pressure of being a celebrity. As Rothenberg puts it, "The muse may not be in the bottle itself, but the alcohol may be the acceptable way to deal with her glory and threat" (129). In part the process was cyclical; always uncomfortable with the social scene, Kerouac showed up to the majority of his televised appearances, readings, and interviews moderately to exorbitantly drunk, often making a complete buffoon of himself, and then drinking more to forget about it. Alcohol became both the cause of and solution to all of his problems.

Surprisingly, despite Kerouac's love of drinking, he actually seldom used alcohol while writing. As he explains, "With a few brews my fingers flail and less than fly as usual" (*Selected Letters* 318). Since Kerouac typically wrote late at night, Benzedrine was much better suited to his intense composition process than the sedating effects of alcohol. In fact, most experts find alcohol intoxication to be counterproductive to creative work. Arnold Ludwig, in his article "Alcohol Input and Creative Output" (1990), studied

a number of writers and their personal statements regarding alcohol's effect on their work. He found that alcohol "appears to have produced a direct impairment in creative performance in over 75% of individuals" (957). Burroughs, who was quite fond of most drugs, agrees that sedatives like alcohol "decrease awareness of inner processes, thoughts and feelings [...] they are absolutely contra-indicated for creative work" (*Writers at Work* 146). While stimulants like amphetamine, when used in moderation, increase energy and mental performance, depressants like alcohol tend to have the opposite effect, generally making them poor writing aids.

However, Ludwig also notes that there is no invariant relationship between creativity and alcohol—as with any drug, the results depend entirely on the individual and the context in which the drug is used (962). In fact, alcohol was not always a negative influence on Kerouac's work; he wrote one of his best short pieces, "October in the Railroad Earth" (1957), while drinking wine. Charters credits the piece's brilliance to alcohol: "Wine was perfect for describing his work on the railroad [...] because it wasn't hallucinatory like morphine or leading him back into memory trips like marijuana [. . .] Instead, wine just made him more excited with his story, like being in a bar with friends" (164). In moderation, alcohol may have helped Kerouac become more uninhibited by muting his inner critic, allowing him to write spontaneously without over-thinking. Another notable work Kerouac composed while drinking is *Old Angel Midnight* (1956), a highly experimental Joycean session of language play. Again praising wine's effect on the prose, Charter writes, "Jack coasted on his own personal currents of sweet wine associations and floating perceptions [. . .] The predominant mood was one of sweet, alcoholic melancholy" (249). However, both of these texts were written at the height of

Kerouac's creativity, before he had become completely dependent on alcohol, which explains their level of skill. Alcohol, like amphetamine and marijuana, is not inherently "good" or "bad" for writing. The literary accomplishment of any text depends more on the writer's inherent talent than what they consumed while working; at the same time, alcohol more than most drugs does seem to have a negative effect on coherency, especially when used heavily.

It goes without saying that people respond differently to the same drug. For some writers, alcohol can be used to initiate a session of writing, similar to Benzedrine. For other, alcohol, like marijuana, can also be used to alter perception; although alcohol ordinarily seems to sedate or mute the importance of external stimuli, in some cases it also magnifies emotions, creating feelings of excitement and fascination. Ludwig attests that alcohol's pharmacological properties have "the capacity to imbue perceptions, ideas and experiences with a heightened sense of meaning" (961-62). William James, in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), praises sobriety as diminishing and drunkenness as expanding, stressing the value of all states of consciousness: "The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness, and our total opinion of it must find its place in our opinion of that larger whole" (387). Whether or not a person find alcohol a useful composition aid, since writing is in part a means of exploring and expressing states of consciousness, the alcoholic-intoxicated mind has value for being a unique altered state, if nothing else.

Big Sur: Stuck in a Rut

Big Sur is a tragic tale recounting Kerouac's alcoholic breakdown. As previously mentioned, Kerouac used Benzedrine to write *Big Sur*, which gave him the energy to

write the novel in ten nights (Charters 326-27). The drug's presence is most felt in the text's sprawling sentence constructions. However, unlike other amphetamine-inspired works like *On the Road*, which manages to maintain relatively consistent trains of thought, here the clauses seem piled on top of one another like bric-a-bracs. At times there is an encumbrance of language. Ludwig finds that larger doses of alcohol can lessen discrimination between visual details (954), and certainly there is a blurring quality to the prose here. Unlike the associative, all-encompassing quality marijuana provided to Kerouac's prose, the feeling here is one of disjointedness, of falling apart. This style is fitting, since the novel was plugged as the "crack-up" of the King of the Beats.

In the following passage from early on in *Big Sur*, Kerouac creates a vivid picture of his breakdown, establishing the text's alcoholic motif through images of despair.

"One fast move or I'm gone," I realize, gone the way of the last three years of drunken hopelessness which is a physical and spiritual and metaphysical hopelessness you cant learn in school no matter how many books on existentialism or pessimism you read, or how many jugs of vision-producing Ayahuasca you drink, or Mescaline take, or Peyote goop up with—That feeling when you wake up with the delirium tremens with the *fear* of eerie death dripping from your ears like those special heavy cobwebs spiders weave in the hot countries, the feeling of being a bentback mudman monster groaning underground in hot steaming mud pulling a long hot burden nowhere, the feeling of standing ankledeep in hot boiled pork blood, ugh, of being up to your waist in a giant pan of greasy brown dishwater not a trace of suds left in it. (7-8)

Kerouac ironically contrasts the real grief of his alcoholism against the existential pessimism brought on by psychedelics. Thematically, his misery at being stuck in a rut and unable to change feels palpable here, brought to life by grotesque imagery of cobwebs and mudmen. There is a sense of heaviness, of thickening, in both the stagnant images and excessive description. The sentence (still long, at 144 words) wanders at length—in this case broken by only one dash—before arriving at the period, which signals not so much completeness as exhaustion. However, fatigue is the very effect that Kerouac is attempting to instill in the reader by pushing the prose past normal boundaries; he wants us to *feel* the depths of his hangover hopelessness, reminding us that it is beyond the limits of typical experience.

Kerouac establishes the text's hangover theme in the very first sentence, recalling how he "woke up all woebegone and goopy, groaning from another drinking bout" (3). Long terms the leitmotif of *Big Sur* as "waking up groaning" (84). Indeed, this pattern of excessive drinking leading to increasingly worse hangovers forms the structure of the story, climaxing in a bout with delirium. Delirium tremens is a common result of withdrawal following excessive alcohol consumption, and according to Long is characterized by paranoia, hallucination, "sleeplessness, sweat, trembling, a groaning feeling of weakness where your arms are numb and useless, nightmares, (nightmares of death)" (74-75). These elements all appear in the novel. Kerouac suffers severe paranoia, ranging from thinking the water he drinks has been poisoned (192) to the belief that his friends are Communist engaged in "a big anti-Catholic scheme" against him (203). He witnesses horrific apparitions of extraterrestrial bats (206) and copulating vultures (208), but ends up being saved by a vision of the cross (205), which finally affords him a

measure of relief. Long notes that not only delusions but also religious desires are common during the “Chronic Phase” of alcoholism (87), which may explain how the book still manages to end on the positive note of “something good will come out of all things yet” (216).

Alcohol’s influence on *Big Sur* is most evident at the level of theme, and an example of the indirect effect of alcohol on Kerouac’s life. That is, he did not write the novel while drinking, but in another sense, the entire text is under the influence of alcohol. Booze dominates the narrative and the theme, and after *Big Sur*, would saturate his style as well. Remarkably though, the only novel Kerouac seems to have written while actively drinking is *Satori in Paris* (1966), as he admitted in an interview: “*Satori in Paris* which is really the first book I wrote with drink at my side (cognac and malt liquor)” (Berrigan 55). This book is often considered Kerouac’s worst effort stylistically, and even though it is purportedly about a trip through France, the results of constant alcohol abuse seep into every page to such an extent that it becomes the theme de facto: Kerouac’s journey becomes one long string of drunken mishaps and blunders even as he claims to receive a satori (or spiritual awakening).

Alcohol had come to control Kerouac so completely in the last decade of his life that it could not help but consume his work. Largely confined to home with his mother, Kerouac had little to write about comparable to his earlier adventures except for the pitiful consequences of his alcoholism. While marijuana and Benzedrine fueled much of Kerouac’s work, they were never explicit narrative topics; alcohol on the other hand began to inadvertently dominate the plots of his later books, which revolve around Kerouac’s increasingly pathetic blunders. Not only did alcohol indirectly become a

central thematic concern, but especially by the time that he wrote *Vanity of Duluo*, it had also directly affected his style; the prose lacks the energy of his earlier writing, watered down into a trickling of impressions rather than the spontaneous imaginative flashes of before.

Vanity of Duluo: The End of the Bottle. Despite its flaws, *Vanity of Duluo* has value for filling in a crucial gap in Kerouac's history, covering the period when he met Ginsberg and Burroughs. However, it reads more like mere autobiography than Kerouac's customary mythmaking. While most of his work is in some sense historical, there is usually a feeling of timelessness to his tales, even when having obviously occurred in the past. Here we are well aware of Kerouac in the present looking back, of his presence as the storyteller, with his narration frequently intruding into the text. Weinreich comments, "Kerouac creates a narrative voice—in regular sentences and without the dashes—so sure of itself he will digress, talk French, link up disparate threads of his past, philosophically muse over them, and break his discourse in exhortation to his intended audience" (153). Moreover, Kerouac's tone here is one of such alcoholic self-pity and resentment that the joyful moments he does describe seem muted. Gone is the excitement for life of *On the Road*.

Kerouac once claimed that *On the Road* was written in part to describe his adventures with Cassady to his second wife, and in *Vanity of Duluo*, he follows a similar approach with his third wife—the difference here is that unlike before, his wife's presence as an audience member is explicitly established in the text. While her involvement could have worked as a storytelling prop, it instead seems to diminish Kerouac's range. His manner swings between crank and braggart, this emotional

wavering attesting to alcohol's ability to cause "wide fluctuations in mood" and "frequent emotional outbursts" (Julien 75). The entire novel seems an attempt to justify his current misery. Here is the opening passage:

All right, wifey, maybe I'm a big pain in the you-know-what but after I've given you a recitation of the troubles I had to go through to make good in America between 1935 and more or less now, 1967, and although I also know everybody in the world's had his own troubles, you'll understand that my particular form of anguish came from being too sensitive to all the lunkheads I had to deal with [...] and God help me, a W R I T E R whose very "success," far from being a happy triumph as of old, was the sign of doom Himself. (Insofar as nobody loves my dashes anyway, I'll use regular punctuation for the new illiterate generation.) (7)

Kerouac mentions that he will use regular punctuation, blaming the "new illiterate generation," which begs the question: had he given up on spontaneous prose because his audience found it unappealing? Or had he simply lost the creative impulse to keep trying? Whatever the answer, there is no denying the prosaic nature of the prose. Perhaps we should be somewhat generous and take Kerouac at his word; there is no doubt that his style, after initially being embraced in *On the Road*, was almost universally panned by critics with the publication of his other works. This change in critical temperament is probably attributable in large part to the stylistic jump between unique but readable texts like *On the Road* and the much more experimental works like *Dr. Sax*; critics were astounded at the seeming transformation, all the more so because Kerouac's works were published almost all at once following the success of *On the Road*, disregarding their

natural chronological stylistic progression. Kerouac and the Beats also rejected the literary establishment of the day, and for all their aesthetic complexity felt oriented towards the common reader. So perhaps Kerouac's assertion that he deliberately returned to a simpler mode of prose is partially true, a response to the overwhelming rejection his literary innovation provoked. However, alcohol is also well documented in causing memory loss, lack of concentration, and the progressive dulling of insight (Julien 78). If we are to continue to link the drugs Kerouac took to the development (or detriment) of his style, then we must suppose that in the case of *Vanity of Duluo* there is also a connection. Just as Benzedrine and marijuana were factors in the origination of spontaneous prose, now alcohol was a factor in its downgrading to a less ornate style.

In any case, *Vanity of Duluo* offers textual evidence that Kerouac was aware of the conflicting role of drugs and alcohol in his life and writing. By the novel's conclusion (and near the end of his life), Kerouac accepts his addiction, even if he does not understand it. He ends with a hurrah for life: "*Hic calix!* Look that up in Latin, it means 'Here's the chalice,' and be sure there's wine in it" (280). Weinreich's commentary on the novel is fitting: "He achieves the only solace he has ever had—as a writer writing. And in this act lies his redemption" (155). As usual Kerouac plundered his life for his writing, turning his deterioration into compelling narrative material. His final acclamation of wine, however, is as troubling as it is illuminating; he bemoans his suffering even as he praises the alcohol that in large part is the cause of it. While Kerouac does not directly admit alcohol's culpability in the text, he seems aware that it, and by extension substances like amphetamine and marijuana, occupied dual positions as both muse and master in his life.

Kerouac's life and work came full circle in term of drugs and alcohol. Initially drugs served as icons of the excessive Beat lifestyle. Amphetamine and marijuana shaped Kerouac's style and became powerful motivating tools for the arduous task of composition. In the end, alcohol killed him. Long rightly asks, "But one question remains: would Kerouac have written and would his work have been of the same quality if he had not been an alcoholic?" (93). In the final analysis, we can choose to praise and/or blame Kerouac for his drug use, but we can not deny their presence—without these influences, Kerouac as we know him would been an entirely different kind of writer. If we are to praise his style than we must also acknowledge the chemical influences that in part contributed to the variety and richness of Kerouac's prose, even while mourning over the fact that alcohol ultimately robbed his health and life.

Ludwig's study resists assigning one interpretation to the role of alcohol in creativity, asking, "Does alcohol foster creativity by removing creative blocks and by stimulating original thought? Or is alcohol primarily an impediment to innovation and productivity? Is alcoholism the price the artist pays for engaging in the creative process? Or is heavy drinking a cultivated 'charismatic flaw' or simply the product of a bohemian, artistic lifestyle?" (953). We can ask these same questions about Kerouac and any of the substances he used. Drugs and alcohol function in multiple ways: chemically, socially, legally, medically, etc. We must withstand the temptation to conclusively establish the "definite" link between Kerouac's work and the substances he took, because drugs and alcohol influenced him on variety of levels. Kerouac took drugs in part as a statement of rebellion that became identified with the Beat generation and later the counterculture. He also used them to enter into the larger literary tradition of drug-using visionary artists.

Finally, there is ample textual evidence that drugs influenced his choice of theme and style, and served as stepping-stones in the development of his aesthetic. In the final chapter, we will consider the various roles drugs played in Kerouac's life, as well as their implications for creativity in general.

CONCLUSION: DRUGS—MUSE OR MASTER?

The Birth of Drugs

As discussed in the introduction, an examination into drug-induced creativity necessarily treads in dark territory. In this same vein, Long asks, “What general conclusion can we draw from this study? A drug, for example, is it muse or a master? Does it inspire creative writing or does it impede it?” (233). Long’s question brings up an interesting point: Even if we can firmly conclude that drugs played a role in Kerouac’s writing process, it by no means guarantees them a causal status in the formation of his style. Did Kerouac create his style on his own terms, later adding drugs to his composition process because they were agreeable to his pre-formulated aesthetic ideas? Or did the drugs themselves form the basis of Kerouac’s style, necessitating their continual use? It is the literary chicken and the egg. In truth, either extreme scenario is implausible; Kerouac’s style was most likely subtly shaped by drugs even as he consciously developed it, and this aesthetic choice stipulated the drugs he took as often as these substances modified his writing.

Drug use is often part of a ritual, and for Kerouac like many other artists, they were connected to the writing process. Because each drug induces a distinct mental state, they function well as spaces within which to establish rituals. In fact, drug use itself often becomes ritualistic; there is a certain methodology to preparing and injecting heroin, for example, which forms the larger context of the actual altered state. Kerouac wrote himself into the larger mythology of drugged writers, taking part in a ritual that has been practiced for centuries by multiple generations of artists. Even if drugs did not actually

influence his style in a direct way, they certainly functioned indirectly in shaping his expectations and methods.

The irony of drug-induced writing is that, in the attempt to transcend the physical body, one becomes more reliant upon an outside substance. Kerouac's vanishing authorial role could be understood as an ironic twist on Barthes' death of the author; must we say that the death of Kerouac is the birth of a drug? Barthes seems to indicate that the text takes precedence over the author, interacting with each reader in a unique way. When that text's stylistic features are in part the result of a chemical alteration in the brain, then the role of the author slips even further away. I hope it is clear that I give Kerouac the majority of credit for his aesthetic achievements, and believe that he was just as capable at writing without using drugs. However, what are the implications of a style partially based on drug-altered states? Should we afford drugs any authorial role? Certainly we speak of cultural, historical, and economic forces "behind" a text. While these influences do not literally produce a text, they establish the context that a writer develops in, and thus in a sense shape the writer's work. While the interplay between writer and context is necessarily vague, revealing how little we truly know about the forces that underlie creativity, I believe that if we can study the production of literature from, for example, a Marxist viewpoint, than there is no reason why we cannot study it from a "chemical" perspective.

The chemical context is important In Kerouac's case because most of his works seem to have revolved around a major drug during the composition process. While drugs are by no means the exclusive influences that shaped his style (just as we cannot pin any work to a strictly Marxist or postcolonial method), we may say that out of the

kaleidoscopic forces behind each work, the personality of a key substance—amphetamine, marijuana, or alcohol—is imprinted on the text. By identifying the key substances that served as Muses for Kerouac's writing and comparing them to each other, we can discern patterns and establish stylistic characteristics which may be labeled as "drug inspired." The real question is not *if* drugs shaped Kerouac's style, but to *what extent*.

As we have discussed earlier, the credit due to drugs is complicated by a number of factors. First of all, the alterations a substance produces do not simply disappear upon cessation of use—they exert lasting changes in consciousness. We must differentiate then between short-term and long-term effects of drugs. In terms of immediate results, whatever substance is used during the actual writing process seems to impart its "personality" in a direct manner, overshadowing other influences. Thus we can appropriately (if not one-hundred percent accurately) speak of *On the Road* as an "amphetamine text," *Dr. Sax* as a "marijuana text," and *Vanity of Duluo* as an "alcoholic text." This does not deny the presence of other drug-induced characteristics, or rule out the possibility that other factors besides drugs played a role in shaping the work in question; it merely affirms that we can often designate a principal chemical authority. However, in cases like *Desolation Angels*, the distinct features of Kerouac's marijuana and amphetamine styles merge; this is all the more notable due to the fact that he was sober while writing it. The lingering traces of these drugs on the text seem to indicate that any substance Kerouac took frequently permanently colored his style even after he ceased using it, making it difficult to ever isolate a sole chemical identity.

Nor does the emphasis on drugs as a source of poetic inspiration imply that they automatically create good writing. There is no such thing as a magical pill to achieve stylistic greatness. Commenting on the frequent misconception that drugs act autonomously, Julien states, “It is important to understand that psychoactive drugs do not create new behavioral or physiological responses; they simply modify ongoing processes” (47). That is, drugs are not independent agents; they only act in combination with biochemical states in the user that are preexistent. Drugs must be examined then in the larger context of Kerouac’s life and evolution as a writer—they are by no means his only influences. We also need to consider Kerouac’s personal background, his literary influences (Wolfe for example), the social climate he wrote in, the aesthetic movement he formed a part of, etc. We have attempted to do so to an extent in this text, establishing the basic factors that affected Kerouac’s stylistic evolution. Of course there is no way to quantitatively rank these in comparison to the importance of drugs. In fact, they cannot even be neatly divided—marijuana for example was as much a social element in the Beat movement as it was a writing aid for Kerouac. The matrix of causes that shaped his style are so interwoven that to pull on one necessarily tugs at others.

However, I think there is enough evidence to conclude that drugs played a central part in forming Kerouac’s style. Certainly the fact that he continued to use them as often as his typewriter cements their status as material aids; just as the original scroll of *On the Road* was based on the technological innovation offered by the typewriter, so did a chemical invention, amphetamine, allow Kerouac a unique alteration to his composition method. It is difficult to discuss the Beat movement without including drugs, because the latter are such a fundamental part of the former’s identity. When we examine the

evolution of Kerouac's prose, we are forced to admit that many of his stylistic breakthroughs involved drug use. He wrote *On the Road* in three weeks and *The Subterraneans* in three days, each on amphetamine. While writing *On the Road* in particular, Kerouac began using the assemblage of stylistic techniques that he dubbed spontaneous prose. While its basic tenants, including a de-emphasis on revision, limited punctuation, and long sentences, formed the basis of Kerouac's style from that point on, spontaneous prose soon evolved into the sketching technique, as seen in *Visions of Cody* and *Dr. Sax*. While this development was akin to the natural aesthetic growth that most writers experience through the process of composing successive works, it was also urged on by marijuana. The predominant proof of marijuana's increased involvement (rather than amphetamine) in Kerouac's methodology is reflected in the differing modes of *On the Road* compared to *Visions of Cody*. While the former text tries to attain authentic language by focusing on the exterior world of events, examining them in extreme detail in order to provide a fuller picture of reality (assisted by amphetamine, which increases attention to sensory input), the latter text opted for an interior approach to authenticity. Marijuana facilitated an inner orientation by its pharmacodynamic tendency to induce dream-like, associative states, which when reproduced textually resemble the unconscious structures of the mind. Of course, as the first section of *Desolation Angels*, written in sobriety, demonstrates, drugs were not the props to Kerouac's style, but rather the impetus. Even in their absence, Kerouac's style retained its essential features. Drugs could also affect his style negatively, as shown in *Big Sur* and *Vanity of Duluoaz*, which returned to a plainer prose—some would say poorer prose—no doubt the result of rampant alcohol abuse.

A Final Vision

What is needed is a more rigorous study of the effects of drugs on language and writing. While this thesis is a first step in that direction, such research efforts have been largely limited because of social and legal pressures. Ludwig echoes this notion: “With respect to the actual effects of alcohol on the creative process or parameters of creativity, research is limited” (953). There needs to be more research on the effects of drugs and alcohol on creativity. Since the history of literature clearly shows that a large portion of writers have experimented with drugs and alcohol while writing, we need to examine more closely the effects of the former upon the latter, rather than simply acknowledging it to be the case. While alcohol, due to its long association with humankind, has received some attention, the effects of drugs like marijuana, amphetamine, and others have in large measure been ignored. Science has taken up this gauntlet in part, but has confined most of its studies to the objective psychological effects of chemicals on the brain, ignoring their more complicated subjective manifestations. This may be mostly due to the government’s scheduling of most substances of interest as Schedule I (including marijuana, LSD, and psilocybin mushrooms), meaning that they have no medicinal potential and therefore are unsuitable for research except in the most exceptional of circumstances. Before this legal action was taken in the early seventies (likely as a backlash of the drugs’ rampant availability in the sixties), such research was being initiated. As Fred Leavitt testifies in *Drugs & Behavior* (1995), since the early seventies until the present day, almost any research on the link between drugs and creativity by both the government and private sector has ceased (327). However, there are indications

that this climate of denial has started to change. Gwendolyn M. Bays makes the need for such research particularly clear:

One cannot fail to reflect, after such a study as this, that today the means do lie at our disposal for crossing the barrier with non-habit forming drugs like LDS-25. If these are taken under proper medical supervision, there is no reason why research into the creative possibilities of the unconscious should not be undertaken by groups of serious-minded scholars in the humanities as well as in the sciences. It is possible that the benefits of such research would not be confined to the realm of the arts only, but might conceivably give man the wisdom and insight into himself that he needs so desperately. (51)

Leavitt reiterates the potential of such studies, arguing for the need to know if drugs can be used safely to enhance creativity, and if not, whether they can offer clues to better, “nonpharmacological creativity-enhancing techniques” (327). I would also like to suggest that part of the problem lies in the exclusive medicinal approach any investigation does take—that is, we characterize drugs as tool, but strictly on the level of health, as medicines or poisons. The health framework of drugs, while a very important one, is not the only trope available. Almost gone from serious discourse are the topics of drugs and spirituality, or drugs and aesthetics. While perhaps these latter concerns are not as immediately urgent as health issues, I would argue that the potential insights drugs could open in the fields of aesthetics, spirituality, consciousness, and social and personal modes of living remains vastly unexamined, and to humanity’s detriment. Perhaps this is inevitable, since subjects like art and religion are inherently subjective, internal

phenomenon. However, if we are to affirm art and religion as being of value at a humanistic level, then I feel we must extend the same possibility to drugs. Part of the problem of this approach is that the government has too long dominated all possible drug discourses; this is largely a recent phenomenon, as the largely unrestricted history of drug use demonstrates. While I am not proposing that the government legalize all drugs, or that drugs are without harm, (indeed, there is every need for limits and control, within reason, because drugs are often very dangerous and addictive when used improperly), I am suggesting that we as a society (and by extension legal bodies) reexamine our traditional notions of drugs. It is sadly ironic that alcohol, a legal, socially acceptable drug, killed Kerouac, while illegal drugs like marijuana inspired his writing. Until the hegemonic discourse that renders all drugs (with the exception of alcohol, tobacco, and approved pharmaceuticals) as taboo is lifted, the negative trope of drug use will dominate public consensus and the potential benefits of these amazing substances will be ignored.

This returns us to the oft-discussed matter of consciousness and creativity.

Commenting on the connection between drugs and creativity, Boon concludes:

[In] our fascination with the novelty of chemical modulation of consciousness, we run a risk of missing the fact that all mental states are extraordinary, not just the novel ones. The important thing to understand here is creativity, its source and its power. Literature and the psychedelic experience are both fundamentally acts of poiesis—poiesis not as representation but as creation itself. (274-75)

Kerouac's writing process is as mysterious as any author's, whether drug using or not.

We simply cannot say for sure where ideas come from, or what exactly shapes creativity

and molds style. Perhaps it is not necessary to draw a dichotomy between drug-influenced behavior and Kerouac's independent thought; maybe both are interdependent aspects of one mind. All of literature is the process of capturing consciousness in flux, and this includes sober states as well as altered ones. Drug-altered consciousness is just one of many states of mind, distinct and meaningful as any other.

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