

**"The thing that makes jazz so interesting is that each man is his own academy... If he's really going to be persuasive, he learns about other academies, but the idea is that he must have that special thing. And sometimes you don't even know what it is."<sup>1</sup>**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Jazzpresso I**

Walking along Reinhardtstraße in Berlin-Mitte earlier this year, my eyes were stopped by a sign offering *jazzpresso* in a small coffee shop hidden behind it. The imaginative term made me smile unwillingly- and I started pondering about the connotation used for something as common as a cup of coffee. Obviously not only joint features of both products as possibly their invigorating effect, their earthiness, were to be stressed, but at the same time the latter was intended to radiate a certain atmosphere and attitude associated with the term jazz.

I wondered what exactly these could be. Clearly, jazz is more than simply the music, and then - which music? What kind of music is the sheer conundrum of different styles called 'jazz'?

It almost seems to me that the term jazz has gone down in everybody's vocabulary and imagination, with only a much smaller number of people being able to pinpoint what they feel about it - what they like or don't. All too easily is jazz associated with mellow 'bar jazz', that is, as background music to an exuberant life style, or with ecstatic afterhours jam sessions on the verge of frenzy.

The questions why many people find jazz exciting, what makes the beauty of jazz and how jazz appears in other forms of art and life form the bottom line of this paper. In order to answer these questions I will start by roughly defining the terms aesthetics and jazz, proceed by analysing how they relate to each other and how they might have come to influence one another. I will also look at essential factors for the understanding of jazz, such as its history and the history, identity and musical tradition of black people. I will then turn to theories seeking to define the very 'essence' of jazz as distinct from other forms of music. The meaning of the entertainment industry and of critics for the development of different styles and for artistic freedom, as well as the influence of personal styles on jazz as a whole, exemplified by two outstanding soloists- Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong, will be additional subjects of research effected in this paper. My aim is to arrive at the formulation of a jazz aesthetic, so this proves feasible, that exists on its own terms and thereby satisfactorily explains the status of jazz as music as well as in other spheres of art and life.

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<sup>1</sup> in Valerie Wilmer, *Jazz People*, p.21

Whilst the earliest jazz was largely ignored by Western European critics in their writings, the decades half way through the last century saw a huge interest in the analysis of this music. Therefore jazz was shifted to the centre of musical and cultural analysis, all the more as its inception was largely coinciding with a change towards modernity of life in general, of technology, of architecture, of art and likewise of classical music.

In retrospect, the earlier Euro-American influenced critics viewed jazz as a primitive, though increasingly popular folk music that was by no means capable of bearing comparison with the highly regarded classical compositions. Far from being recognized as a form of art, jazz and aesthetics seemed to present a contradiction in terms. Dating back to the ancient Greek philosophers, aesthetics and art had always been intrinsically linked. How could something as intuitive and improvised, as discordant and raucous as jazz be related to the "artificial" and by extension artistic music created by Bach, Beethoven and the like?

Once the senses become used to a certain form or style of music, innovations seem to be hard to reconcile with the established opinion of the time. In the case of jazz, originating with black people excluded from society and even more so from the realm of art, this was particularly difficult. And yet people soon realized, that there was something to the emerging 'Negro' music, something attracting, thrilling and to a certain degree repelling at the same time. This something would never have been able to measure up against serious music in the eyes of most listeners and would consequently never have been attributed any lasting aesthetic value. But which are the criteria that render an object or other impressions perceptible to the senses, such as music, aesthetically valuable?

## 1.2. Aesthetics

The first philosophers concerned with beauty were trying to find answers regarding the very nature of aesthetic experience and the conditions for determining the truth of statements about art. Classical aesthetics is "a not very tidy intellectual discipline, a heterogenous collection of problems that concern the arts primarily but also relate to nature", its objective being the analysis of what beauty is, or what is perceived of as beautiful and why. In its ambition to formulate logical and universally valid criteria, classical aesthetics revolved around questions such as: Are form and order the only important aspects of art? Does art exist for its own sake and therefore exclude functionalism? Is art an imitation of nature?

Whereas with Kant the Greek term "aísthesis" referred to the perception of the beautiful and sublime in both, nature and art, Hegel excluded natural beauty from the aesthetic debate and thereby contributed to the fact that the terms art and aesthetics eventually became identical. For him and Schopenhauer likewise, art is visible truth. However, following along their lines of thought, only white, European men are capable of "aísthesis"/perception of truth. Those men who did not learn the lessons of the Enlightenment, and therefore are not rational in their mode of thinking, do not possess a sense of beauty and the sublime.

"Once ART and AESTHETICS are distinguished from "popular culture" and "low taste", then one has effected a confinement that can be enforced merely by mentioning a word. Such distinctions - resting on Western metaphysics - can be used to defend and preserve canons of literature and to protect "artistic" masterpieces from all criticism. Only "men of taste" are held to possess the developed "aesthetic sense" and sensibility

requisite to identification and judgement of genuine works of ART. If such men declare that a product is not ART but a product of some other category, there is no escape from their authority of confinement - except subversion."<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3. Aesthetics and Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In the course of the 20th century, aesthetic criteria were gradually extended or loosened in order to embrace developments in the sphere of modern art. The outlook on life and history had become modern in nature. No longer was the world viewed as exclusively functioning according to linear, causal and rational mechanisms, but rather as a complex interplay of highly diverging, yet inclusive, phenomena. Plato's philosophy of art as an object of perceptual interest, which engages the intellect as well as the aesthetic sensibilities of the observer for some time, regained momentum. To André Malraux art was the "means by which forms of raw experience are transformed into style". This view found its expression in the form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*-like "happening" art, for example, where participant observation constituted the art work itself. Highbrow culture was not any longer necessarily the harmonious creation of centuries, embodying order and reason, in which the audience was relegated primarily to a passive role.

This focus on interactivity and the process of creating is visible in jazz, too. It is assumed by some analysts that the music might itself have contributed to the modified sense of art and culture. How this could have gone about will be given the attention due later in this paper. Even though the term art is now used, broadly-speaking, to describe that which informs and enriches our lives, it is not to be confounded with entertainment, which, as suggested by the word itself, is merely engaging our mind for a short time. The latter, too, lacks the spiritual implications evident in art. As with folklore and art, the boundaries between entertainment and art are sometimes fluid. The conclusion, however, that the status as 'art' automatically confers a general aesthetic value to the art work in question is not valid. Whether an art work is assessed valuable aesthetically is now judged in terms of its significance for a particular group of people, mostly a culture with aesthetic standards differing from the Eurocentric ones. The artist's performance is assessed against the background of artistic values and techniques embedded in the culture he is part of and which lend meaning to the aesthetic appearance of his work. This approach, albeit it abandons the aesthetic criterium of universality, is attempting to finally recognize the so-called primitive art forms as aesthetically valuable in their own right. The postulated universality of the artistic language, long a criterium for aesthetic considerations, was in truth profoundly Eurocentric in nature. As there is no longer a monopoly of any world interpretation, cultural relativism and historicism must be conceded to artistic creation. The search of a cultural theory of aesthetics is in full swing, yet it might take some more time to internalize its implications and to wholly acknowledge the broadening of one's horizon of self-understanding that comes with it.

To explain how progress from the early chauvinistic and racist view of aesthetics and art towards achieving something like a *Black Aesthetic* and the ultimate incorporation of the latter into an expanded concept of aesthetics was achieved, I will turn to jazz and its development towards "America's classical music".

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<sup>2</sup> Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.110

"Jazz is merely a return to the humming, hand-clapping, or tomtom beating of savages"<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Jazz

### 2.1. Jazz, The Word

Though the early critics of the new music called jazz soon changed their tone and modified their judgement, there was nonetheless a strong sense of vagueness in their ambitious undertaking to define what they heard. The music was approached by way of categorizing its form and structure, thereby never losing its mature role model, classical music, out of sight. Once the term "jazz" had been accepted to designate what developed from the hollers, shouts, spirituals, worksongs and blues of the former slaves, attention turned towards the origin of the word itself - as if musical analysts were hoping to mitigate their uneasiness in the face of this boisterous new sound by pinning down whatever responded to scientific logic. What came out was indeed fascinating - the history of the word jazz was "variously derived from Africa, Arabia, the Creole, French, Old English, Spanish, the Indians, the names of mythical musicians, old vaudeville practices, associations with sex and vulgarity, onomatopoeia, and other sources, its real origin has been, and may well remain, a mystery".

Depending on which etymology of the term is given priority, a certain aesthetic expectation comes along with it. The outlook on the music is changed to some degree whether we perceive jazz as owing its denotative roots to Africa, to a somewhat defamiliarized Western tradition, to the legendary Jasbo Brown or to minstrel shows and vaudevilles of American show-business. What is known for sure, is that by the beginning of the last century, "jass-it-up" was shouted during performances in order to signal to the musicians to "speed it up". The adjective "jazzy" soon took on the meaning of 'colourful, exaggerated'.<sup>4</sup>

It is indicative for the presumption of Western analysts to claim expertise in the definition of jazz, the structure of the music and its musical value prior to any sound knowledge of and insight into the Afro-American thinking and tradition. Social and cultural considerations only entered the scene of writings about a history of jazz with delay, a consequence of the fact that peoples other than the descendants of Western European whites were hardly granted the status of having any culture at all. African tribal dances, religious traditions, sculptures, music and singing were regarded rather scornfully as primitive art. Only after the 1940s has there been growing interest in functional aspects fundamental to African music and art and consequently a reappraisal of black elements in jazz.

### 2.2. From Worksongs to Blues and Jazz

What survived of the African heritage during the centuries of slavery with adaptation forced upon the blacks, was in fact a melting pot of elements preserved and adapted to Western musical influences.

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, "Jazz and the American Culture" in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.437

<sup>4</sup> P. Clayton and P. Gammond, *The Guinness Jazz A-Z*, p.137

Even after their liberation, blacks were harassed by white Americans and no less at times by the less pigmented Creoles. While music, singing and dancing continued to play an important role in the black community, new forms developed alongside those handed down from the times of slavery. Worksongs, shouts and field hollers with their roots in Africa had been added spirituals as an expression of the slaves Afro-American experience in the wake of Christianization and as a way of relieving their everyday life's hardships by praying for salvation. The new Afro-American forms of music had been inspired by European and American examples as to their form, content and instrumentation, rhythm and harmony however remained African in their essence. After their liberation in the second half of the 19th century the former slaves saw their lives threatened by new difficulties: poverty, the need to feed themselves, the disintegration of families as well as new challenges arising from self-determination under severe conditions. The musical expression of the day reflected these changes in the blues, the first black music devoid of strict functionality. Love, solitude and other individual experiences became frequent topics, often representing the duality of negro life - their immersion in the American culture versus the knowledge of their special status within society at large. As a natural consequence of the altered situation numerous locations and groups sprang up all over the country. As had the music from Africa, that of the post-liberation time preserved functionality as an important, though no longer the pre-eminent characteristic. Dancability of the tunes as well as communication within the group and with the audience by way of call and response patterns about their individual and collective experience continued to mark their music. Consequently, singing remained as significant a factor as the method of making the instruments sound like human voices - partly due to their incapacity to read notes and to copy the white's techniques. Music for the Afro-American community was part of life and did not take place outside life - that is in silent 'contemplation', as did most elaborate Western music. Hence its spontaneity and group dynamics.

Even after their liberation, repressive measures by the "White Supremacy" persisted. Around the turn of the century, the Creoles were no longer allowed to enjoy some of the whites' privileges, as for example their participation in the highly popular marching bands. Their return to black combos playing music in danceclubs, at parties and in many other public places had its effect on the style of music played by the blacks. By way of a theoretical musical formation using European instruments had the Creoles assimilated European techniques that now became fused with the "rougher" uptown negro sound.

With the introduction of an ever greater number of European instruments, namely brass instruments, and the enhanced mastery of these, black musicians concentrated more on the timbre and its effectful use. With the exception of the blues that evolved around the same time, the music gradually took precedence over the human voice, culminating in the highly instrumental and European-influenced ragtime music. The latter had paved the way for the entrance of instrumental music into the professional entertainment business, which had been blocked to blacks before the turn of the century. The imitation of this strongly syncopated music on the part of less technically-versed black musicians rang in the era of jazz.

### **2.3. From Slavery to Black Bourgeoisie**

Even though liberation speeded up the development of black music, social progress was comparatively slow. The Jim Crow doctrines of segregation and discrimination added to further intolerance and raised even more obstacles to the full participation of black people in American society. Organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan, Pale Faces and Knights of the White Camelia did even more to shake their existences. As LeRoi Jones points out in "Blues

People", many former slaves found it difficult to come to terms with their uncertain position within the post-slavery American society. Caught between two cultures, their own African tradition and that of their former masters, they chose the way of assimilation very often at the expense of their African roots. This was especially true for those members of the black community who had enjoyed a more favourable position within their former white masters' households or who had been given the possibility of learning some craft other than farm work and had seized the opportunity of going north and making a certain amount of wealth, thereby constituting a slowly upcoming black middle class. Not only did they distance themselves from their poorer fellow Afro-Americans, their cultural legacy and values, but also did they promulgate the concept "separate but equal" in order to accommodate their misgivings. Eagerly they tried to disprove any traits of character and habits associated with "negroes". As a logical consequence, condescension with regard to Afro-American music was part of the attitude of rejection and their growing assimilation of the white's taste. I mention these points to illustrate the disunity and social disequilibrium within the black population itself, which is in jazz writing is sometimes all too easily overlooked.

Considering the social background of black people, it might seem astonishing to read that jazz, taking shape at the beginning of the 20th century, had by 1920 become effectively influential in most of the Western world and subsequently the dominating voice of popular music. In contrast to the blues and ragtime, jazz grew in an organic, unorganized way in America as the accidental juxtaposition of several musical strains. Its beginnings are to be found in the folk-musics of various nationalities that were taken to America by the early settlers, making it the first music that was about being "American" in that it incorporated music of all kinds - from Creole to Afro-Cuban elements. This argument seeks to balance the over-strong assertions of early jazz writing that jazz was simply a music descending directly from African sources. Over time the view has been taken that the black slave population of America, amongst whom jazz acquired its richest growth, was able to sow the seeds of its own traditions in the very rich soil of an already strong American tradition, the two combining to create jazz. This argument is not meant to diminish the African influence on jazz, but rather to stress that by this time in history these people were no longer Africans, but native Americans.

Even LeRoi Jones as ardent advocate of jazz as a profoundly Afro-American ethnic music, that was in his view watered down in its quality and authenticity by whites meddling with it, agreed that real jazz had to reflect the entire socio-cultural continuum, encompassing black and white achievements alike. He described that very sound evolving at the turn of the century as the first truly "American sound".

## 2.4. Defining Jazz

"Jazz is freedom".

-Archie Shepp

"Jazz is affection and great violence".

-Gertrude Stein

**"Jazz is why this century sounds different from the others".**

-Dizzy Gillespie

**"It's nothing we can bring into focus or categorize it;  
once we call it one thing it forms into  
something else."**

Definitions of what jazz is range from the shortest answers thinkable - or even the acknowledgement on behalf of passionate jazzers of their incapability to define the music they are playing - to lengthy theoretical bodies of work putting forward the most detailed analysis of the musical inventory of its styles. This fact suggests the difficulty even experts encounter to put this music's essence and criteria into words. Too different are the styles covered by the term jazz, too obscure are the boundaries between folk and art music and too inaccessible is the musical body due to the lack of full-fledged compositions in the classical sense. The dilemma for anyone attempting to define jazz resides in its fluid nature - jazz means something different to everyone.

"Jazz is not, what you do, but *how* you do it".

Fats Waller

And how people go about things, is obviously a highly personal matter, provided that they are given the freedom to act accordingly.

Even those definitions approaching jazz under scholarly aspects, such as African heritage and its Afro-American nature, will soon encounter criticism of those who do not wish to see the white influence diminished, or those who wish to more openly stress commercial and personal interests as factors shaping the music. As neither a musicological nor a historical analysis are really gratifying, social and cultural considerations have entered the scene gradually and have helped to illuminate a much broader picture of jazz. For any discussion about the music and in particular for the justification of aesthetic judgement, jazz critics resort nonetheless to historical patterns, as evident in the boundaries set by the chronological framework of jazz styles.

I therefore decided to back up my search for a jazz aesthetic by a somewhat representative accumulation of subject headlines put into context, that generally form the basis of any discussion on jazz. My unusual presentation of these is intended to reflect the disunity of jazz music and the variety of influences - such as people, places, public taste - that stimulate the dynamic spontaneity and emotion expressed in the jazz idiom.

## 2.5. A Chronological Overview

At the *beginning* of any *jazz historiography* figures the name of the *first jazz band* known to have played popular jazz for a wide audience: The **Original Dixieland Jassband**. Curiously the band was a "white" band imitating the *raucious black music* played in New Orleans around 1917. Its musical style became synonymous with "*speed*" and "*excitement*" (S.46) and was accorded the characteristics "hot" and "dirty". From the early 1920s onwards *industrialisation* together with slightly liberalized *race* policies led to the migration of great numbers of Afro-Americans to *cities* in the north. In **Chicago**, the new centre of *jazz*, a new *white* variant of the black New Orleans style emerged, moving towards a slightly cooler and more *experimental* idiom. Trends were set rather by powerful *individuals* such as **Armstrong** and Hawkins than by *group identity*. Perhaps the most significant feature was the gradual move toward a more *arranged* approach, eventually ushering in the *swing era*. Regular efforts were undertaken by **Paul Whiteman** encouraging professional composers such as *Gershwin* and *Grofé* to write works of so-called 'symphonic jazz'. It was assumed in these early days of jazz that there would ultimately be a fusion of jazz and *classical* music. This and other attempts such as **Black, Brown, Beige** by **Duke Ellington** must in the eyes of some be counted as a failure, as no real *masterpiece* ever materialized that could satisfy both sides, jazz *aficionados* and classical devotees alike. Examples where composers have kept to their own style allowing some of the elements of jazz to creep in, such as Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), have later come to be appreciated as *American* music in their own right. The decade of the 1930s into the mid 1940s saw the height of swing. It was the epoch of *big bands*, a development going hand in hand with the increased influence of the *music industry*. The music refocused on *European sound* and *tone quality* at the expense of *Afro-American* elements. *Improvisational freedom* was largely given up in favour of *orchestral discipline*. The *influence* of the swing-style was such that many jazz writers and record companies of the time fell into the habit of using 'swing' where 'jazz' would have been more appropriate to describe all kinds of jazz *styles*.

In the **New York** of the 1940s emerged a style that constituted a *total rupture* with what the jazz repertory had embraced before that time. **Black jazzers** created a symbolically black music as an *escape* from the established *conventions* during endless *jam sessions* at **Monroe's** or **Minton's**. Weeding out elements in jazz that the *white entertainment business* had added to jazz, the *boppers* attempted to get back to the *blues* and the *true* language of jazz. Theirs was a cooler and more matter-of-fact approach with the aim to make jazz more difficult to play for the *average* white player who had nonetheless won *lucrative jobs* while black musicians had been kept out for racial considerations. In some ways bebop was breaking the solid *rhythmic patterns* of earlier jazz catching up



with **serious music** in the use of extended **chord** harmonies. Minton's became a meeting point for stars like **Lester Young**, **Ben Webster**, **Coleman Hawkins** to mingle with such newcomers as **Charlie Parker**, **Charlie Christian** and **Dizzy Gillespie**. It was here that the face of jazz was changed and the 'modern' era of jazz was rung in..

**Bebop** encountered **violent** reactions on the part of **established** musicians and yet they could not deny for a long time the enhanced **polyrhythmic** feeling of the boppers. Most significant is the fact that for the first time in jazz history a form of jazz was approached in terms of an **art**, its adherents viewing themselves as the artistic elite.

**Modern jazz** created something apparently quite different from the style created by the music's earliest followers. It was still a 'hot', sometimes even **frantic** music, however it needed a "*cool head and sophisticated intellect*" in order to play it. The modernists roamed freely through the chord structure with the basic chord sequence in mind. More radical however was the rhythmic **shift**, stressing the **off-beat** and other devices that would have thrown older musicians off-balance. The term 'modern' is loosely employed for everything that has happened in *the jazz scene since the 1940s*. Of course, changes in style and innovations became manifest as is reflected in characterizations such as 'cool', 'hardbop', '*avant-garde*' and '**free jazz**'. Whereas **Cool Jazz** came to signify the slightly detached, intellectually *serene* music of people like **Gerry Mulligan** and **Dave Brubeck**, who introduced more European elements in order to win recognition in sophisticated circles. **Hardbop** presented -as is suggested by the name - an *intense*, **hard-driving**, even **aggressive** kind of jazz played by black musicians to detach themselves from the more **laid-back West Coast** and predominantly **white** schools and to reinstate the 'hot' character of earlier jazz along with elements of blues and gospel. The term **Avant-garde** was used for a while to cover the next phase, when the remaining **chord structure**, chorus length and **time** signature were felt to be too **restricting**.

**Free jazz** circumscribes a **conglomerate** of styles, a *break* with earlier **norms** and the insistence on individuality of form and structure that came to the fore around **1960**. At the expense of a regular **beat** the rhythm group is often carrying the *melody*. A further characteristic is the introduction of unusual instrument or materials to produce an **exotic** sound. However, the strict **negation** of any musical **convention** becomes itself something like a norm and by extension a form of **political expression**.

Also from **1960** onwards, coinciding with the **Black Freedom Movement**, numerous cultural influences were taken up, leading to **Bossa Nova** and other '**ethnic**' styles. The **1970s** were marked by endeavors to combine elements of **rock** and **jazz** in the so-called '*fusion*' style and to introduce romantic elements as a **reaction** to free jazz. With the launch of the **synthesizer** in the **1980s acid jazz**- also known as **funk** or

*groove* -set a new trend. Elements of jazz, **70s funk**, *hip hop* and **soul** were fused to create a "**groovy**" /"**funky**" sound based on the music of Charlie Parker

Latterday **manifestations** of jazz have gone in *many directions*, drawing ever closer to the classical, "**serious**" side as well as incorporating elements from various ethnic backgrounds.

### 3. The 'Essence' of Jazz

#### 3.1. In Search of the Essence of Jazz

As was my intention to exemplify by the chronological overview of different jazz styles, musicologists went about categorizing jazz in analogy to the history of classical music. At the beginning it was attempted to define the character of the original jazz, which was logically thought of as "real" jazz, by means of investigating the special sound and swing effects, and by pinning them down in an inventory of musical qualities and techniques. With the music progressing it became clear, however, that any classifying approach was in short due to become overly exclusive and that innovations were bound to overwhelm the rule. The musical development did not respect any boundaries but went beyond the postulated scope of what "real" jazz was. While some white analysts simply excluded new musical developments from their jazz theories - as did the French music critic Hugues Panassié in the 1940s, who, when faced with bebop, claimed that jazz was "dead" because this music could not simply be assessed as a new style - others went on to introduce characteristics that were supposed to be inherent in the entire spectrum of jazz styles.<sup>5</sup>

Among these figured "swing", "rhythm", "blue notes" and "improvisation". The term swing, brought into common currency by Duke Ellington in 1931 with his number "*It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing*", came to be used to describe the inherent impetus of good jazz materialized by means of syncopation and rhythm.

*Rhythm*, as manifest in jazz is the tension between beat and off-beat or between different rhythms, known as polyrhythm.

*Improvisation*, a key element in reference-book definitions of jazz, highlights the spontaneous, improvisatory nature of the music and the lack of an all-out composition. However, as jazz progressed over time, it became less improvised and more arranged up until the era of free jazz. The further the music changed away from the initial New Orleans style, the more it was stressed that jazz had to have an "essence"<sup>6</sup> inherent in all its manifestations. No longer were purely musical characteristics alone satisfactorily to define jazz. That which is perceptible to the senses only, concepts and ideas, were given increasing significance alongside musicological factors.

The search of that essence has many times raised controversies among music analysts. Even as it is undeniable that over and over again in the history of jazz a great number of white bands were successfully borrowing and polishing up jazz styles initially invented by black musicians and reaping financial benefits at their expense, it is questionable in how far the repudiated 'essence' of jazz survived these tactics. The reason why this was done, is obvious: Jazz as played by white musicians was somewhat altered to accommodate the wealthier white public's taste, which in turn guaranteed commercial success. As a consequence, many

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<sup>5</sup> Hugues Panassié, *Die Geschichte des echten Jazz*, 1942

<sup>6</sup> Scott Deveaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition", *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.485

black musicians converted to the same style of playing, though they were payed less and did by far not achieve the same popularity as white bands did. But neither this first Eurocentric version of jazz was excluded from the jazz history, nor was the expressly black and even more exclusive bebop style. The essence seemed flexible enough to withstand race-related and commercially-orientated modifications of all kinds.

In the face of criticism of the whites' disregard for black cultural values and properties, it must also be acknowledged that without the white's interest in the music, jazz would probably not have outgrown its status of an Afro-American folk music and neither would it have overcome the confines of the American continent. One should not forget that there have been indeed valuable contributions by white musicians, too, who took care not to disregard the black achievements. In so doing, they helped themselves to substantiate that which is circumscribed as part of the music's 'essence', namely its openness. It is often claimed that jazz played by white musicians is somewhat "differently flavoured" than that of their black colleagues, however the existence of racially mixed jazz bands proves that both versions can be mutually enriching. Even if the tendency towards different interpretations of the musical material is found this does not exclude a white musician from achieving a 'true' jazz feeling. It should not be forgotten either that jazz has always been an all-American music with various cultural influences incorporated - a fact that predisposed it to be presented as America's 'classical' music. The fact that prominent music critics from countries other than the United States recognized this status first, revering jazzers as stars no matter what the colour of their skin, highly contributed to the aesthetic value accorded to the music and its subsequent promotion. Thereby it also supported the view of the inclusive nature of jazz as part of its essence.

From the outset jazz, as Afro-American music, had been attributed characteristics, predominantly by whites and the black middle class regarding the music's wild, ecstatic nature. Whereas the first were strangely aroused and fascinated, and saw jazz as a welcome contrast to the so-called serious music, the latter mostly distanced themselves from this 'low-brow' form of musical expression. The music's Africanness was attractive to the first, where it repelled the latter. As for white and black musicians and fans, jazz, besides being entertaining, often represented a sort of rebellion against established norms and values, as well as individual assertion within a group. Likewise, the former slaves' handling of their legacy and free spirit somehow seemed to go well with the American pursuit of happiness-ideal, which were seen to be visible in the music's focus on improvisation and stylistic freedom. To summarize, the 'essence' of jazz resides in the multiple characteristics described: swing, sound, rhythm, improvisation, openness, Africanness, Afro-Americanism, Euro-Americanism, rebellion, freedom, self-assertion and communication.

### **3.2. From Jazz Idiom to Jazz Aesthetic**

Following an approach taken by Stephan Richter and other jazz writers, I will relate these factors to jazz, that is the music, the musicians and their interplay with society at large in order to develop a clearer picture of what constitutes the 'jazz idiom'. That which is communicated in the jazz idiom serves as the point of reference in the formulation of a jazz aesthetic.

To speak and to understand the language of jazz requires the conscious and active penetration of its core elements. These I summarize here for reasons of scope under the key words tradition, time, sound, freedom and identity.

### 3.2.1. Tradition

...invocations of the past ( as tradition) may occur as a means of resisting change or of achieving innovations.<sup>7</sup>

Tradition is meant here in the sense of traditionalism only where the feeling of attachment to past achievements is considered but not where it implies strict adherence. With regard to jazz, tradition simply expresses the transmission of values from one generation to the next as well as the handing down of a certain repertory of techniques and styles. Wynton Marsalis honours the legacy of jazz in the following statement:

"One is the tradition we know in such wonderful detail from the enormous legacy that tells anyone who will listen that jazz broke the rules of European conventions and created rules of its own that were so specific, so thorough, and so demanding that a great art resulted. This art has had universal appeal and application to the expression of modern life that it has changed the conventions of American music as well as those of the world at large."<sup>8</sup>

It is important, however, to think of tradition as a continuous dialogue with the past, as a coming to terms with it in order to confront the present. The fact of retracing our roots not only widens our perception in the face of our daily experience but also allows us to localize our inner self. It thus serves as a backdrop and stabilizing factor when we move in the present. To live with one's tradition then signifies the full acceptance of life as ephemeral and of things in a constantly fluctuating state of being. Tradition is not at odds with modernity but the rapprochement of the two and ultimately the incorporation of the latter into the first. With respect to jazz, tradition surely implies the rootedness in the Afro-American origins of the music and the knowledge of these. To be able to play in the tradition requires a study of the sources and the musical material that evolved from them over time.

The reason why many white musicians in spite of extensive studies of and prolonged formation in classical music are unable to play anything resembling a true jazz idiom follows from his ignorance of that special 'jazz language' based on tradition. It is not due to a technical incapacity on the part of the musician of producing a typical jazz sound - though it might at times meet his initial resistance to play non-harmonic tones, that is, blue notes for example - but due to his inability to improvise in line with tradition.

Although jazz became heralded as an improvised music, suggesting something made up on the spur of the moment, there is logically until the time of free jazz only a small amount of jazz that is wholly improvised. The freer jazz becomes, paradoxically, the more it resembles the completely improvised sounds coming from some artists with his roots in 'straight' academic music. Generally, improvisation only succeeds through the existence of foundations. This is not meant to suggest the priority of a more arranged approach - though as jazz progressed it became admittedly less improvised and more arranged - but the traditional nature of jazz implies a constant repetition of ideas, phrases and tricks, which convey a relatively stable basis as a repertory to choose from and to innovate upon. Duke Ellington wrote of his disbelief in unadulterated improvisation:

"It is my firm belief that there has never been anybody who has blown even two bars worth listening to who did not have some idea what he was going to play before he started".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, in S. Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p. 87

<sup>8</sup> Wynton Marsalis, "Jazz", p.21

<sup>9</sup> D. Ellington in P. Gammond and P. Clayton, *The Guinness Jazz A-Z*, p.117

Ellington clearly rejects the myth of the openness of jazz to everything, regardless of the quality. Marsalis goes on to say that "this just shows the contempt for the basic values of our music and our society. If everything is good, why should anyone subject himself to the pain of study?"<sup>10</sup>

The Jazz tradition reflects its own values as distinctive from the European or any other tradition and has made jazz become an art form. Anyone open to this music can be part of the tradition by way of "tellin' the story", by really listening and comprehending. Improvisation, just like the understanding of the narrative form inherent in jazz, is only possible where the material improvised upon is profoundly known. To quote Marsalis once more:

"I don't really play any free, you know, and I think before you can play 'out', you have to play 'in'."<sup>11</sup>

"Jazz is what it is because it is a culmination of all that has come before".<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2.2. Time

"But of course you have to take each night for itself. When you do something good one night you go home and catch yourself saying, 'That's how I want to sound tomorrow', and that's where you stub your toe and stumble".<sup>13</sup>

Jazz is hovering more than any other music between a nostalgic view of the past and an utopian outlook for the future. It came into being by the very means of its improvisational nature when dealing with the present - its creators simply celebrated their existence there and then in spite of the difficulties they encountered.

Music, more than any other art form is closely linked to time. In the case of jazz this is particularly significant as the music is essentially ephemeral. The fact that jazz works have been recorded abundantly does not correspond to the inner logic of the music as an 'ad hoc'- creation. And yet even here the interdependence of time and existence comes to bear: just as no jam session or concert will be the exact copy of another, no jazz work recorded reflects anything more than merely a deliberate take from the entire range of varying interpretations. The lack of an all-out composition challenges the musician to wholeheartedly live the moment, that is, express his innermost feelings in communication with those of the group and with the audience. Every single jazz moment is bound by the present and by circumstances at work at that certain point in time and will therefore never be the same again; the particular interplay cannot be recreated.

Just as the music is operating in the present it is also echoing the past, as seen in its relationship to tradition. At the same time it is revealing its outlook on the future, as expressed in the improvisational attitude.

From a social and historical point of view jazz is a reflection of its time, of the attitude of its people, the economic and political situation, its cultural and societal status and the standards of morality in existence. Likewise, jazz reflects the personal way of the individual dealing with

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<sup>10</sup> W. Marsalis, "Jazz", p.21

<sup>11</sup> Ornette Coleman, *Beauty is a rare thing*, in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.108

<sup>12</sup> S. Deveaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition", in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.485

<sup>13</sup> Art Tatum in V.Wilmer, *Jazz People*, p.17

his time. A musician's style represents his very intimate handling of time at the moment of playing, which can be of a rather economical or affluent nature.

Most jazz has preserved some functional sides, one of which can be dancing. In the performance, jazz illustrates how time and space are intrinsically linked: The audience is moved and made to swing, and oftentimes invited to dance, instead of indulging in distant imagination as is often the case with classical music. It is a dance around the time, the nostalgia of the past as well as the thrill of the present. Swing, perceived as vitality and dynamism with and against the rhythm, is created by the tension deriving from the constant gathering and relaxing of energies, driving the pulse on until the listeners can no longer sit and resist its impetus. Jazz is about immediate satisfaction, of both, the musicians involved in the creative process and the people immediately reacting to it. They communicate in real time.

"...the rhythm guitar of the swing era has been described as the clock that laughs"<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2.3. Freedom

"Jazz is the symbol of the triumph of the human spirit, not of its degradation. It is a lily in spite of the swamp".<sup>15</sup>

"The art - the blues, the spirituals, the jazz, the dance, was what we had in place of freedom".<sup>16</sup>

The new-found freedom of black people in the wake of their liberation from slavery was at first rather apolitical in nature. Instead they were able to fully experience their musical and rhythmic freedom that had as a matter of fact long been suppressed by their former masters. Jazz as the idiom of that freedom, traditionally rejects any preconceptions stifling individual and collective invention. The imaginative freedom is being tested permanently, not allowing the musician to simply render a certain repertory of written work as in classical music. On the contrary, the jazzer must work right in the heat of the moment in a mobile environment, where choices must be constantly taken and reacted to in one way or another. His is a very modern relationship between mind and life, thought and feeling, giving him the freedom to constantly reinterpret the musical idiom.

"Freedom seems to be the freedom to escape accepted definitions of jazz - including the modernist definition of jazz-as-an-art-music that got jazz into the avant-garde in the first place".

"The discipline did not come, as one might expect, because Wills demanded that they play any certain way. There was too much musical freedom in the band for that. Ironically, it came from the complete opposite. Because Will's style was so free and uninhibited, his musicians never knew what to expect and had to be ready to do the unexpected".<sup>17</sup>

The demands on and the respect for the individual in the jazz band put aesthetics into democratic, 'free' action:

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Clarke in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.123

<sup>15</sup> Archie Shepp in V.Wilmer, *Jazz People*, p.131

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*

<sup>17</sup> Wills in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.241

"In its social organization and philosophy, Afro-American instrumental music is democratic, experimental, and committed to individual freedom. Hence, it is the artistic embodiment of the American ideal as filtered through the black American sensibility".<sup>18</sup>

During World War II jazz was listened to on all fronts. After the war, when the United States and its Western allies were suddenly faced with the communist threat, jazz, as entirely American music, represented an air of freedom almost in the literal sense of the word. Within the United States, however, freedom as expressed in the jazz idiom was of a cultural rather than of a political nature up into the 1960s. At that time, however, jazzers got more aware of racial injustice as a subject for their music. Most of the times their commitment was visible in both, the free style of the music and the title, taking up the term 'freedom' one way or another. Whereas some tunes were *about* freedom, others contained a definition of freedom musically expressed and therefore to some degree *were* freedom.

"A music, improvised freely by blacks and whites together, it sounds a summons to free, communal living. A music of vital forward motion, jazz is a symbol of that improvisational process, guided by the instinct for freedom, which all social progress essentially is". s195

By the end of the 1960s the yearning for freedom had in some black circles gone even one step further. Not merely peaceful or even harmonious co-existence of blacks and whites were demanded but a racially-conscious revolution as represented in the Black Arts Movement. The aim was to proclaim a new black aesthetic as an alternative to European aesthetic thought.

Taken in a rather general sense, freedom in jazz resides in the possibility of playing whichever kind of music one likes to, as long as it remains somehow identifiable with the jazz idiom, spiritually and technically. In reality this is obviously rarely the case in performances for reasons that are all too comprehensible. Personal gratification often give way to pressures related to the earning of a livelihood. However, the attraction of jazz as a music open to individual interpretations of freedom, seems not to have diminished.

### 3.2.4. Sound and Identity

"What we as Black people have always done is show that the world of sound is bigger than white people think".<sup>19</sup>

In the Afro-American concept of tone quality, sound is that "which is or may be heard". This implies an openness to special sound effects, even to 'noise'. The effective production of these does of course depend on a musician's technique, the mastering of his instrument. The conclusion, however, that with enhanced formal training the sound is necessarily more intense, is not valid: a musician with academic background can be well-versed on his instrument without having his own, special sound. An exception that comes to mind is John Coltrane -there are surely others, though. The way he perfected his technical mastery was such that he seemed to have subdued the given limitations of the instrument as evident in his expressive, almost ecstatic handling of the same. In his quest he appears to have pushed back any restrictions on the sound he aimed for.

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<sup>18</sup> De Veaux, "Jazz Tradition", p.550 in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.188

<sup>19</sup> in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p156

I will exemplify this quest for an extremely personalized mode of expression with the help of two quotes:

"Although he received a conventional formal training, Monk plays 'incorrectly', with his fingers held parallel to the keyboard, gently shaping the keys to his thoughts. ...Was he ever taught to hold his hands in the formal manner? 'That's how you're supposed to?' he asked with feigned surprise. 'I hold them any way I feel like holding them. I hit the piano with my elbow sometimes because of a certain sound I want to hear, certain chords. You can't hit that many notes with your hands...'"<sup>20</sup>

"Russels had many tone qualities at his command, almost all of them unorthodox, often raspy, dirty, scratchy, shrill - a timbral zoo of sounds that could never have come out of a conservatory clarinet studio, And yet, unbelievably, this ménage of tonal aberrants almost always produced a great deal more than some gratuitous distortions. On the contrary, the sound of his playing formed the substance, the guts of his musical vision as much as the notes and melodic lines themselves".<sup>21</sup>

This shows that not the tones producable on the instrument itself sets limits to the musician, but the reality of existing sounds. The expansion of one's technical capacities is thus as significant as to enhance the quality of one's sound, its emotional impact.

Lester Bowie said:

"A lot of the sounds that I do now were originally mistakes I made trying to get another note".<sup>22</sup>

The deviation from a standardized tone creates originality, distinctiveness and thereby an aesthetic of its own. It is the personal approach to tradition, time and freedom that is felt in the sound, which then becomes identity, the musician's unmistakable hallmark. In spite of a great number of jazzers playing the same instrument, the individual cannot be replaced easily. This fact was used by Duke Ellington and other composers when they were writing or arranging jazz works. The special sound of each member in a group is just as important as their mutually inspiring interplay. The result is a very particular 'group sound' that nonetheless constitutes the sum of individual sounds.

Art Pepper described the method of working of the composer Bob Graettinger in the following terms:

"We played one-nighters, mostly, and we'd be on the bandstand playing, and he... had these strange, haunting eyes and he stood out. ...He would block everything out, if he could, and listen to just one particular person, and get that person's sound, the way the person played...He wrote for each person, like as far as the projection of their sound, how the sound carried, what it reminded him of, and he spent months just doing that, just standing and listening to the band".<sup>23</sup>

In the American history the stage-management of important artists has long been a feature, that of musicians, however, only began with jazz and later even more significantly with popular music. The manner in which jazzers have orchestrated their own person and personality has most of the times turned the attention away from the notes of a certain piece of music to

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<sup>20</sup> V. Wilmer, *Jazz People*, p.44

<sup>21</sup> G. Schuller, *Swing Era*, in S. Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.112

<sup>22</sup> Lester Bowie, in S. Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.110

<sup>23</sup> Easton, in S. Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.159



the oftentimes more fascinating personal interpretation of it. It is the balancing of musical perfection and hard work with the distinctive presentation of one's art. The market helps the musician in the creation of his public identity, his image. The audience wants to be able to identify the individual musician or the jazz band - be it their true identity or only the one that sells.

In difference to popular music, jazz musicians have a harder time not revealing their innermost feelings and attitude as a consequence of improvisation. On top of that jazzers, more than any other musicians, had to constantly disprove the stereotype which views jazz as a music charged with emotion but largely devoid of intellectual content, and which sees the musician as "the inarticulate and unsophisticated practitioner of an art which he himself scarcely understands"<sup>256</sup>. He therefore has to act somewhere between 'primitiveness' in the positive sense of the word, meaning authenticity with regard to the jazz idiom, and sophistication.

The myth created around a musician's identity is sustained by the design of record covers. The aesthetic impact on the music is not to be underestimated, all the more as the recordings long outlive live performances and reach a much wider audience. Much the same is true for newspaper and magazine articles, that, though they generally vanish comparatively soon, imprint a certain image on the readers' minds.

As jazz has proved capable of integrating all sorts of human characters, attitudes, movements, styles, demands and fashions from very different social backgrounds, (sub-)cultures and traditions, its character is one of flexibility and openness to the 'other'. It is this plethora of individual identities that constitute the larger identity of the jazz community, in which the individuals can think freely, find inspiration and express themselves as they wish without ever having to give up their personal identities. The attitudes towards tradition, time, freedom and sound expressed in the jazz idiom make up its distinctive identity. In this view, jazz music is about the communication of these ideas among different identities, that, when looked at from a distance, seem to form into one identity - jazz.

Just like individual identities participate in the shaping of the larger jazz identity, jazz is sometimes exploited to convey desired characteristics to a product or art work outside the aesthetic realm of jazz. Albert Murray calls this principle 'aesthetic namedropping', thereby referring to music selling as jazz in spite of its distance from the jazz idiom. The same policy of sales promotion is used in the case of the *jazzpresso* that caught my attention some time ago.

### **3.3. The Jazz Idiom versus Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker**

"The goals of the neo-classicists will have been admirably fulfilled if and when busts of Armstrong and Parker stand alongside busts of Beethoven and Bach in practice rooms and music studios across America".<sup>24</sup>

In the following I will present two very different artists who both had an important impact on the creation of an overall jazz identity, e.g., who have given the music a face (or two). Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker are generally referred to as the two most influential soloists, musical innovators as well as impressive personalities in the history of jazz. In analogy with the precedent analytical factors I will try to assess their contribution to the development of the

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<sup>24</sup> S.Deveaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition", in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.504

music and the repercussions felt up into the present. Which is their place respectively in a larger jazz aesthetics?

### 3.3.1. Louis Armstrong

"A jazz aesthetics incapable of embracing Louis Armstrong whole is unworthy of him, and of the American style of music making that he, more than any other individual engendered".<sup>25</sup>

While Louis Armstrong was and still is highly regarded by most musicians and the public alike, some members of the jazz community, that is jazz purists and critics and particularly the bebop generation of the 1940s, disproved of his role as an entertainer in the second half of his career. They resented his clowning which, according to their view, supported the Uncle Tom image younger blacks desperately wanted to overcome.

"Louis Armstrong was a superb artist in his early years, the exemplar of jazz improvisation, until fame forced him to compromise, at which point he became an entertainer, repeating himself and indulging a taste for low humour".<sup>26</sup>

For this reason the emphasis is generally put on Armstrong's achievements in the years prior to 1936, that saw the formation of his musical genius by talent and incessant rehearsal. But Armstrong was also lucky enough to meet important men who advanced his career, among them King Oliver and his long-time manager Joe Glaser. His innovative style and musical mastery, though, were his own merit.

#### 3.3.1.1. Tradition

Grown up in New Orleans in an orphanage, Armstrong came under the influence of the 'hot' jazz of the time, placing him directly at the beginning of what was then to go down in the jazz tradition. In the decades ahead he was himself to become one of the most influential figures of jazz, establishing an ideal that everything that was to follow on later would be measured against. To which degree he was rooted in the traditional style he himself had helped to shape, is reflected by his total rejection of bebop in the 1940s, "that modern malice" as he called it. It might seem astonishing that the very man who had in the 1920s revolutionized jazz by the introduction of solo-playing, thus undermining the African tradition of group expression, would react so categorically with regard to this new style.

An advocate of improvisation as part of "real" jazz, he once wrote:

"If every man in the band had his own way and could play as he wanted, all you would get would be a lot of jumbled-up, crazy noise. But that does not happen, because the players know by ear and sheer musical instinct just when to leave the underlying pattern and when to get back to it".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gary Giddins, *Satchmo*, p.32

<sup>26</sup> Gary Giddins, *Satchmo*, p.26

<sup>27</sup> John A. Kouwenhoven, "What's American About America", *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.128

### 3.3.1.2. Time

Armstrong's innovations that have been incorporated into the jazz tradition still serve as a basis to jazz studies on various instruments for musicians the world over. They are, however, by no means always easily imitated. It is claimed that the intense Armstrong swing, even if he did not invent the phenomenon, remains unparalleled. His personal approach to time is reflected in the way he "swung" and built up the climax of his solos. In 'Invisible Man' Ralph Ellison described Armstrong's capacity of "going outside ordinary time and space constraints", his playing

"...gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes you're behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music".<sup>28</sup>

Gunther Schuller views Armstrong's handling of time in similar terms:

"Even if we isolate a single quarter note from the context of a phrase, we can clearly hear the forward thrust of that note, and in it we recognize the unmistakable Armstrong personality. It is as if such notes wish to burst out of the confines of their rhythmic placement. They wish to do more than a single note can do; they wish to express the exuberance of an entire phrase".<sup>29</sup>

As was his approach to time musically expressed, Armstrong's outlook on the society of his time was one marked by spontaneity and dynamism. He jumped at chances to pursue his career, moved via Chicago to New York, toured overseas frequently and never stopped playing until he died in 1971. Surely he had been aware of the difficult situation for black musicians in a society dominated by whites, but he managed by way of his uninhibited personality and strong charisma - together with his talent of course - to find his position within that society. His music bore witness to the state of being of America at large, as Wynton Marsalis observed.

### 3.3.1.3. Freedom

Louis Armstrong's artistic as well as personal freedom found its reflection in the choices he made, sometimes with a view to strengthening his position in the world of show business or in order to address difficulties, as was the case when big bands declined in public favour. Never tired of trying out new things, he seems to have made the right choices at the right time. His career comprised extraordinary achievements as a trumpeter, singer and film star. He took the freedom to do what he considered in line with maintaining and enhancing his status as a celebrity, pragmatic in his approach, but without giving up his own personality. He might have repeated himself to satisfy the taste of the audience, but to claim that this meant a betrayal of his own personality goes beyond the point, because, as is known, Armstrong really was in love with applause. His was a full commitment to his art as musician and as entertainer alike, which won him respect and admiration most of the times. Though he was not predominantly engaged for the black people's cause, his worldwide fame and trips as

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<sup>28</sup> R. Ellison, *The Invisible Man*, p.8

<sup>29</sup> Schuller, *Early Jazz* in S. Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.133

"ambassador Satch" to the free America, did probably a lot more to stimulate reflection on the issue than did the beboppers' revolt expressed in their music, which was inaccessible to most listeners, black and white. And yet it was particularly this commercialization of black values and music in the way Armstrong did, that parts of the younger generation disapproved of.

#### 3.3.1.4 Sound and Identity

Armstrong's special sound, both, on the trumpet and as a singer, was beyond incrimination, though. By 1930 he possessed "the finest technique of any trumpeter in jazz, a reckless confidence and an extraordinarily rich melodic imagination". His playing could be as exuberant and playful as it could be of a brooding melancholy and sadness, freeing jazz from being a simple music in accompaniment of drinking and dancing. The listeners seemed to directly sense Armstrong's personality in the music he played. Much rather than being defined by the notes played, his solos own their distinctiveness to the tone quality, colour and form. His technical mastery was put to use more to refine his sound in favour of an economy of style displayed later in his career, than to move to ever higher registers and an ever greater number of notes.

This resulted in his singing and playing being so naturally sublime, that Gunther Schuller couldn't help commenting on his solo in "Big Butter and Egg Man" as follows

"...no composer, not even a Mozart or a Schubert, composed anything more natural and simply inspired"<sup>30</sup>

"Recall that jazz's greatest singers, Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday, never had great range or vocal gymnastic abilities; they had little - in Billie's case no - conventional music training as such. They had a certain grainy, meditative truthfulness, they had swing, they had musicality to spare, they had soul. No acrobatic vocal technique, but they had everything else".

So outstanding were Armstrong's sound and personality that even with such renown colleagues as those in his Hot Five and Hot Seven All Star Bands, it was his identity that shaped that of the band and attracted public attention. It is seen as his merit to have made jazz socially acceptable and known to a worldwide audience, thereby having contributed to providing the United States with a popular art form entirely of its own and to enhancing the status of black musicians in America. As for the latter aspect, it is true that Armstrong did little for the acceptance of blacks in their own right. His struggle for respect and social progress took place within the confines of cultural assimilation, but it was his accomplishment to make the wider public receptive to new sounds and forms of music.

Gerry Giddin's concludes in his biography Satchmo that

"Armstrong was an artist who happened to be an entertainer, an entertainer who happened to be an artist - as much an original in one role as in the other".

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<sup>30</sup> Schuller, *Early Jazz*, in S.Richter, *Zu einer Ästhetik des Jazz*, p.132

### 3.3.2. Charlie Parker

Bird said, "Hear with your eyes and see with your ears." I never forgot that.

Art Blakey<sup>31</sup>

#### 3.3.2.1. Tradition

Like most jazz musicians of his time, Charlie Parker developed his craft largely through practical experience : listening to older local jazz masters, acquiring a traditional repertory, and learning through the process of trial and error in numerous jam sessions. Between 1939 and 1944 Parker played with various bands and toured in the Southwest, Chicago and New York. His first recording sessions made in 1941, document his early, swing-based style and at the same time reveal his gift for improvisation. But he was bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used then.

" I kept thinking, there's bound to be something else...I could hear it sometimes, but I couldn't play it..."<sup>32</sup>

While playing with other young modernists such as Dizzy Gillespie in Earl Hine's big band, which Parker referred to as "a prison", and later in Billy Eckstine's band, they regularly participated in afterhours jam sessions at Minton's Playhouse and Monroe's Uptown House. The informal atmosphere and small groups favoured the use of improvisation which in turn made room for the development of his personal style and of the new bebop music generally. Although Parker is known mostly as an innovator, his repertory is rooted firmly in tradition and is built on a very limited number of models. Among those figure the 12-bar blues, a number of popular songs, several jazz standards, and newly invented jazz melodies using the underlying harmonies of popular songs. Thus, by restricting himself to a few harmonic sources, Parker was able to improvise over a few familiar patterns, against which he could constantly test his ingenuity and powers of imagination. To the uninitiated his improvisational style of playing could easily seem somewhat disorganized, however, analysts have shown that he was in command of more than one hundred different formulae which themselves were subject to constant variation and redispotion. This makes clear, that his approach to music was nowhere as erratic as its reputation, but that it was grounded in the achievements of the jazz tradition - though he himself described bebop as something entirely separate from jazz. It had been the boppers' intention to break with the musical tradition in order to overcome the commercial abuse and triviality of the music produced in the swing era. In fact they envisioned to get back to the music's Afro-American roots, which, at least in theory, would have excluded as much solo-playing as evident in bebop. Not wishing to diminish the revolutionary impact that Charlie Parker's music and bebop in general represented for jazz, I think it necessary nevertheless, to put these changes into perspective. In comparison to free jazz, bebop still contained many elements and structures of the earlier jazz styles, and was, as a matter of fact, rather a redefinition of, than a total rupture with tradition. What was more significant, however, was the altered status of jazz in society as a consequence of the music's dissociation from the mainstream mass culture.

#### 3.3.2.2. Time

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<sup>31</sup> in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, p.178

<sup>32</sup> R.Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.229

The music of Charlie Parker and his fellow musicians in some ways did reflect the mood of the era, whereas in others it did not. I stated before that by the 1940s big bands were slowly dissolving at the favour of smaller ensembles and soloists. Swing music appeared increasingly worn out, which created the afore-mentioned yearning of musicians for something 'new' when World War II came to end. With respect to society at large, bebop was by no means the appropriate answer. The fact that the emerging bebop style was presented as an art that was neither considered entertaining nor easily accessible to the listeners, besides not being 'danceable', did anything but appeal to the broad public. Its Afro-American tendencies did even more to undermine its acceptance as a valuable art form.

"Modern life is fast and complicated, and modern music should be fast and complicated".<sup>33</sup>

Parker's music is a symbol of his inner and outer conflict, expressed in "the fast New York tempos"<sup>460</sup>. The aggressive nature of his playing combines drive and a complex organization of pitch and rhythm, his solo breaks the quarter-note pulse into a succession of varied and discontinuous subdivisions, creating a hieratic, emotionally disturbing effect. The beat in a bop band is "with the music, against it, behind it", by no means creating the joyful dance in time and space as does the earlier swing style<sup>508</sup>. Parker "sought to outrage his public into an awareness of his most human pain" and thereby "captured something of the discordancies, the yearning and cunning of the age".<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3.2.3. Freedom

His artistic freedom found its clearest expression in his brilliant improvisation and harmonic complexity. The resulting force and originality of his style, however, forged his reputation among musicians but led to little popularity and financial return. His personal freedom was that of an outsider, one who was worshipped by his followers, who fascinated those surrounding him and who had the guts to act as he felt. According to witnesses he stretched the limits of human contradiction beyond belief.

"Bird was a most gifted innovator and evidently a most ingratiating and difficult man - one whose friends had no need for an enemy and whose enemies had no difficulty in justifying their hate".<sup>35</sup>

"...During a break, as guest Paul Robeson sang a work song called "Water Boy", Bird trotted scandalously toward the stage with a glass of water."<sup>36</sup>

It might be asked how much freer Charlie Parker actually was by his definition than Armstrong in his make-belief role of clown. No jazzman was said to have struggled harder to escape the entertainer's role than him. And yet, as the boundary between his private and public life was obscured to the point where they became inseparable, his entire life appeared like "a grim comedy". His personal chaos, on stage and off, served as entertainment for a sensation-starved, mostly white public. The rudeness with which he treated the musicians and the audience alike, was soon accepted and imitated as an expression of artistic temperament. The same was true for his addiction to drugs, then seen as part of his high-flying inspiration and uninhibited freedom, which fostered the image of artistic performance being synonymous with 'getting the kicks' His lifestyle came more than once in his way, wreaking havoc on his health, putting at risk his cabaret licence and damaging his reputation in society at large.

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<sup>33</sup> Gil Fuller in S.Deveaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition", *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*,p.494

<sup>34</sup> R.Ellison, *Shadow and Act*,P.230

<sup>35</sup> R.Ellison, *Shadow and Act*,P.229

<sup>36</sup> Giddins,Gary,*Celebrating Bird:The Triumph of Charlie Parker*,p.113/114

"The most important thing for us is to have our efforts accepted as music...there's no boundary line to art"<sup>37</sup> Parker once told reporters. He was flexible enough, however, to not solely play bebop in its orthodox sense but to open his music to classically inspired modes of presentation, as performing with a string group, to ballad playing and to Afro-Cuban influences.

Parker referred to jazz as the "sound of surprise", and indeed his music was one of aesthetic self-assertion that unintentionally gained some degree of political force and value.

#### 3.3.2.4. Sound and Identity

"...well, that night, I was working over 'Cherokee', and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive".<sup>38</sup>

Charlie Parker's sound, just like that of Louis Armstrong, was imitated on diverse instruments by most aspiring musicians in his lifetime and beyond. He is said to have been singing into his saxophone, producing a most penetrating tone with a slow, narrow vibrato, in which swings a great deal of "loneliness, self-depreciation and self-pity". Never perceived as being creating any music, Parker seems to simply "pick notes out of the air", that combine into a most clear and coherent line. For Parker the relation between real life and work is of an immediate nature, consequently, his fight against the "perversity of circumstances" pushes him to acquire blinding virtuosity. The kicks he gets from his playing, appear to be directly communicated to the receptive listener, who becomes himself easily absorbed into his sound. It can be speculated what proportion of his following was secured by his unique tone quality and what role his extraordinary personaliy played, it can be stated with certainty, however, that both added up after his early death to provide for his veneration as a cult figure. Interestingly enough is the fact that, while in his lifetime Charlie Parker's "greatest significance was for the educated white middle-class youth", the non-conformist Beatniks, whose martyr he was to become later, it did not take long after his death that 'Bird's' name went down in jazz history as a legend. Though his rebellious, 'outlaw' image prevails, he is known to and admired by a wide public today.

Together with Dizzy Gillespie, Parker shaped the identity of the bebop generation, not only in terms of their innovative music, but also by way of making fashionable the typical 'bop-talk' and 'bop-look', and, sadly enough, by involuntarily raising the drug-related death-toll among his emulators. Even if the nature of Parker's music precludes popularity on par with that of Armstrong or Ellington, his place alongside them as a creative, modernising force in jazz history is assured.

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<sup>37</sup> C.Parker in L.Lewine, "Jazz and the American Culture", *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*,p.443

<sup>38</sup> R.Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, p.330

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. Toward a Jazz Aesthetics

As we have come to understand in the course of this paper and as I have sought to demonstrate in the precedent paragraphs on Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, jazz is manifold in its manifestations and cannot be approached as a homophone entity. With regard to many styles that are unified by their belonging to jazz seen as a musical category, it is easier to mark their dissimilarities than to define what they have in common. Nevertheless, apart from characteristics concerning the repertory of techniques and formulae handed down from one generation to the next and acquired through hard study, a similar concern for the factors I have analysed above can be found in the musicians' relationship to jazz. This does not suggest that the personal interpretation is the same, hence the distinctive style.

From this follows that the individual style in jazz is an expression of the musician's general attitude, his view of life. The music he is playing helps him to define his position in society, the interaction with his colleagues symbolizes his way of confronting the world. The jazzier acknowledges that life requires a continuous affirmation of the dynamics of existence and re-evaluation of one's own role within that construction. His attitude then is one of flexibility and creative activity, just as his music is life-affirming and spontaneous. Improvisation on and off stage define his way to accept life as a sequence of ups and downs, which he cannot escape but only make the best of. His permanent struggle is that of a revolt against the forces of destiny, not that of a revolution. He does not tempt his fate, but he does not watch and stand by either.

This 'jazz attitude' has its roots in the Afro-American past. Neither the African culture nor the Afro-American culture emerging in the years of slavery and after was founded on the individual claiming power to subdue his people. Instead, the focus was a joint action and communication about the self as part of the group. Individuality was given a framework by the sense of belonging somewhere and yet accorded the freedom to assert oneself against the group. Tradition served as a point of reference, only to be interpreted differently and nourished by the individual.

It is important to keep this in mind in the search for a jazz aesthetic.

Jazz has developed numerous strands within the United States and all across the world, many of which are not part of the Afro-American heritage. And yet, the 'jazz attitude' I have described is what brings the different cultural legacies, histories, mentalities, experiences, and hopes together - regardless of age and race. Members of the jazz community might have various mother-tongues, but they all understand the language of jazz. Just like any language has different dialects, communication in jazz can take place in all sorts of idioms.

In this context jazz and the philosophy of aesthetics in the modern era can be brought together. Both allow for individual and cultural particularities to enter the scene, without submitting to any one dominant form of expression. The art work/ music can be assessed in terms of cultural relativism and as an organon of thought reflecting specific values. The message of a work of art is as important as the narrative character of jazz, both are based on tradition and a common understanding and yet support an individual interpretation.

Seen from this perspective, the aesthetic of jazz resides in the universality of its language, expressed in a diversity of forms. It is characterized by its openness to any influence and new form, as long as quality and coherence with the ideal embodied musically in jazz in the broadest sense are respected. Its aesthetic value can be judged by the performer's personal signature, that is by the way in which he deals with given forms and realities and succeeds in communicating them.



"True art comes into being not so much through efforts and activities on the part of the artist but rather through overwhelming forces which urge the artistic process to be their mouthpiece and medium".

Nietzsche

#### **4.2. A Jazz Aesthetic - or Jazz Aesthetics ?**

At the outset of this paper I was wondering whether it would be possible to formulate something like a jazz aesthetics. In the course of my writing, however, I came to realize that it is not possible to fulfill this task. There is no single definition of what constitutes the aesthetic value of jazz enabling us to render judgements pertaining to the quality of a jazz performance. As a consequence of its inclusive character no universally valid conclusion can be drawn other than an approach must be multi-dimensional. To render an aesthetic judgement would pre-suppose many 'jazz aesthetics', that would respect the cultural setting, the techniques, musical tradition and communicative value of the individual performance. A 'jazz aesthetic' can only exist in so far as it embraces the nature of jazz as art, that is as a particular means of communication. A more specified approach to a personal style or that representative of an era, can only be undertaken by establishing individual 'jazz aesthetics' adapted to the same.

#### **5.3. Jazzpresso II**

In order to come to the full circle of this paper I retrace my initial thesis of jazz conveying certain desired connotations to a product or place. Besides coffee, other products pertaining to everyday life, as drinks, food, cars, clothes, magazines, etc., are readily presented in context with jazz. Mostly this is done by means of commercials accompanied by 'jazzy' jingles to sell the atmosphere with the product - or at least pretend to do so. The character of jazz has in its openness and flexibility proven able to cater to all kinds of tastes - from sophisticated, bourgeois to freaky and artsy attitudes. Jazz is viewed as the expression of modern life per se - embracing 'jazzy' skylines, movement, speed, change, extreme heights and depths, both abstract and concrete, darkness and light, loneliness and mass. The individual recognizes his sort as one among millions of life-affirming modernists. The rootedness of jazz in Afro-America brings to the fore a duality of associations : exotism, a degree of 'strangeness' and the freedom promised by the image of America. All these leave their effects on the *image* of jazz.

To sum up, the image of jazz represents both, a consequence of and impact on the aesthetics of jazz. Just like the image of jazz ensues directly from the jazz aesthetic inherent in the music, it does create a certain aesthetic attention toward the music, that many musicians willingly play on. Nonetheless, the aesthetic value of the music remains unaffected by its image, whereas the image changes with the music to some extent.

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