This present study is entitled “Aesthetic Techniques in Jack Kerouac’s On The Road: A Structural Study”. It purposes to re-evaluate the novel On The Road of the contemporary American novelist Jack Kerouac's in the present day context. This study explores On the Road as an autobiographical novel. It also examines Jack Kerouac’s writing system of novelty: elimination of period, use of long connected dash and improvisational Jazz notes. This paper shows that, how Jack Kerouac has employed “Aesthetic Sincerity” in this novel. The aesthetic sincerity is exposed to sincerity in its traditional sense of a congruence of attestations. Aesthetic sincerity applies to the veracity with which, the writer conveys this congruence in a text. This research paper is a narrative, communicative, and linguistic approach to the novel On the Road. There is a development and changes in the fiction. The reason for changes is not artistic but logistic and linguistic. It is not an ethnocentric study but it is ego-centric.

KEY WORDS: Spontaneous approach, Improvising methods, Aesthetics, Aesthetics of Sincerity, Narrative techniques, autobiographical narration, Self-reflective methods, Jazz aesthetics.

Jack Kerouac was born on March 1922 in Lowell, to French Canadian parents. Lee-Alcide Keroack and Gabrielle-Ange Levesque. Kerouac was an American novelist. He is considered a literary iconoclast with William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, a pioneer of the Beat Generation. Jack Kerouac is recognized for his method of spontaneous prose. Thematically, his work conveys topics such as catholic spirituality, Jazz, Promiscuity, Buddhism, drugs, poverty, and travel. He beame an underground celebrity and, a progenitor of the Hippie Movement.

Jack Kerouac's method was heavily influenced by the prolific explosion of Jazz especially the Bbop genre established by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelomious monk. Kerouac included ideas, he developed from his Buddhist studies, that began with Gary Snyder. He referred to his style as “Spontaneous Prose”. His prose was spontaneous and purportedly without edits, the primarily wrote autobiographical novels based upon actual events from his life and the people with whom, he interacted.

His novels exemplified his spontaneous approach including On the Road, Vision in Cody and The Subterranean. The central features of this writing method were the ideas of breath, which is borrowed from Jazz music and from Buddhist mediation breathing. The method is improvising words over the inherent structures of mind and language, and not editing a single word. Kerouac's system of novelty is connected with his idea of breath was the elimination of the period, preferring to use a long, connecting dash. As such, the phrases occurring between dashes might resemble improvisational Jazz notes. When spoken, the words might take on a certain kind of rhythm, though none of it pre-meditated.

Jack Kerouac's novel On the Road exists within an ethos, where the possibility of truly sincere communication was unlikely, an ironic subversion of 1950s American culture or an authentic, introspective study of selfhood. The novel On the Road is neither ironic nor authentic in its treatment of the issue of the self in regards to other-driven communication. Kerouac imbues the novel's aesthetic with sincerity both in its traditional sense and its new understanding and through the writing style itself. The novel's autobiographical qualities, Kerouac's formal incorporation of Wallace in the On the Road exists as a message of irony against the hypocrisies of the fifties. It work to subvert the dominant ideas of the culture.

The music Jazz, and the earnest depiction of the self in writing regardless of its impossibility, the aesthetic of On the Road points to its sincerity. Moreover, each aspect of the novel's sincere aesthetic qualities fosters communication. With an other. It echoes the public, and communicative aspect of sincerity. Aesthetic sincerity is exposed to sincerity in its traditional sense of a congruence of attestations and intent. Specifically, aesthetic sincerity applies to the veracity with which the writer conveys this congruence in a text. Ultimately, if an author believes and takes pleasure in what he writes, then his attestations will achieve an aesthetic sincerity. Matthew Arnold states this notion in his poem “A Caution to Poets”:

What poets feel not, when they make, A pleasure in creating, The world, in its turn, will not take Pleasure in contemplating. (1-4).

Here, Arnold contends that, if a poet fails to feel and take joy in his writing, then the reader will not experience a pleasure in engaging it. This idea evidences Trilling's definition of sincerity whereby only through a true feeling can convey a true message. Like Arnold, Wordsworth believes that, aesthetic sincerity begins with a true feeling within the writer. His subject matter and this feeling of engagement is perceptible by readers.

Wordsworth claims that, the impression of an aesthetic sincerity in a text and the belief in the reader that, the author is earnestly invested in his subject can compensate for many formal and stylistic errors within it. The aesthetic sincerity of a work carries the potential to negate the work's technical and formal shortcomings. When such a notion applied to On the Road, a work, that has received a wealth of critical disparaging for its stylistic faults, highlights an avenue to ameliorate the work's critical standing. One of the loudest and most prominent critics of the novel On the Road was Norman Mailer, who asserts that Jack Kerouac lacks discipline, intelligence, honesty and a sense of the novel.” Likewise, another Jack Kerouac's critic Truman Capote dismissed Kerouac as an author: “That not writing, that typing.”

Indeed, the novel's content is espoused to sincerity and anticipates the tactics of the New Sincerity movement. On its surface level, the novel provides a discussion on sincerity. In particular, the novel resonates with traditional sincerity in its aesthetic depiction. On its surface, the novel On the Road presents a poetic, energetic, and descriptive prose. It's narrative style, the writing itself resonates with the notion of sincerity through the highly autobiographical nature of the text and its emphasis on the intense revelation of the inner self of the author to an audience. This goal of presenting the self to an audience echoes Trilling's public focus of sincerity. Ultimately, this communicative aspect is beneficial because, it connects rather than isolates. Before understanding the connection of the novel's autobiographical qualities with sincerity, it is vital to understand the nature of autobiography in the novel.

Specifically, Kerouac, according to biographical and historical accounts, hoped to convey in his novel the nature of his true self in relation to the events in the text, whether historical or fictionalized. Kerouac’s Sal Paradise is a character and thereby functions as the narrator of the novel, yet the existence of the original edition of the novel intimates that Kerouac intended a much more personal aesthetic. Joyce Johnson in her book on Kerouac The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac comments on Kerouac's original intentions for the novel. She states that in 1951 Kerouac originally wrote On the Road a “true life” novel and “was ready to give his name to his protagonist and narrator” (15).

Beyond this point, she indicates that Kerouac desired that, this version of himself in the text possess characteristics similar to his own life such as having a working-class upbringing and being from New England. Yet, as Johnson indicates, upon the novel's publication in 1957, Kerouac's publisher forced him to alter several similarities between himself and his narrator: “Due to intense pressure from the legal department of his publisher, Jack had reluctantly disguised not only the names and identities of all the other characters in the book but his own as well, going so far as to turn his mother into an aunt” (15). Ultimately, the character Kerouac intended to name Jack became Sal. However, Johnson indicates that,
Kerouac did not desire this change (15). Thus, in studying the aesthetic of the novel, it is important to point out Kerouac’s intention for the book’s presentation. Namely, he wished his works to be “true to life and his experiences and desired that, his characters and narrator reflect that reality.

While it may be argued that, the name changes and alterations in the novel negate any similarities between the narrator and the real world of Kerouac’s experiences. The reason behind these changes mitigate such judgment. Kerouac’s critic, Tim Hunt states in is critical work Kerouac’s Crooked Road: The Development of a Fiction, the main reason behind Kerouac’s alterations to the novel and the name changes in particular was pressure from his publisher. Thus, the reason for the alternations is not artistic but logistic. Kerouac intended for the novel to reflect his experiences and his personhood. If there is no legal issues, publication of the novel would have contained the real names of the people involved Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsburg, and William S. Burroughs. However, it should be noted, that the existence of real names and Kerouac’s personal experiences in the novel do not indicate that, Kerouac hesitated to embellish aspects of his experiences:

While, Kerouac clearly exaggerates many of the events in the novel, his intention is, to convey a sense of truthfulness and verisimilitude to the events He actually experienced while on the road with Neal Cassady, to whom he refers in the novel On the Road as Dean Moriarty. Thus, the problem in observing the novel as autobiography lies in Kerouac’s clear exaggerations in the text. However, the novel possesses qualities of the autobiographical in a historical take on Kerouac’s revelation of the self. Critics often bemoan the sense of autobiography in the novel. Kerouac’s critic, Johnson acknowledges that in the novel Kerouac “was not writing autobiography in the usual sense.” (407) but more of a fictionalized biography of his own self. Hunt echoes this sentiment:

Kerouac is writing a biography of his self-image. Autobiography in the ‘usual sense’ is unreflexive and anecdotal But biography is reflexive and interpretative. Details of life are selected and arranged according to some principle of illustration. In On the Road, Sal is certainly an image of Kerouac but an image which Kerouac uses to measure his own growth. (5)

In this way, the novel functions as both a form of autobiography and biography of Kerouac’s self-image. It is a fiction, depict both actual events and real people while simultaneously preserving the artistic central to fiction writing such as narration, plot, characterization, tension, and metaphor.

The novel On the Road is criticized as being superficially autobiographical” (5). Hence, when Kerouac’s narrator Sal Paradise states his reason for going on the road with Dean: “I was a writer and needed new experiences” (9). Kerouac is not historically recounting his own feelings per se but mediating his self-reflections through his novel’s narrators. This mediation of the self through a narrator exhibits its “the biography of self-image.” Sal is not Kerouac but Kerouac’s self-image in the text, ultimately, Kerouac’s self-image is determined to reveal its inner nature to the readers of the novel. It is not simply autobiography. The novel On the Road possesses traits of a refined sense of autobiography through self-reflection mediated through the narrator.

The topic of autobiography in the novel is pertinent to the discussion of aesthetic sincerity. Trilling establishes between the autobiography and sincere expression. In discussing the sincerity of the self in regards to writing, Trilling contends that the sincere self, through autobiography, wishes to convey interior knowledge of the self to his audience. It is the belief that the self possesses the aesthetic in view” which is central to sincerity. According to Trilling, the genre of autobiography stems from the individual self’s need for expression. It is a self “bent on revealing himself in all his truth, and demonstrating his sincerity” (25). In this vein, Trilling asserts that, the rise of autobiography proliferated from the self’s own individuality and the desire “to demonstrate that which is to be admired and trusted” (25). Thus, the nature of autobiography demands the self believe. It possesses both a level of import and something of significance to communicate. This belief fosters an understanding of the self as an autonomous individual able to engage in meaningful dialogue with an objective audience. Trilling’s thoughts on autobiography are extended to his beliefs regarding the rise of individualism: “at a certain point in history men became individuals” (24). His notions regarding the sincerity of autobiography transcend the topic of individualism, when viewed under the light of Kerouac’s utilization of autobiography in the text On the Road. Specifically, Kerouac uses the autobiographical aspects of the novel to foster form of self-disclosure, bent on communicating with an objective: Kerouac’s critic Hunt clarifies that, the novel’s aesthetic is unique because of its effect in communicating to an objective reader. This technique places the reader closer to the author by removing the gap between the writer, narrator, and reader.

Unlike his modernist forefathers, who elevated their positions as writers to the point of becoming personas, through his highly personal self-disclosure. His incorporation of autobiographical characteristics, Kerouac echoes Wordsworth’s edict that poets ought to be “men speaking to men.” While not strictly autobiography, as evidenced by Hunt, the novel contains autobiographical qualities, that points towards sincerity through Kerouac’s presentation of the self through the Sal Paradise. Kerouac’s critic mary paniccia carden the Road as an “autobiographical novel in which Dean Moriarty, a thinly disguised Neal Cassady, initiates Sal Paradise (Kerouac) into the traveling life” (85). Unlike Hunt, Carden sees the autobiography possessing a central role in the novel’s aesthetic. However, both Carden and Hunt believe that, Kerouac’s central concern is the presentation of his true self in the text. Whether that text is a “biography of his self-image” or an embellished, autobiographical personal history. She clarifies that, earlier versions made no attempt to conceal makers of time and location, not to mention the identities of friends and acquaintances,” which eventually resulted in “its present incarnation when Kerouac decided to write the novel as if he were answer questions” (85). Whether direct autobiography or a biography of the self, Kerouac’s focus in the topic of the novel is a genuine self-disclosure. Kerouac. Trilling contends that, this topic of self-disclosure is central to form of autobiography: In writing autobiography, the writer must then truthfully reveal himself, if the reader wishes to perceive him as being true to himself and true to his readers.

In autobiography sincerity requires the truthfulness of experience, in the novel, Kerouac seeks likewise to convey the truth of his own experiences. Rather than literal experiences, Kerouac conveys the spiritual experience of an individual’s quest for fulfillment with truth. Indeed, Kerouac’s focus in the text is self-exploration. But, this presentation of the self is not in vacuo. Specifically, Kerouac’s focus is not for authenticity and the isolated exploration of the self which devoids an objective reader but for a sincere communication with a reader, and the attempt to facilitate a dialogue between the readers and the text. Novel’s autobiographical beginning in the exchange between Kerouac’s self-disclosure to the reader through Sal, ultimately engenders an impression of sincerity. Kerouac is being true to what “he was and is” (Trilling 23). This truthful communication of the self, senses his truthfulness to others. Thus, where critics have used the novel’s autobiographical features as grounds for critique, the existence of these autobiographical factors intimate the work’s sincerity.

In addition to the autobiographical aspects of the novel, On the Road achieves sincerity through the musicality of its prose. Specifically, Kerouac incorporates Jazz into the novel’s aesthetic as a stylistic tactic, conveying the fluidity of life that Kerouac perceives it. In the novel, jazz takes center stage in two of Sal and Deans travels to Chicago and San Francisco. The novel mentions jazz in New York, the two most prominent discussions of jazz occur in these two cities. It is George Shearing’s “ecstatic face” (128) in Chicago Slim Galliard’s “wild jazz sessions” (177) in San Francisco, jazz is a recurring theme. What, Kerouac develops in the aesthetic of On the Road is a prose imbued with the musical qualities of jazz, aural pleasure, improvisation, and participation.

Kerouac’s jazz aesthetic resonates with the notion of sincerity through its concern with the unmediated presentation of the self to an objective audience. It is a presentation contingent upon the congruence of avowal and true feeling. Interestingly, the feeling of jazz within Kerouac’s prose is not a product of Kerouac’s frantic writing style but an intentional technique, which he was conscious while writing the novel. James Campbell in “Kerouac’s Blues” makes this point: The improvisatory technique that, Kerouac had evolved while revising the long scroll version of On the Road he called it ‘sketching,’ Shaped by his belief that, jazz is the essential American art form, and his feeling that, no one before him had seen the potential scope of a jazz prose. Kerouac’s model for this new and self-consciously American melody line was adopted from the tenor man, “blowing a phrase on his saxophone till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his statement’s been made.” (367)

To Campbell, Kerouac’s utilization of jazz in the novel’s prose stems from his own beliefs regarding the nature of writing. Kerouac, it seems, believed that the “jazz prose” in the novel would be something unique, revolutionary. The method by which Kerouac infuses Jazz into the aesthetic of the novel is threefold: the treatment of jazz as a language, an emphasis on improvisation, and a desire to foster participation with an audience. Kerouac’s treatment of, attention to These areas produce a prose teaming with energy, melody, and unpredictability. Douglas Malcolm’s “Jazz America: Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac’s On the Road” deals specifically with Kerouac’s process of jazz incorporation which he believes Kerouac’s model for this new and self-consciously American melody line was adopted from the tenor man, “blowing a phrase on his saxophone till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his statement’s been made.” (367)

While, he ultimately proposes a reading of the novel, that centers on the connection of jazz and African American culture, his analysis of Kerouac’s jazz aesthetic cogently displays Kerouac’s fascination with jazz as a formal technique. He argues, “Kerouac’s analogy with jazz is exact. Some of the choruses read like scat singing played back at slow speed, words “blown” for their musical values or their literary link to the actual music.” (86) According to Malcolm, Kerouac intentionally chooses language for its musical effect as well as its topological significance.

For this reason, many famous passages in the novel maintain their resonance. Specifically, Kerouac’s description of Sal’s overwhelming attraction to madness presents these musical qualities. Here, Kerouac’s prose develops a melodic cadence and builds a rhythmic tension, that heightens as the sentence goes on. The first clause ending with “mad ones” anticipates the quick succession of parallel phrases that follow “mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved.” Likewise, the sec-
In Kerouac's specific application of the jazz aesthetic, he values the characteristic of improvisation as being both central to jazz composition and his formal poetics. Hunt states that Kerouac's "notion of improvisation informs the language of his writing at an exact technical level. Though, Kerouac has neither the knowledge of a musician, nor the critical vocabulary of a person learned in the subject of music, he clearly demonstrates a profound identification of the creation of music with that of literary works" (8-9). Beyond jazz, Kerouac himself was a proponent of improvisation and spontaneity in his work. His "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," published in 1958, one year after the release of On the Road, contends that the writer must cast off all external concerns and allow language to take over in the writing process.

Thus, as a general principle in writing, Kerouac was concerned with the notion of improvisation. In the novel On the Road, this improvisation manifests in connection to jazz. While, Kerouac does not directly mention jazz in this passage, the connection is logical based on his treatment of jazz in the novel. In a sense, jazz accompanies the movement of the narrative. Specifically, in their travels, Sal and Dean regularly visit Jazz clubs. Moreover, jazz informs the novel's central theme: the quest for self-signification by giving the characters a glimpse into the sort of freedom they long for. Sal and Dean's experiences in jazz clubs consistently involve moments of transcendence, when they realize the IT16 that they desire to attain, and the fluidity of jazz, along with its apparent lack of resolution, marks them in their knowledge of improvisation and melodic possibilities and by their technical skill and imagination in combining and recombining these possibilities in novel ways" (182). Kerouac seems to be conscious of this connection and incorporates jazz into the language of the text.

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Carlo are unable to “communicate with absolute honesty” their inner natures, the fixed nature of language, it seems, precludes this sort of total honesty. As Leland notes, in regards to the narrator, the novel concerns “Sal's search for a voice, one that aspires the personal as well as collective, claiming redemption and forgiveness for all” (48). This task, is far from tenable. As a narrator, “Sal is not one of the mad ones and he often gets tongue-tied.

Hunt sees the novel's narration as a presentation of the tension “between the enacting of the self as an individual free of society and the possession of identity within and from society” (188), and this tension obfuscates any coherent presentation of the self in the novel. Here, Sal seems to be aware of the shortcomings of language in communicating the nature of the self. While the postmodern emphasis on the slippage of language had yet to take hold upon the novel's publication, the seeming impossibility of using language to communicate with absolute honesty is implied throughout the text. Kerouac's repeated use of the word “IT” as an encapsulation of complete meaning.

Kerouac's use of “IT” seems to be a recognition of the inability of language to convey objective meaning. Kerouac’s presentation of it is not ironic. The novel's characters earnestly believe in “IT”. It chases throughout the narrative as the object of their desires. In terms of On the Road, it appears that Kerouac incorporates a similar sort of earnest irony in Sal's depiction of both his true self and the esoteric ideals of the characters around him. Sal admits that through his journey, he becomes unable to know even himself. Kerouac seems to recognize in the text. It does not negate the earnestness of Kerouac's attempt. It is through this fusion of the earnest and the ironic, that the aesthetic of On the Road finally points to New Sincerity. No doubt, the structure of the novel On the Road aesthetics and sincerity. The aestheticness has become technique as well as structure.

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