THE BEGINNING
OF BOP
1959

Bop began with jazz but one afternoon somewhere on a sidewalk maybe 1939, 1940, Dizzy Gillespie or Charlie Parker or Thelonious Monk was walking down past a men’s clothing store on 42nd Street or South Main in L.A. and from the loudspeaker they suddenly heard a wild impossible mistake in jazz that could only have been heard inside their own imaginary head, and that is a new art. Bop. The name derives from an accident, America was named after an Italian explorer and not after an Indian king. Lionel Hampton had made a record called “Hey Baba Ree Bop” and everybody yelled it and it was when Lionel would jump in the audience and whale his saxophone at everybody with sweat, claps, jumping fools in the aisles, the drummer booming and belaboring on his stage as the whole theater rocked. Sung by Helen Humes it was a popular record and sold many copies in 1945, 1946. First everyone looked around then it happened—bop happened—the bird flew in—minds went in—on the streets thousands of new-type hepcats in red shirts and some goatees and strange queerlooking cowboys from the West with boots and belts, and the girls began to disappear from the street—you no longer saw as in the Thirties the wrangler walking with his doll in the honkytonk, now he was alone, rebop, bop, came into being because the broads were leaving the guys and going off to be middleclass models. Dizzy or Charlie or Thelonious was walking down the street, heard a noise, a sound, half Lester Young, half raw-rainy-fog that has that chest-shivering excitement of shack, track, empty lot, the sudden vast Tiger head on the woodfence rainy no-school Saturday morning dumpyards, “Hey!” and rushed off dancing.

On the piano that night Thelonious introduced a wooden off-key note to everybody’s warmup notes, Minton’s Playhouse, evening starts, jam hours later, 10 p.m., colored bar and hotel next door, one or two white visitors some from Columbia some from Nowhere—some from ships—some from Army Navy Air Force Marines—some from Europe—The strange note makes the trumpeter of the band lift an eyebrow.
Dizzy is surprised for the first time that day. He puts the trumpet to lips and blows a wet blur—

"Hee ha ha!" laughs Charley Parker bending down to slap his ankle. He puts his alto to his mouth and says "Didn't I tell you?"—with jazz of notes—Talking eloquent like great poets of foreign languages singing in foreign countries with lyres, by seas, and no one understands because the language isn't alive in the land yet—Bop is the language from America's inevitable Africa, going is sounded like gong, Africa is the name of the flute and kick beat, off to one side—the sudden squeak uninhibited that screams muffled at any moment from Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet—do anything you want—drawing the tune aside along another improvisation bridge with a reach-out tear of claws, why be subtle and false?

The band of 10 p.m. Minton's swings into action. Bird Parker who is only 18 years old has a crew cut of Africa looks impossible has perfect eyes and composure of a king when suddenly you stop and look at him in the subway and you can't believe that bop is here to stay—that it is real, Negroes in America are just like us, we must look at them understanding the exact racial counterpart of what the man is—and figure it with histories and lost kings of immemorial tribes in jungle and Fellaheen town and otherwise and the sad mutts sleeping on old porches in Big Easonburg woods where just 90 years ago old Roost came running calling "Maw" through the fence he'd just deserted the Confederate Army and was running home for pone—and flies on watermelon porches. And educated judges in hornrimmed glasses reading the Amsterdam News.

The band realized the goof of life that had made them be not only misplaced in a white nation but mis-noticed for what they really were and the goof they felt stirring and springing in their bellies, suddenly Dizzy spats his lips tight-drum together and drives a high screeching fantastic clear note that has everybody in the joint look up—Bird, lips hanging dully to hear, is turning slowly in a circle waiting for Diz to swim through the wave of the tune in a toneless complicated wave of his own grim like factories and atonal at any minute and the logic of the mad, the sock in his belly is sweet, the rock, zonga, monga, bang—in white creamed afternoons of blue Bird had leaned back dreamily in eternity as Dizzy outlined to him the importance of becoming Mohammedans in order to give a solid basis of race to their ceremony. "Make that rug swing, mother,—When you say Race bow your head and close your eyes." Give them a religion no Uncle Tom Baptist—make them wearers of skull caps of respectable minarets in actual New York—picking hashi dates from their teeth—Give them new names with zonga sounds—make it weird—

Thelonious was so weird he wandered the twilight streets of Harlem in winter with no hat on his hair, sweating, blowing fog—in his head he heard it all ringing. Often he heard whole choruses by Lester. There was a strange English kid hanging around Minton's who stumbled along the sidewalk hearing Lester in his head too—hours of hundreds of developing choruses in regular beat all day so in the subway no dissonance could crash against unalterable choruses in implacable bars—erected in mind's foundation jazz.

The tune they were playing was All the Things You Are . . . they slowed it down and dragged behind it at half tempo dinosaur proportions—changed the placing of the note in the middle of the harmony to an outer more precarious position where also its sense of not belonging was enhanced by the general atonality produced with everyone exteriorizing the tune's harmony, the clonk of the millenial piano like anvils in Petrograd—"Blow!" said Diz, and Charley Parker came in for his solo with a squeaky innocent cry. Monk punched anguish ed nub fingers crawling at the keyboard to tear up foundations and guts of jazz from the big masterbox, to make Charley Parker hear his cry and sigh—to jar the orchestra into vibrations—to elicit gloom from the doom of the black piano. He stared down wild eyed at his keys like a matador at the bull's head. Groan. Drunken figures shaded in the weaving background, tottering—the boys didn't care. On cold corners they stood three backs to one another, facing all the winds, bent—lips don't care—miserable cold and broke—waiting like witchdoctors—saying, "Every thing belongs to me because I am poor." Like 12th Century monks high in winter belfries of the Gothic Organ they wiledyed were listening to their own wild sound which was heralding in a new age of music that would eventually require symphonies, schools, centuries of technique, declines and falls of master-ripe styles—the Dixieland of Louis Armstrong sixteen in New Orleans and of big Pops Forest niggerlips Jim in the white shirt whaling at a big scarred bass in raunchy nongry New Orleans on South Rampart street famous for parades and old Perdido Street—all that was mud in the river Mississippi, pasts of 1910 gold rings, derby hats of workers, horses steaming turds near breweries and saloons.—Soon enough it would leap and fill the gay Twenties like champagne in a glass, pop!—And crawl up to the Thirties with tired Rudy Vallee's lamenting what Louis had laughed in a Twenties Trans-
oceanic Jazz, sick and tired early Ethel Mermans, and old bear bed-
springs creaking in that stormy weather blues when people lay in bed
all day and moaned and had it good—The world of the United States
was tired of being poor and low and gloomy in a line. Swing erupted
as the Depression began to crack, it was the year marijuana was made
illegal, 1937. Young teenagers took to the first restraint, the second, the
third, some still wandered on hobo trains (lost boys of the Thirties num-
bered in the hundreds of thousands, Salvation Armies put up full houses
every night and some were ten years old)—teenagers, alienated from
their parents who have suddenly returned to work and for good to get
rid of that dam old mud of the river—and tear the rose vine off the
porch—and paint the porch white—and cut the trees down—castrate
the hedges—burn the leaves—build a wire fence—get up an antenna—
listen—the alienated teenager in the 20th Century finally ripe gone wild
modern to be rich and prosperous no more just around the corner—
became the hepcat, the jitterbug, and smoked the new law weed. World
War II gave everybody two pats of butter in the morning on a service tray,
including your sister. Up from tired degrading swing wondering what
happened between 1937 and 1945 and because the Army’d worked it
canned it played it to the boys in North Africa and raged it in Picadilly
bars and the Andrews Sisters put the corn on the can—swung with its
heroes died—and Charley Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk
who were hustled through the chow lines—came back remembering old
goof—-and tried it again—and Zop! Dizzy screamed, Charley squealed,
Monk crashed, the drummer kicked, dropped a bomb—the bass ques-
tion mark punked—and off they whaled on Salt Peanuts jumping like
mad monkeys in the grey new air. "Hey Porkpie, Porkpie, Hey
Porkpie!"

"Skiddlibee-la-bee you—oo, e bop she bam, ske too ria—Para-
sakili Blooza—menooaistibiatolyait—oon ya koo." They came into their
own, they jumped, they had jazz and took it in their hands and saw its
history vicissitudes and developments and turned it to their weighty use
and heavily carried it clanking like posts across the enormity of a new
world philosophy and a new strange and crazy grace came over them,
fell from the air free, they saw pity in the hole of heaven, hell in their
hearts; Billy Holiday had rocks in her heart, Lester droopy porkpieled
hung his horn and blew bop lazy ideas inside jazz had everybody dreaming
(Miles Davis leaning against the piano fingering his trumpet with a
cigarette hand working making raw iron sound like wood speaking in
long sentences like Marcel Proust)—"Hey Jim," and the stud comes

swinging down the street and says he's real bent and he's down and he
has a twisted face, he works, he wails, he bops, he bangs, this man who
was sent, stoned and stabbed is now down, bent and stretched-out—he
is home at last, his music is here to stay, his history has washed over
us, his imperialistic kingdoms are coming.

ABOUT THE
BEAT GENERATION
1957

The Beat Generation, that was a vision that we had, John Clellon
Holmes and I, and Allen Ginsberg in an even wilder way, in the late
Forties, of a generation of crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising
and roaming America, serious, curious, bumming and hitchhiking
evetywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way—a
vision gleaned from the way we had heard the word "beat" spoken on
street corners on Times Square and in the Village, in other cities in the
downtown city night of postwar America—beat, meaning down and
out but full of intense conviction—We'd even heard old 1910 Daddy
Hipsters of the streets speak the word that way, with a melancholy
sneer—It never meant juvenile delinquents, it meant characters of a
special spirituality who didn't gang up but were solitary Battlesies star-
ning out the dead wall window of our civilization—the subterraneans
heroes who finally turned from the "freedom" machine of the West
and were taking drugs, digging bop, having flashes of insight, experi-
encing the "derangement of the senses," talking strange, being poor and
glad, prophesying a new style for American culture, a new style (we
thought) completely free from European influences (unlike the Lost
Generation), a new incantation—The same thing was almost going on in
the postwar France of Satre and Genet and what's more we knew about
it—But as to the actual existence of a Beat Generation, chances are it
was really just an idea in our minds—We'd stay up 24 hours drinking
cup after cup of black coffee, playing record after record of Wardell
Gray, Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, Willie Jackson, Lennie Tristano
and all the rest, talking madly about that holy new feeling out there in