Revolutionary rhythms : jazz, poetry, and black consciousness in 1960s and 1970s America

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INTRODUCTION

Black Literature and jazz both disclose various facets of Black American culture. They not only reflect each other's forms but also intertwine in their exploration of shared content. In the United-States' segregational context, jazz has been a distinctive voice to assert a cultural ethos while articulating the yearning for freedom which otherwise could not be voiced in the American social body. In the 1960s, New Black Poetry asserts itself with resounding clarity and exhibits its musical lineage which molds its distinct literary path. As it turns out, jazz primarily finds its manifestation in the Black Arts Movement (BAM) through two avenues: stylistically through sound and rhythm techniques, and thematically through weaving narratives of the Black Experience while celebrating jazz musicians and Black music.

Essentially, Black arts of the sixties are propelled as a Black consciousness-raising force, affirming values of Black culture with an authentication of the African American perspective in the United States. Within that context, the writings of BAM poets reveal a multifaceted nature combining revolutionist delivery and musical form. From a musical standpoint, these works are produced in parallel with, and sometimes in conjunction with, the sub-genre known as "spiritual jazz." This genre broadly encompasses a process of spiritual awakening through music, primarily influenced by nationalist concerns, a revival of traditional non-Western aesthetics and mythology, and a commitment to expressing a new Black reality. In essence, this sub-genre can be viewed as the musical counterpart to the Black Arts Movement, sharing similar political and aesthetical goals. It is partly for this reason that I refer to poetic works of this essay as New Black Poetry, due to their abstract yet hyper-real nature reminiscent of the New

Thing in jazz. In this paper, I thus aim to research and interrogate the recurring literary and sonic elements of New Black Poetry to paint a picture of its overall aesthetic to underline its intersectionality between cultural tradition, political drive, and musical innovation.

I will begin by addressing the nation-building aesthetics of New Black Poetry through Maulana Karenga's "Black Cultural Nationalism," (1968) a fundamental framework to grasp the poetry's intent, references, and form. Based on Arthur L. Smith's *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* (1969), I posit that New Black Poetry embodies aggression and unity, serving as a collective cathartic force of intellectual and material disruption. Destructive in its critique of oppressors, as exemplified by the works of Amiri Baraka and Haki R. Madhubuti, yet unifying for the masses, as evidenced in the works of The Last Poets. This exploration continues into an investigation of jazz within Black culture, particularly how it serves as a medium for expressing social discontent. I will first present the intertwined history and shared mission of jazz and poetry within this cultural context. Then, I will return to the works of the Last Poets to conduct a thorough sonic and thematic analysis to highlight the stylistic and philosophic blend of jazz and poetry, which I argue foreshadows the emergence of rap. Continuing with this approach, I will later examine the figure of John Coltrane through the works of Stanley Crouch, Amiri Baraka and Jayne Cortez, which account for a process of mythification. Through verbal and sonic devices, the jazz musician becomes a mythic figure of salvation within the Black nation, encompassing the spiritual, political, and literary ideologies of this movement.

My corpus is centered around performances of poems that were likely not meant to live on the page, though they were at some point put to text either after or before their performance. My interest lies in the transcendence of oral over text due to Black Poetry's roots in an oral tradition that is being rhetorically revived and exacerbated. With this aim, my essay predominantly draws its sources from a collection of periodicals from the same era as the literary works under scrutiny. These periodicals include "Negro Digest" (later known as "Black World,") "The Black Scholar," "Freedomways," "Black Dialogue," "SoulBook," "The Journal of Black Poetry," among others. These magazines not only served as platforms for Black voices but also contributed to a broader movement aimed at establishing black-owned publishing houses and media outlets, cultivating discourse tailored by and for the African American community. This selection of sources proves relevant due to its close alignment with the artistic zeitgeist of the time. These periodicals were sharply attuned to the artistic and social currents within the African American community, often putting forward the works of active authors and reflecting the shape of contemporary issues. In fact, the corpus of poems under examination is in dialogue with those discourses, often illustrating or responding to these conceptual theories. While it's worth noting that a good portion of academic voices found their way into these publications, it is essential to recognize their non-academic nature. Hence, this essay will complement these primary sources with a range of academic secondary material, spanning from scholars of that time to more recent discussions on African American studies. Given the inherent limitations of this approach, the scope of sources necessarily remains narrow. However, the articles within this corpus offer valuable insights into the emergence of New Black Literature,

capturing its evolving essence as it unfolded. I have thus generally adopted a historical approach to unearth and select lesser-known materials in order to create a comprehensive landscape of ideas while adding my perspectives with other critical commentaries. By focusing on these sources, my essay constructs a partial portrayal of the intellectual framework of that movement, framing key concepts crucial to Black culture and literature. In recognition of my position as a white European writer, this essay prioritizes direct engagement with the voices of Black thinkers, activists or artists striving to convey their perspectives and contributions authentically.

I - New black poetry

The conversation between political ideas spread by intellectuals and artistic contributors of a new cultural model—both within the domains of literature and music—deserves examination. And to discuss New Black Poetry's aesthetics, the ideological effort driving the movement must be introduced. Specifically, the essential and recurring principles ingrained in Maulana Karenga's "Black Cultural Nationalism" (1968) stand as this essay's primary source to highlight Black revolutionist rhetoric while pinpointing a new interpretation of the function of African American creative productions within the liberation struggle.

A - Black cultural nationalism: art as resistance

A revolutionary impulse, arising from the struggles of a socially and politically oppressive environment, penetrates the artistic sphere of the sixties as Black artists and intellectuals strive to disentangle themselves from the confines of established white power dynamics. The general idea of "Black Power" comes to mind as a militant ideology of that time which refuses assimilation and champions self-determination and Black pride. Within that ideological trend, Maulana Karenga, a scholar from Los Angeles, had an aim to help Black empowerment, predominantly by amplifying Black culture within White America. This objective supports the nature of the US Organization he established in 1966, a group which aimed to fortify solidarity and surmount oppression with a distinct emphasis on cultural resurgence. In 1966, Karenga and US established *Kwanzaa* as the first Black national holiday, a testament to their

dedication to the celebration and preservation of African heritage. In his article "Black Cultural Nationalism," he establishes his ideological views by underscoring that:

> The battle we are waging now is the battle for the minds of Black people, and that if we lose this battle, we cannot win the violent one. It becomes very important then, that art should play the role that it should play in Black Survival and not bog itself down in the meaningless madness of the Western World wasted (Karenga, 5).

This stance speaks to the fundamental reasoning behind the rise of a new approach to artistic creation, one that prioritizes a penetration of the psyche of the community as a catalyst for guiding the revolution. Accordingly, art is perceived as a valuable resource pushing back dominant culture and stimulating the essence of Blackness. To win this battle, a new value system is implemented for both the creation and assessment of art, thus generating a radical reconfiguration of the nature and role of both the artwork and the artist. In this context, Black artists of the sixties are compelled to align their endeavors with a political mission. Their creative output must necessarily adhere to specific criteria for validity as "all art must reflect and support the Black revolution, and any part that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution are invalid" (5). Additionally, looking at the *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* as a frame of reference, it becomes clear that this text uses provocative language to denigrate the white power structure in the arts, a tactic to persuade his readership of his argument for Black separatism. In a similar vein, poet Johari Amini, in her note "Statement on the Black Arts," (1975) has underscored the significance of cultural reclamation in the face of systemic oppression. Indeed, she further elaborates on the stakes of decolonizing the mind:

> We know that the level of the struggle we are in now is for the *minds* of our people, including ourselves. Our images *must* deal with what has happened to those minds. We often refer to the consequences of 'brainwashing', but Chancellor Williams also said that "brainwashing is too mild a word for what has happened to us—we have had a *white mind transplant*… Depending on where you are, our art will benefit Afrikans, or benefit our oppressor (Amini, 80).

Amini's remarks highlight the imperative need for separation and subsequent reconstruction of the Afro-American self through the establishment of new representations. Notably, the striking mention of Williams's concept of a "white mind transplant" stresses the enduring identity subjugation experienced by Black individuals but also continues to point the finger at white colonial dynamics. Hence, this discourse positions itself as a rejection of assimilation and endeavors to reaffirm and repossess the essence of the people, thereby demanding a comprehensive reevaluation of cultural norms and values for the intent of cultivating a sense of pride and heritage.

Yet, which values are under consideration? While Karenga designed the *Kawaida* philosophy, which introduced the *Nguzo Saba*, a social framework founded upon seven principles inspired by traditional West African customs (Baraka, 54), he also outlined distinct parameters for the arts, which can be applied to both poetry writing and musical composition. From his interpretation of Leopold Senghor's philosophy, Karenga presents three foundational principles that art must abide by: Functional, Collective, and Committing (Karenga, 5). While these principles are interconnected, the functionality of art derives from a political discourse that rejects the idea of "art for art's sake," emphasizing the minimal significance of technical aspects or aesthetics in comparison to the social mission of art. Art is thus perceived as purely utilitarian, serving as a weapon for the survival of the Black community. Then, collectivism calls for the

dissolution of individuality, the cultivation of a collective personality, and the establishment of a Black canon that avoids “the European grift of trial and error” (8). It reduces the artist as bound to their Afro-American context, making it their obligation to offer the people a profound understanding of themselves through artistic expression. In turn, the people inspire the artist through their shared Black identity, forming a reciprocal relationship encapsulated by the proverb, "one hand washes the other” (8). Finally, the notion of commitment, somewhat resembling the functional principle, entails a dedication to radical change and a relentless pursuit of a new Black future, as expressed by the assertion, "it must commit us to the fact that earth is ours and the fullness thereof” (9). Ultimately, this comprehensive framework discerns artistic resources as vehicles for conveying revolutionary messages, thereby revealing an authentic Black experience that should resonate with the African American community. In short, this theory functions as a campaign to instill new dignity and champion Black heritage to determine African-American future as independent.

B - From essence to expression: recurrent black aesthetics

While Karenga’s mission as a Black agitator is to produce the necessary catharsis to gather the masses (Smith, 32), his theory helps us cast the structure and content of the artistic output of his time. This stance raises critical questions regarding the interplay between political, musical, and poetic forms as I believe that BAM literature is a convergence of all these aspects. Yet, Black poetry also draw from an embodied ideology of Blackness. While this substance is, to an extent, also subjected to rhetorical manipulation, I believe that this established spirit helps shape the content and structure

of the literary output. Overall, in Black revolutionist poetry, the prominent theme of resistance to dominant white cultural norms underscores the resilient stance of this poetry in advocating for the empowerment of the Black community. In other words, the poetry of the Black Arts Movement is as much “Anti-White” as it is “Pro-Black” (Touré, 4) because the agitator, or Black revolutionist, cultivates both terror and unity (Smith, 25). Consequently, this section interrogates the ideology of Blackness in poetry, then thoroughly examines its aesthetics through these dual aspects, initially focusing on the insurgent essence of the poetry, before subsequently looking at the communal and participative aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement.

1 - Saturation and soul

If we look at the body of BAM’s works, most writers are highly prescriptive about the criteria that qualify poetry as Black and revolutionary, while only a few explicitly outline a definitive aesthetic for their work. Within these discussions, vague references to beauty are utilized as an ideal aesthetic. For instance, Karenga’s advocates art as "everyday life given more form and color" (Karenga, 7), a concept that, although ambiguous, aligns with the idea that art should be firmly rooted in the lived experiences of Black people. At the same time, it contributes to the “glorification of the Black Man as part of the revolutionist’s mission for an American renewal” (Smith, 40).

Therefore, I posit that the aesthetics of New Black poetry mirror its functional significance. In this regard, Haki R. Madhubuti has attempted to delineate the features associated with BAM in “Towards a Black Aesthetic?” (1968) Where he asks: “What is a Black poet? What is Black poetry? What is the Black aesthetic?” (Madhubuti, 27)

Haki R. Madhubuti, originally known as Don Luther Lee, stands as a significant poet and publisher celebrated for his impactful strides in African American literature and culture. He also co-established Third World Press, a pioneering Black-owned publishing house. Based on Larry Neal's interpretation of a Black aesthetic, he arrives at the conclusion that:

> A blk/aesthetic does exist, but how does one define it? I suggest, at this time, that we not try. However, understand that the blk/esthetic exists and will continue to be embodied in the work of Black artists (painters, novelists, poets etc); and, will be determined from the forthcoming and existing body of Black works (31).

The reluctance to provide a clear definition may suggest a desire to allow Black poets to freely express themselves within a lineage of Black creation. This especially acknowledges and insists on the foundation of a new Black canon in its infancy, hence the indefinite forms of that genre. In this respect, this excerpt touches upon a broader issue encountered while examining Black poetry which is that its literary essence is somewhat readily identifiable yet challenging to categorize. Indeed, identifying Blackness in literature is a nuanced task, as it encompasses both a tangible literary presence and an elusive essence. In "Saturation: Progress Report on a Theory of Black Poetry" (1975) literary scholar Stephen Henderson elaborates on the concept of "saturation" to outline and discuss manifestations of Blackness in literature. He defines saturation as "a sense of fidelity to the observed and intuited truth of the Black Experience" (Henderson, 10). Although this definition can be challenging to apply to text, it attempts to delineate a certain intuited feeling when reading Black poetry. This tool can be put into perspective with Bernard W. Bell's investigation into the concept of

Soul within Black culture—a foundational definition that encapsulates a sensed core of the Black experience:

> Soul power is the primal force of human nature, tempered by a common experience of suffering and struggle for survival that manifests itself through shared modes of perceiving and expressing that experience; it is, above all, the affirmation of the resiliency of the spirit-the inner experience—in a world of insecurity and blues-like absurdity (Bell, 85).

This definition efforts to expose the bottom line of Black creative intentions not only during the sixties, but throughout Black history. It highlights the shared and complex experiences of Black individuals in America, reflecting their personal essence and shared perception shaped by cultural oppression and a history of survival. Although this definition lacks sociological authority and simplifies the complex reality and history of the African American experience, it reveals a conceptualization of a certain ethos that underlies shared sentiments, references, approaches and concerns evident in African American artistic outputs, particularly in poetry and music. In its literary context, this definition gives spiritual dynamism to Black poetry and serves as material for Black revolutionaries to demonstrate a mythification of Blackness (Smith, 36). Put differently, the Black arts of the sixties are to be perceived as a "fragmentary unity, knotted and charged with moments of human understanding brought to its highest density and concreteness—mosaic pieces waiting for their mythic assemblage" (Taylor, 32). In this context, Blackness can therefore be perceived not as a race or identity, but as an ideology that stands in opposition to the creed of white imperialism and supremacy. In essence, this essay acknowledges this complexity while attempting to question and raise attention to recurrent literary and sonic features of Black poetry.

2 - INSURGENCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION

The resilience manifested in this experience stands as a focal point within the Black Arts Movement. Since the spirit of revolt and the weight of purpose drives this movement, it therefore sets the structure of the poetry as the assertive message, transforming the function of literature from conceptual to a tangible social and cultural act. Like all revolutionary initiatives with aim to design a national narrative, New Black Poetry shows a preoccupation with survival, as its creators labor to detach from an inflicted history and express a gritty struggle for freedom. In literary terms, this is posed by James T. Stewart as "can the Black revolutionary artist rid himself of the oppressive aesthetics of the white society in this country?" (Stewart, 15). Likewise, in his article "What the Arts Needs Now" (1967) about Black theatre and literature, Amiri Baraka states that:

> We want a post American form. An after whiteness color to live and re-erect the strength of the primitive. (Plays where history is absolutely meaningful and contemporary.) The first learnings of man. While we fly into the next epoch (Baraka, 6).

Overcoming literary castes is the demand of the author who seeks to establish a transformative point. In truth, Baraka envisions the future of literature beyond the dominance of whiteness while he emphasizes the historical significance of marginalized voices. Implicitly, this complaint demonstrates a process of reversal which belongs to the framework of insurgence that drives BAM poetry. But what implications does this hold for the concrete aesthetics of that movement? Baraka's vision is again concerned with action in his article "The Black Aesthetic" (1969):

> *We are clawing for life*. The forms will run and sing and thump and make war too. We are "poets" because someone has used that word to

> describe us. What we are our children will have to define. We are creators and destroyers-fire makers, bomb throwers and takers of heads (Baraka, 6).

Initially, Baraka refutes the classification of poetry and poets as definitive of Black artistic expressions. Like Madhubuti, he rejects a precise definition of Black literature, and focuses instead on current undertakings that are responding to the pressures of white establishment. In Baraka's vision, the Black poem is an action that extends beyond mere words on a page, it carries tangible consequences in the physical world as a weapon of war. In a true revolutionary sense, the forms of poetry mirror and are intertwined with the unrest of the streets, both participating in the struggle and capturing the essence of reality to birth consciousness. Therefore, Black poetry is intended as a tool for *tabula rasa* here, magnifying aesthetics of a chaotic, warlike frenzy with explosive energy, resonant clamor, and death on display. Using the rhetoric of the agitator (Smith, 25), the depiction Baraka presents of Black art is one of a two-way force both creative and destructive, simultaneously constructing a vibrant narrative of resilient Blackness that brutally annihilates established power structure. This sentiment notably finds wording in his poem *Black Art* (1965), regarded as a cornerstone of the Black Arts Movement.

It additionally appears to have prompted Madhubuti's understanding of Black poetry, which resonates with Baraka's perspective on Black aesthetics. Although I previously observed Madhubuti refraining from defining Black poetry, he later describes the essence of Black poetry, encompassing its raw intensity and bluntness:

> Blk/poems will talk to blk/people and will come like daggers, broken brew bottles, bullets, swift razors from blk hands cutting thru slum landlords and Negro dope pushers. Blk/poems will talk to pimps &

> prostitutes and will aid in the destruction of their actions. Will come like napalm raids over the white house & all its weird ways… Will be sisters burning wigs & false eye lashes, brothers cutting off processes & breaking wine bottles over honkies' heads. Blk/poems will be gang-bangers pulling dope needles out of their arms & sticking them into the pusher's eyes. Blk/poems are death to the unrighteous and birth to the truthbringers… (sic; Madhubuti, 30).

Again, this list deals with a comprehensive view of a literary movement, yet it completely disregards technical analysis and literary aspects. Instead, it expresses the author's vision of the Black experience in America as encompassed within the poetry's aesthetics and meaning. It presents itself as a testament to a Black reality, depicting the inner-city crisis intertwined with the history, culture and customs of the African American community. Indeed, it underscores the belief that poetry can work as an effective response to prevalent social crises, such as economic disparity, racial discrimination, and urban decay, experienced by inner-city communities during the 1960s. Furthermore, the Black poem is shown as a heroic cleansing force that purges the ghetto of its white subjugation as well as its vices such as drugs and prostitution, symbolizing the aspiration for social and cultural regeneration in a marginalized community. This observation finds resonance with “"Communicating by Horns": Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement” (1992), where Lorenzo Thomas comments on Baraka's *Black Art*'s violent imagery and vengeful force. Thomas notes that this force is “derived from mass cult Americana — comic books and school boy recess re-enactments of Van Johnson “Dialing Dollars” WWII movies” (Thomas, 298). This insight is equally valid with Madhubuti's work, notably in his depiction of exaggerated, cartoonish acts of retribution which function as

a kind of revenge fantasy intricately linked to the tangible societal violence emanating from the Vietnam War, gang activity, and the heroin epidemic.

Still, referring to the *Rhetoric of Black Revolution*, this retribution also works as a rhetorical strategy to alter the balance of powers in place. Mainly, the author objectifies collective bodies, aggressively blaming them for the challenges faced by his audience. Derogatory terms such as “honkies” are used to vilify adversaries, and Black poetry further designates and condemns external groups as responsible for the contemporary misfortunes of Black people (Smith, 29). This blaming mechanism functions as the “exertion of a collective despair turned against those in the society who possess means to eradicate the alleged causes of grievances” (32). It proves effective insomuch as the author positions himself as an anti-hero, offering catharsis to an audience familiar with these groups in their lived reality (27). Consequently, Blackness takes on a specific significance as it contributes to the mythification of poetry. In fact, Madhubuti adopts the style of a Black preacher, both in terms of rhythm through repetition, and in terms of strategy through references to specific issues to substantiate his accusations. Ultimately, the proclamation of "death to the unrighteous and birth to the truthbringers” (sic; Madhubuti, 30) emerges as a revolutionist scripture that assigns “supra-natural support to [his] beliefs, actions and goal” (Smith, 37), and thereby inspires greater dedication.

Later in Madhubuti’s discourse, this process extends to language, music, and history.:

> Blk/poems will talk of the Kingdoms of Africa, will speak in Zulu & Swahili, will talk in muthafuckas and “can you dig it.” Blk/poems will be the music blk/people will dance by… Black poems will compliment the art of Tom Feeling and Omar Lama; will be read to the music of Coltrane and Sun Ra (sic; 30).

Black poetry is further shown as a comprehensive incarnation of the Black experience, serving as a validation of social history and artistic heritage as poetic material. Primarily, Black poetry acts as a tool for reclaiming one's self through language, embracing the African American vernacular with expressions like "muthafuckas" and "can you dig it," while incorporating elements from African languages such as "Zulu and Swahili" which fosters a reconnection with African heritage. Moreover, this passage serves as a reclamation of the body, rejecting assimilationist appearances by "burning wigs & false eye lashes" as an alignment with the "Black is Beautiful" ethos. Then, music is portrayed as an ideal form of expression that stimulates movement through dance, asserting that "Blk/poems will be the music blk/people will dance by." Lastly, this poetry is presented as a complement to contemporary art and, notably, to the music of innovators such as Coltrane and Sun Ra, who strive to construct a Black sonic world through their compositions.

3 - UMOJA AND THE PEOPLE

On the flip side, the Black social body also emerges as a central focus and a foremost preoccupation for Black writers as Madhubuti also argues that:

> Black people must come first. People then art. What good or use, is art without the people? … Black poets (blk/ artists per se) are culture stabilizers; bring back old values, and introduce new ones. Black poets are continually defining and re-defining present values and will help destroy anything that is detrimental to our advancement as a people. Black poetry will give the people a future (Madhubuti, 29).

Black poets must take on a spiritual and moral role as exemplars of Blackness and catalysts for consciousness, essentially acting as a reminder of what it is to be Black in

America. The shape of Black poetic aesthetics also lies in the reciprocal relationship between the poet and the community. I am interested in questioning how the community influences poetry and how, conversely, poetry is thought to mold the community. The community or the people could be perceived as a cohesive social group of Afro-descendants from lower classes who live the Black experience as a tangible, challenging social reality, with experiences such as "sleeping in subways, being bitten by rats, six people living in a kitchenette," (27) which must be captured by the poet and converted into poetry. Is Black poetry then a form of reality poetry? I rather believe that it is a deliberate ideological construction of a new Black worldview, assembled from pieces of collective lived experiences, historical narratives and cultural productions of the Black community, which aims to redefine the people through a poetic reflection of themselves.

Again, looking at Karenga's collective principle, art and the people are understood as a unit cultivating a mutual exchange between artist, whose role is to educate the people, and the lived experiences of the people, which serve as inspiration for the poet. In this deterministic view, the poetry focuses solely on the Black experience, as Karenga asserts that the Black individual's identity is inseparable from their intrinsic Blackness, forged within the crucible of the African American narrative (Karenga, 7). This interdependence is thus envisioned as a continuous cycle that rejects drawing inspiration from whiteness and instead embraces Black ideals, ultimately invigorating a sense of liberation derived from the self-determination of a cultural community. Once more, this underscores the revolutionist notion that celebrating Black beauty and resilience will shape the destiny of Black Americans in the face of oppression.

In this instance, Madhubuti, through Keorapetse Kgositsile's work, elucidates that Black poetry's core is love of one's people through oneself:

> I do not write protest poetry. My poetry is love poetry. Check out any Black ghetto in the world. Listen to the songs that move people to the innovation of all kinds of dances and crazy hollers and tell me if that is not love. My poetry is that spirit throbbing with the love of millions of Black people all over the world. But the impulse is personal (Madhubuti, 29).

Expanding upon this insight, the innovative potential of the Black community is pictured as a force for positive change. Here, poetry is defined as the materialization of the universal spirit of Black communities which outline the trajectory of Black poetry towards communal affection, as opposed to Karenga, Baraka and Madhubuti's emphasis on deconstruction of the powers that be. Moreover, the communal energy is specifically rooted in the music and its repercussions on the bodies of Black individuals. This resonance aligns with the goals of cultural nationalism, which seek to express Blackness through artistic creations and ultimately engender a heightened awareness and appreciation of self within the community.

The dynamic symbiosis between poet and audience underscores the evolving nature of Black artistic expression, where voices of the people shape and authenticate the poetry that reflects their experiences, aspirations, and struggles (Turner, 157). The Last Poets' composition *Poetry is Black* (1971) is a fitting illustration of the profound relationship between the Black community and the interplay of poetry and music during this pivotal cultural and artistic period. The original formation of The Last Poets[1], consisting of Gylan Kain, David Nelson, and Felipe Luciano, emerged in 1968 as a

[1] The name "Last Poets" is as a reference and homage to a poem by Kgositsile, asserting that their cohort of poets constitutes the final generation of poets preceding the anticipated revolution.

group of poets and performers in Harlem who engaged in street readings with a goal “to turn people on, to wake people up, make them conscious of themselves and their environment and hopefully push everybody to the stage where their very lives are poetry” (156). *Poetry is Black* is featured on the soundtrack of Herbert Danska’s film *Right On!* (1970) which captures the group's performances on the streets and rooftops of New York. Through its lyrical and rhythmic articulation, this track encapsulates the broader argument that Black poets engage with and express communal experiences through both poetry and music.

Performance stands as a key factor to the perception of New Black Poetry. Given the improvisational nature of this piece, the flow of words may not hold the same coherence on the page as it does in the live performance, especially when accompanied by drums and engaged in a dialogue with an audience. This is essentially what Sherry Turner remarks in her article "An Overview of the New Black Arts,” (1969):

> The new poetry is most often not to be read — but to be recited. It represents a reclaiming and a raising anew of oral tradition: communicating through non-written sources opens up many possibilities in directness and immediacy of expression, in molding or reshaping the given work to fit the mood and character of the audience —leading, finally, to greater interaction between poet and audience; to a new deliberate relationship between the two (157).

In truth, the recording of *Poetry is Black* substantiates this observation, by presenting a live execution with specific intrinsic and external verbal and sonic features. For instance, the piece opens with a dialogue that engages the audience in the unfolding discourse: "Poetry is what? What is it?” queries Nelson, prompting a swift response from an audience member, "Black!" she asserts, while he urges someone in the back to participate. A dialogue is hence initiated where the audience recurrently interjects to

signal their feelings (agreement, surprise, laughter…) with Nelson's affirmations on stage. This dynamic interaction, where listeners spontaneously respond to the sounds , emotions and ideas conveyed by the performer, not only reflects the spontaneous nature of that poetry but also exemplifies a form of spiritual liberation (McClendon, 23). In keeping with this, Turner aptly underscores the influence of church culture on poetic performance: "The New Black poetry draws heavily on this heritage of rhythm — verbal, musical. It is for this reason that the preacher, the holy roller preacher, the 'real poet' is often a source of major inspiration for them" (Turner, 157). Thus, dynamic performance between orator and audience might mirror the responsive interaction of a congregation in a Black church, reacting to the preacher‘s ceremony. The phenomenon extends beyond mere engagement, as the body of churchgoers within a holy roller church is possessed by the holy spirit. In this case, the Last Poets endeavor to possess the audience through the union of music and poetry, intricately illustrating the notion that poetry is inherently resides within the core of themselves. Within this context, the mantra "Poetry is Black" adopts a call-and-response format reminiscent of the practices of folk preachers. Ultimately, this mechanism fosters an animated exchange between the speaker and the audience, where rhythmic and unscripted chants invite active participation alongside the orator (Bell, 26).

As a result, form, characterized by an improvisational and participative performance, and content, encompassing rhythm, poetry, and the collective essence of the people, converge to fulfill a common objective: uniting the medium and the people as an integrated whole. To be precise, it fundamentally defines poetry as an expression of the people and vice versa, conveyed through music, rhythm, and groove:

> Black rhythm yeah, yeah that's right
> Words floating on Black rhythm is poetry
> Poetry is Black words floating on Black rhythm
> Poetry is Black people movin' and groovin'
> Poetry is Aretha Franklin and Ray Charles and blaaaaaack, Black !
> Poetry is Black, poetry is you
> Poetry is Black people, you know, Black people is Black poetry, is Black people (The Last Poets, 0:43-1:18)

Starting with a recurring assertion of "Poetry is Black," the performer systematically claims, line by line, a conceptualization of poetry grounded in Blackness and rhythm. Demonstratively, each line is a declarative statement on the Blackness of poetry, guiding the listener progressively towards the core of the poetry, fixed in "you," which refers to the audience, specifically Black people. It also operates through the repetition of sentences in different orders and places. Actually, there are syntactic turnarounds which emphasize the interchangeability of sentence components, playfully reiterating the impact of the statements, where "words floating on Black rhythm is poetry" becomes "poetry is Black words floating on Black rhythm." Then also "poetry is Black people" becomes "Black people is Black poetry." The reference to popular R&B singers of that era implies that poetry and music, or more precisely rhythm, are synonymous, as they are both "Black words floating on Black rhythm." This line underscores the pivotal role of rhythm as the cornerstone upon which poetry thrives. It elucidates how Black music transcends mere auditory expression, evolving into a manifestation of Blackness through its inherent rhythmic qualities and oratory delivery. The following section adopts a rapid and dynamic cadence with a percussive combination of words to reiterate the assertion that poetry is inherently Black: "Black poetry is Black people is Black poetry is Black people is poetry is Black people is Black AOUH ! Movin' and groovin'

and glidin’ and doin’ the shingaling and Black !” (1:21-1:31) This segment serves as a surge of Black vitality, as Nelson channels the fundamental tenets of his poetry while intertwining them with the influence of Black poetry and rhythm on Black communities. Through the mention, he explores bodily responses, once more reminiscent of the fervor of the holy roller preacher. The mention of the shingaling dance is significant too, as it underscores a recurring focus on Black bodies in movement. Then, the performer adeptly blends sentences into a continuous and harmonious fusion, employing "is" as a linking verb to interconnect multiple subjects that reciprocally qualify each other. In terms of rhythm, conventional metrics are perhaps not applicable here, instead, it is intuitive to understand these lines as musical phrases rather than fixed to metrical feet. The poem, as a whole, operates rhythmically without adhering to pre-established forms, and instead crafts a spontaneous arrangement of words and rhythmic patterns in real-time engagement with the audience. In this case, the performer embarks on a rhythmic enunciation of a particular line, transforming words into percussive elements that complement the background drummer. Consequently, "is" functions like a downbeat or a snare that guides the poet in a formal performance that almost removes itself from the content, pausing just before articulation becomes entangled. The audible exclamation "aouh!" uttered in relief adds theatrics to the performance while it could be drawn to the relief a musician experiences after completing a solo, allowing a moment to catch one's breath before resuming the performance. This is further exemplified in:

> Poetry is Black, poetry is you, poetry is Black rhythm, fast rhythm, fast groovin’ rhythm, you know fast groovin’ rhythm? You know grooving’ fast rhythm? Fast groovin rhythm groovin’ fast rhythm FAST groovier rhythm fast rhythm fast g-g-g-G-G-G-GROOVY ! FAST RHYTHM ! (1:31-1:47)

A simultaneous acceleration of both Nelson and the drummer transitions to a rapid cadence that reaches a point of intended stuttering, signaling the moment where words momentarily overpower the speaker while creating a double-time rhythm. This culminates in another exclamation that channels the meaning he tries to convey: “FAST RHYTHM!” This energy is discharged in the emphatic "woo!"—a burst of energy that segues into a "slow rhythm." Once again, the alignment of form and content is evident as the performer accelerates his cadence to articulate "fast groovin' rhythm," while conversely, "slow rhythm” (1:50) is enunciated in a cool, slower-paced manner. Additionally, the line "Running when it's time to run / And walking when it's time to walk” (2:16) follow suit, addressing self-determination through the moving body in relationship with speed. The poem concludes with a final crescendo centered around "groovin'," repeatedly expressed energetically, to the point of stuttering again. This repetition almost forms a compound word, "GROOVEONBLACKPEOPLE," (2:30) exuberantly exclaimed. Suddenly, there is a shift to a more serene tone, concluding with the statement, "‘cause you are poetry and you are beautiful Black folks I retort” (2:34). This declaration justifies and provides a rationale for Black individuals to embrace their true selves, moving their bodies as a symbolic gesture of freedom and self-assertion through the marriage of words and rhythm.

Ultimately, the term "spoken-word poetry" comes to mind to describe this poem. To be specific, I rather see this piece as an expression of a Black poetic energy, an artistic crystallization of Black music within lyrical expression. At the time, this type of poetry seemed explicitly oriented towards providing instructive insights to the community it

engaged. The Last Poets were giving workshops and poetry readings at a loft on 125th street in Harlem (Turner, 156), which points to the importance of accessibility and relatability of street performances as a means of connecting with the community as “one must move, chant, sing with the poets, become a poet oneself.” (156) All in all, there is a spirited dimension to that poetry. Evidently, Nelson engages in linguistic play, not only manipulating the meanings of words and their contextual relevance but also leveraging their oral quality, transforming them into musical tools as they are articulated. The performative aspect, too, carries an element of playfulness, as laughter recurrently punctuates the recording. This poetry then does not neatly fit into the conventions of a poetry reading, concert, rhetorical speech, religious sermon, or comedy performance. Instead, it assembles stylistic ressources from each of these oratorical domains to convey a shared feeling of Blackness.

C - BLACK CLASSICAL MUSIC: JAZZ AESTHETICS IN NEW BLACK POETRY

Given the incorporation of music in this poem, I posit that, in addition to ideological influences, Black music, particularly jazz, stands as a crucial source of aesthetics across various dimensions. The term "jazz" is put into question by artists of the era, who highlight its exploitation by White America (Roach, 3). Artists preferred the general term “Black music” as a comprehensive designation that engross the various facets of the Black experience (Byrd, 30). In fact, this genre stands as a source of artistic innovation while articulating Black consciousness in the way that it fosters a revolutionary spirit and a Black exuberance akin to that observed in poetry. This segment thus draws a parallel between the sonic advancements of jazz and the literal

explorations of New Black poetry. Primarily, I identify jazz as a vehicle to convey Black realities beyond verbal expression. Therefore, I believe that Black music is a thematic wellspring and formal base for New Black Poetry which strives to capture the fervor of the jazz scene while following its path of sonic exploration. This argument seeks to comprehend musical forms as both influenced by ideologies and as catalysts for Black liberation with a direct challenge of prevailing white norms. Specifically, it is imperative to acknowledge the political dimension of jazz as a medium attuned to societal unrest and as a means to articulate societal discontent. As a case in point, James Mtume's declaration on Black music serves as a testament to the underlying philosophy of Black musical creation which advocates for a utilitarian approach to jazz. Through this lens, I draw parallels between the perceived essence of jazz and poetry, both emerging from the oral tradition. Building upon this similarity, an extensive examination of The Last Poets' *Jazzoetry* serves as a prime illustration of the marriage between jazz sounds and poetic expressions. Ultimately, I argue that New Black Poetry may capture the improvisational aesthetics of the jazz ethos, aspiring to detach itself from predetermined notions of poetic conventions and manifesting a determination to explore and assert Blackness through words and sound as "Black writing will be/… A variation on a theme/or words will notate/ sounds. /music. /coltrane & sun ra/ … words will be used to visualize motion (allegories & andantes)/ in music" (sic; Madhubuti, 56).

1 - POLITICAL VOICE

As attested by Thomas J. Porter in his article, "The Social Roots of Afro-American Music" (1971): "There is no abstract Black music. There is Black Music reflecting

different political positions of Black people" (Porter, 265). Porter convincingly illustrates how jazz has encapsulated the social instabilities experienced by African Americans across generations and stylistic periods. Corresponding to the argument I have made about poetry; Black music is fundamentally perceived as an interplay between art and the socio-cultural milieu of Black communities. Like the philosophies of Karenga and Baraka, these critics contend that art does not operate in isolation from the societal framework. Indeed, Porter accurately observes a discernible transformation in the substance of music aligned with the growing political awareness of the Afro-American working class during the McCarthy era (265).

Bebop is thus viewed as a pivotal benchmark not only for its novel musical design but also for its ideological color. On one hand, in "Notes on the Avant-Garde," (1966) music critic Alvin Morrell traces a lineage of the rhythmic complexities of Bebop to the music of the 1940s, referring to artists like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach who built upon the groundwork laid by Louis Armstrong in the 1920s (Morrell, 238). On the other hand, Porter directs our attention to the increasing political consciousness among Black communities in the 1940s and 1950s, leading to significant protests such as the bus boycotts in Baton Rouge (1953), followed by Montgomery (1956-57) and the freedom rides that culminated in the March on Washington in 1963. Indeed, this fervor intensified in the 1960s with numerous uprisings across various states (Watts, Newark, D.C., Detroit, Cincinnati) and the emergence of radical Black political groups such as the Nation of Islam or the Black Panther Party, and with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. rising as ideological leaders (Porter, 265).

A parallel surge is observed in culture, where Jazz and R&B increasingly voiced the experiences of the Black working class, attributed by Porter to the works of Charles Mingus, Max Roach, and Sonny Rollins in jazz. Hence, a transformation in the societal milieu has prompted certain musicians to play music that captures class struggle and overtly mirrors the social unrest within the community. Max Roach's LP *We Insist: Freedom Now Suite* (1960) is an example of such effort and grappled with themes surrounding racial oppression, slavery, and the quest for liberation. This demonstrated that jazz could function as an artistic denunciation of racial injustice and resonate as a plea for civil rights and equality. Simultaneously, other artists such as John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor embarked on another type of revolutionary path by challenging established musical conventions. These jazzmen were bending the Western tradition with groundbreaking approaches that explored novel rhythmic concepts and new auditory landscapes. For instance, Coltrane asserts a more Asian-African harmonic influence in some of his later works (Miller, 92), while Taylor's construction of new sounds transcends classical elements (Porter, 267). In broader terms, Morrell characterizes the emergence of Avant-Garde Black music as an "erroneous classical style," originating from Black creatives appropriating and reinterpreting European culture while manifesting their own tradition. (Morrell, 238).

2 - *ALKEBU-LAN*: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH SOUND

James Mtume belongs to that Avant-Garde scene of musicians breaking new ground. As an activist, most political concepts I have previously discussed materialize in his compositions. Hence, *Invocation*, a track released as the opening of his debut album,

Alkebu-lan (Land of the Blacks) (1972), serves as a tangible manifestation of these ideas within the realm of musical composition. Emerging from Philadelphia, Mtume hails from the Heath family, renowned for their influence in the world of Bop. As a luminary of the new jazz scene of the 1970s, he found himself under the mentorship of Miles Davis during his “electric phase”, sharing stages and studio sessions alike. While enrolled at Pasadena City College, he actively participated in Karenga’s US Organization, demonstrating his engagement with the ideological currents of the time. This recorded speech holds particular significance as a declaration of intent for the mission of Black music. Paying respects to both Karenga and Baraka, this opening discourse positions itself within the ideological framework of Mtume's mentors[2], and endorses the utilization of music to reach self-determination. Mtume applies the theories of “Black Cultural Nationalism” to the concrete challenges of music composition:

> What you’re about to hear is not jazz or some other irrelevant term we allow others to use in defining our creation. But the sounds, which are about to saturate your being and sensitize your soul, is the continuing process of nationalist consciousness manifesting its message within the context of one of our strongest natural resources: Black music (Mtume, 1:00-1:24).

He refuses jazz as a valid label comparably to Baraka’s rejection of the term poetry, which shows a re-appropriation of a Black resource usurped by the dominant culture. Concurrently, in Mtume’s view, music operates as a barometer of the ongoing political momentum and social discontent, essentially serving as a direct expression and indicator of the Black liberation movement. Furthermore, the significance attributed to the auditory experience, characterized as "saturating one's being and sensitizing the

[2] Amiri Baraka is makes an appearance as a performer on the record.

soul," works as an reflection of Karenga's concept of the "battle of the mind" (Karenga, 5) and Henderson's literary concept. This demonstrates a process of awakening where the music's purpose is seen as pervading the body and seizing the spirit of the Black individual, infusing it with an essence of Blackness through sound. Moreover, Mtume distills Karenga's teachings into a tangible and actionable mission:

> We must begin to understand it is our responsibility and duty to be in constant search of stronger and better means of amplifying, radiating and raising the level of consciousness of our people…We must begin to view our musical compositions as vessels through which concerts become conscious conversations and our records repositories of positive Black images (2:18-2:48).

Even within musical composition, form functions as a conduit for meaning, and art should facilitate the emergence of affirmative perspectives to a marginalized group that is gaining consciousness of self. Yet, is consciousness defined as the divorce of Blackness from the prevailing white hegemony? Is it rather the process of self-realization of Blackness through engagement with Black art? I would argue that Black consciousness stands for a phenomenon of ignition of a sense of "identity, purpose and direction," (3:01) implanted by a value system shaped by the Black experience and propagated predominantly through artistic media such as music and literature. Thus, this discourse serves as a prominent illustration of the mindset driving the jazz conception of that era—an art infused with significance, molded by the people, and perpetuating the revolutionary momentum. All things considered, Mtume's adherence to these principles culminated in a profound, exploratory, and unfiltered live performance that resonates with the experimental spirit of free jazz during that period.

3 - SHARED ORAL HERITAGE

It may be assumed that African American poetry encounters similar intricacies between stylistic exploration and militant voice. Indeed, African American authors find themselves entrenched within a predominantly white society while producing works rooted in Black experiences. In his commentary titled "Black Art, Black Magic" (1967), playwright Ronald Miller ponders whether "Black art will topple racist America" (Miller, 8). Echoing his contemporaries, Miller affirms that Black music, particularly jazz, represents the pinnacle of self-expression and assertion within America (12). Interestingly, his argument concludes on new jazz productions being translated to verbal form: "What would it sound like in words; appear as in definite symbols and images?" (93). I consider this inquiry to be especially important to the creative endeavors of authors of that period as they aspire to apprehend the dynamic essence of jazz, which both stretches technical limits and echoes the pursuit of liberation. Miller even extends his perspective by referring to Amiri Baraka as a "verbal jazz-man," a statement that is a testament to his vision of intimate connection between literary creation and musical expression. This viewpoint is aligned with Askia Muhammad Touré's argument in "The Crisis in Black Culture" (1969). He similarly regards Black music as the most substantial asset within the Black community, serving as a foundation for a shared philosophy:

> As time passed, the Black Musician became and remains the major philosopher, priest, myth-maker and cultural-hero of the Black Nation. What, again, we must be aware of is that Black Music is the core of our National Culture. Being the core or root, as it goes, so goes our spiritual/cultural life as a nation of people (Touré, 5).

What is intriguing, in this context, is the attribution of qualities such as "philosopher, priest, myth-maker, and cultural-hero" traditionally associated with the domain of constructing narratives through language. This establishes music as the foremost conduit for creative expression and self-portrayal, as Touré asserts that Black musicians are the genesis of a national and spiritual narrative, leading to the unification of African Americans specifically. Undoubtedly, this vision resonates with Madhubuti's definition of a Black poet as a creator of a novel ethical system rooted in a collective Black philosophy. Overall, this perspective acknowledges music's potency within African American culture, and Black writers who likely regarded this art form as both a wellspring for their creative endeavors, and a tradition to be revived: "There is no reason in the world that James Brown and Aretha Franklin should not know Leroi Jones, Larry Neal, or Abdul Karim. Some of the newer Black Writers are familiar with the New Musicians — and are even influenced by them" (8). Implicit in this statement appears to be a concern regarding the intellectual and social gap between popular Black music and esteemed Black intellectuals.

In considering the convergence between jazz and poetry, I suggest the substance of Black music and Black poetry originates from shared origins rooted in the oral tradition of African American culture. This essence manifests itself as an emancipated form of expression forged through resistance against colonial cultural norms. To further explore this interrelation, our attention is brought to the foundational elements inherent in both music and poetry, emphasizing the improvisational nature of Black music in contrast with Western tradition reliant on notation. Touré goes on about the origin of oral tradition in the era of slavery (5). Within this oppressive period, the prohibition of

reading and writing among slaves led to the use of songs to pass on knowledge and consciousness, despite the deprivation of various cultural customs. Touré emphasizes that music, with its dual aspects of rhythm and lyrics, persisted as an intangible residue of African heritage, enabling the “Black man to express thoughts and feelings about Life, God, and the Universe” (5). Morrell presents a similar understanding of the genesis of Black musical expression. He stresses the rhythmic essence inherent in communal life, expressed through music, dance, and rituals, which persisted despite efforts to suppress them. This persistence eventually led to a departure from Western musical constraints at the end of slavery, culminating in the emergence of blues and jazz.

Furthermore, in “Improvisation and the Aural Tradition in Afro-American Music,” (1973) Avant-Garde saxophonist and professor Marion Brown agrees with Morrell on the distinctions between Black "classical" music, represented by jazz and blues, and Western European classical compositions. Both critics affirm that Western music relies on harmonic design and written composition, placing emphasis on notation and precision. In contrast, music from outside the Western culture predominantly displays improvisation and intricate rhythmic components, aspects historically unfamiliar to European music. However, these critics overlook the fact that improvisation was indeed a feature of European classical music, as exemplified by composers such as Bach, Mozart, Liszt, and Paganini. Although the nature of improvisation in European classical music differed significantly from the foundation of African American music. Once more, this can be seen as part the rhetoric of Black revolution, where these articles endeavor to portray history as an argument for Black validity. It aims to present Black

music in opposition to European norms, as an independent canon, deserving of recognition and authority. This rationale could be extended to the genesis of contemporary Black poetry, which seems to stem from Black music's fusion of complex rhythmic patterns and lyrics. This departure signifies a divergence from Western conventions, instead rekindling an authentic link with rhythmic structures and improvisation. Also, as presented in *Poetry is Black*, Black poetry appears to depart from the written page, prioritizing performance and embracing rhythm over traditional meter.

While I refrain from qualifying Black poetry as a derivative of Black music, it appears that both media find their substance in the intricacies of personal Black expression within the framework of communal experience. Morrell reports saxophonist Oliver Nelson's feeling on expression:

> Jazz is not only the way Billie Holiday sang but the way she'd pronounce certain words. It's the way Duke Ellington pats his foot when he's playing. Sure, it came out of the experience of the Black man in America — the way he feels, the way he brings those feelings into music (Morrell, 240).

While alluding to the intuited concept of soul I have previously discussed, this unveils that the essence of Black musical expression lies within the intricate details. Indeed, it is not solely about the set form but rather about the manner, purpose, and inherent Black experience expressed through the arts, where the individuality of the creator emerges from the collective Black community. Avant-Garde pianist McCoy Tyner shares this point of view when asked about his craft: "A lot of these expressions— Jazz, Avant-Garde— came about because of our environment… It is an extension of the whole body of Black experience" (Tyner, 40). To put it in perspective, I turn once again to Miller,

who contemplates a definition of a Black Literature and emphasizes the significance of its personal intricacies in relationship with its surroundings:

> I mean, a way of literarily stylizing that little bounce-dip in the walks, those creases and points in those hats. I mean, a literature … concerning itself with colloquials, the little shades and nuances that come out of unique life-experiences, and environmental influences. A literature that asserts rather than explains. That is what I mean by Black literature (Miller, 93).

This perspective revolves around the affirmation of a Black perspective and attempts to pinpoint an aesthetic within an emerging genre without the need for validation nor explanation. However, the primary focus remains in the specifics—how the individual can be distinctly articulated within their context. This very idea, stemming from assembling Black views, prompts an interrogation about style. Still, confining it solely to a matter of style would misconstrue its essence; it is rather an artful projection and assertion of Black concepts that are "not seeking [white] acceptance, but … state [their] superiority …, not out of arrogance, but out of struggle" (Porter, 269).

D - *JAZZOETRY*: HARMONIZING WORDS AND SOUNDS

In addressing these matters, *Jazzoetry* (1972) by The Last Poets sheds light on the profound interrelation between jazz and poetry. First, it must be said that this incarnation of The Last Poets—featuring Jalaludin M. Nuriddin (known then as Alafia Pudim) as the primary writer and orator—differs significantly from the previously examined version, which, at the time of release, adopted the moniker "Original Last Poets" to avoid confusion. Although bearing the same name, Nuriddin's group distinguished itself by attaining both commercial success and critical acclaim. This

formation differs to the extent that they now produce songs in a studio setting with a full band of musicians. For this reason, while both incarnations pursue a comparable objective within lyrical and musical expression, they differ in the formal devices used. This departure from raw poetry performance brings *Jazzoetry* closer to a musical composition, resembling a song in its execution. This creative effort again shows a convergence in both structure and significance. *Jazzoetry* is not a poem about jazz, nor a jazz song about poetry; rather, it serves as a demonstration that jazz is poetry, and that poetry is jazz. Nuriddin seemingly harnesses the vibrant energy of jazz, transforming it into a poetic performance that encompasses the intricacies of spoken language with complex rhythm. My interest lies in the fact that this form deviates from traditional poetry but does not strictly stick to formal jazz conventions either. Instead, it offers a poetic expression of jazz music and its influence on literary expression. Though the poem's written version in the liner notes implies prewriting due to its clearer ending, the song has greater authority since it is the manifestation of text brought to sound. For this essay, the written version functions like a musical score, and the recitation is where the audience can discern the nuanced shaping of words, words that are not intended for silent reading but for pronunciation over music.

Within this stylistic approach, this poem pertains to the birth of rap as a fusion of poetry and jazz. This genre, defined by its reliance on the combination of words and rhythms, blurs the boundaries between song and poetic performance. At its essence, rap seeks to forge a connection with its audience to articulate a unique African American sentiment and perspective through its form. Within this framework, The Last Poets are essentially outlining their innovative artistic effort through the real time enactment of

Jazzoetry. This prompts us to meticulously pay attention to meter and to break the poem down into distinct sections that demonstrate the poet's wide array of flows and delivery techniques while underscoring the importance of Black music as vessel for self-expression, Black consciousness, and unity.

This record can be regarded as groundbreaking, defining a standard in its genre by seamlessly integrating rhythm and flow within a musical performance. Here, 'flow,' which is a prominent term to qualify rapping technique, denotes the way the poet synchronizes with the music, shifting in and out of the drum's groove with varying cadences and intonations. In this regard, Nuriddin's timing and delivery is noteworthy right from the outset:

> Rhythms and Sounds, in Leaps and Bounds
> Scales and notes and endless quotes
> Hey! Black soul being told.
> Hypnotizing while improvising is Mentally Appetizing
> Off on a tangent, ain't got a cent,
> Searching, Soaring, Exploring Seek and you shall find
> More Time, More Time, More Time, More Time,
> More Time, More Time, More Time, More Time (The Last Poets, 0:00 - 0:30)

The vocalist articulates words with precision, setting the stage for a nuanced interplay among the poet's message, its expressive delivery, and the simultaneous musical responses woven into the composition. *Jazzoetry* commences with the poet's a cappella voice uttering "Rhythmssss," with long syllables that prompt a drum response resonating at intervals. The bass follows suit after two bars, and subsequently, the saxophone joins in after another two bars, each aligning with the poet's similar enunciation of "soouundsss." Similarly, in the second line, emphasis is placed on rhyming syllables characterized by the recurring "s" sound in both "notesss" and

"quotesss." This steady rhythmic cadence counterbalances the lively bass line, synchronized with the drums on every beat. Consequently, this initial sequence hints at the notion that the poet's vocal delivery intentionally functions as another instrument within the band's framework.

In parallel, the use of echo on Nuriddin's voice accentuates and extends his enunciation of "rhythms and sounds," seemingly stretching it into the acoustic space. While this stylistic effect adds theatrics and uncanniness, it is reminiscent of the approach famously utilized by R&B singer Curtis Mayfield on the socially charged soul hit *(Don't Worry) If There's a Hell Below, We're All Going to Go* (1970), released a couple years earlier. In both cases, it prolongs and sustains the performer's voice, imparting an impression of magnificence, like an otherworldly or spatial effect, as if the speaker was dramatically speaking out of supernatural authority.

A distinctive shift in rhythm unfolds in the following lines: the speaker gains momentum with the phrase "seek and you shall find,", articulating "more time" repeatedly eight times over two bars. Initially appearing slightly out of sync, the speaker effortlessly adjusts to synchronize with the drum's groove, achieving precision through the consistent repetition of "more time," eventually transforming it into the rhythmic amalgamation "mo-time." To dissect this rhythmically: in a 4/4 time signature, two bars span a total of eight beats. So, the poet intuitively aligns each foot of the eight feet in this line with the respective beats, establishing synchronization between the verse's structure and the rhythmic pattern. This synchronization can be attributed to the inherent meter within these words, where the dual stress on "more" and "time" creates an immediate one-two beat. Yet, the poet deliberately places "more" on the less

accentuated off-beat, while "time" becomes the strong downbeat, perfectly aligning with the bass's groove and precisely coinciding with the driving hits of the drums.

This intentional rhythmic scheme once again underscores the poet's skills and unveils the fundamental rhythmic elements commonly associated with rapping. It not only transcends the conventional realm of poetry reading but also diverges from the songwriting. Instead, we encounter a hybrid form of speech delivery and music performance rightly labeled *Jazzoetry*. From a literary standpoint, the brisk delivery and repetitive utterance of "more time" not only exude a playful quality but also encapsulates a poetic essence. The speaker purposefully manipulates rhythmic timing to articulate the concept of accumulating time. On a broader scale, this segment establishes a profound connection between "Black soul" and the realm of sound, encompassing both musical expression and oral narration. The term "Black soul" strays from its religious connotations and instead alludes to the specific African American interpretation of soul, as previously explored by Bell. This correlation is deeply rooted in the intrinsic essence of the inner spirit, propelling an ongoing pursuit of exploration, discovery, and innovation. In this context, the phrase "Hypnotizing while improvising is mentally appetizing" alludes to jazz's improvisational nature acting as an abstract force that permeates the mind and nourishes the soul. This concept harmonizes with Mtume's interpretation of Black music serving as a conduit for Black consciousness, ultimately tracing its roots back to Karenga's concept of a "battle for the minds" of Black individuals through art.

Furthermore, these ideas are repeated towards the conclusion of the poem:

> On the set ! Ain’t none of y'all been freed yet

Trying to pin what's happening
What you're coming from and going toooo
Communicating with me and you
Internal feeling is spiritually healin' (2:49-2:59)

On a conceptual level, this section firstly deals with freedom in relationship with time. Both jazz and poetry engage with time in their musical essence but also symbolically as a representation of the African American historical narratives and the awareness of such. Here, this passage in relationship with the poem as a whole hints at the the act of crafting jazz or poetry as essentially involving drawing from the past, aiming to comprehend the present moment, and ultimately seeking to illuminate potential future trajectories. To be precise, this passage also deals with communication both within the community between "me and you", but also inner communication that soothes the soul: "Internal feeling is spiritually healin'/when I'm dealing with Jazz." Stylistically, significant stress is placed on the "ee" syllable in "feeling," evidenced by a sudden, loud vocal burst delivered at a higher pitch, causing the recording to momentarily distort. This vocal expression serves as a signifier of emotional depth, and again resonates with Mtume's conceptualization of the body's saturation and the sensitization of the soul through Black music. Jazz, in this context, is perceived by both the musician and the orator as a catalyst for an internal healing force—a notion that an external Black artistic stimulus, manifested in style and emotion, can communicate with and evoke an inner state within another individual and their spirit. In other words, Nuriddin articulates how jazz provides a unique positive influence on the soul.

Additionally, these lines serve as indicators of a broader poetic structure. The phrase "On the set!" disrupts the preceding segment with three brief, forceful words, delivered

in a louder voice. This stark contrast is then followed by the next line, employed a calmer yet sardonic tone to deliver a punchline: a blunt reminder that "none of y'all have been freed yet." This serves as a well-timed cue underscoring that the community previously addressed remains bound, likely encountering constraints in both social and spiritual dimensions. This rhyme scheme deserves closer examination as it can be traced back to the beginning the composition and throughout the performance:

> Left earth on a new birth,
> In space, out space, our place and face us
> Regenerated less complicated,
> Vibrating, Educating, Stimulating
> Young and old as a whole
> Those who know Jazz is Prose and how it goes
> and is going to be, Me, Us, We, Free (0:43 - 1:04)

From this passage, in which it is the most obvious, we make out a general rhyme pattern that features succinct lines crafted by the poet, containing two to three internal rhymes within each line, and transitioning to a new rhyme in consecutive lines. This structure influences the composition on multiple levels: it contributes to the track's bouncy quality, where the inherent musicality of poetry complements a lively delivery. Specifically, the delivery's vocal inflections, emphasizing the rhymes, enhance the groove of the composition and function akin to a leader position within the band. Then, when paired with the lines' meaning, this structure constructs a sharp framework comprised of a sequence of concise, impactful lines that function as catchphrases, or punchlines as mentioned earlier. Certainly, the strength of this device is owed to the poet's sense of wording which expresses a series of concepts both effectively and succinctly. This snappy lyrical approach enables the poet to craft images using rapid

bursts of words, juxtaposing them at times in closely related meaning and at other times in opposition, thereby generating dynamism within Nuriddin's poetry.

Most notably, this section deals with an opposition between the inside and the outside and faces the listener with movement: "Left earth on a new birth/In space, out space, our place and face us." Initially, this idea of an otherworldly reawakening stands as a testament to the spiritual and identity-forming potency inherent in Black music. Concurrently, the poet gradually, word by word, steers the dialogue back towards the Black community from an external perspective. In this context, the term "Us" assumes both formal and meaningful significance as it disrupts the consecutive rhyming pattern of the "-ace" sounds initiated by "space," and refocuses the listener's attention to the Black essence of the composition. This distant point of view afforded by "bop" effectively grants the poet a fresh perspective and a renewed sentiment regarding the subject: "Regenerated less complicated / Vibrating, Educating, Stimulating" (1:03) which are the effects of Jazz on the poet's awareness and understanding of his community. At the same level, the significance of community is made clear as *Jazzoetry* serves as a unifying force encompassing both "young and old as a whole," engaging with the concept of time and personal history and bridging generational divides to create a new collective entity. More generally, it must be said that the poem has a recurrent way of describing *Jazzoetry* as bridging gaps. It is essentially described as an all-encompassing entity, ubiquitous and omnipresent, an energy that can be discerned not only in its intricate details but also in its broader conceptual scope, dealing with concepts as expansive as space "in space, out space," (0:44) time "the beginning of this, the end of that," (1:31) and existence "life and death all in one breath" (1:59).

Continuing with the passage, in the lines "Those who know Jazz is Prose and how it goes / and is going to be, Me, Us, We, Free," the poet, in a reverential manner, prophesies freedom for those who believe in the interconnectedness of jazz and spoken language. Stylistically, the speaker transitions gradually from the individual "me" to the collective "Us," further evolving to the embodied collective "We," ultimately culminating in the concept of liberation "Free." This progression underscores the idea that each individual's freedom is intertwined with the community's liberation, emphasizing the interdependence within the Black social body in order to attain freedom. Ultimately, the performer's expressive rendition, marked by vocal nuances and tonal variations to communicate the lyrical message, once more presents itself as a way of articulating a personal Black experience through the utilization of lyrical techniques and rhythmic presentation, intended for audience engagement.

This concept is further illustrated later in the composition, as the poet clarifies *Jazzoetry*'s essence as a means of self-expression while also paying homage to the community:

> Brilliant colors, Glowing hues
> Intimate expressions, personal views
> Spreadin' the news, by way of the blues
> Brothers, Others, Lovers, Mothers, Sons,
> Friends, Brothers, Others, Lovers, Mothers, Sons,
> Friends, Brothers, Others, Lovers, Mothers, Sons, Friends (2:31-2:49)

The three initial lines illustrate an alignment with the bass' rhythm by continuing to subdue the unstressed syllables and emphasize the naturally stressed rhyming syllables, which culminate in the phrase "spreadin' the news, by way of the blues," seamlessly fitting atop the bass groove because of its four feet in synchronization with the four

beats of the music. Subsequently, the poet disrupts this established rhythm by elongating the vowel sounds and enunciating each word: ”Brotheeeeerss, Otheeeeerss, Loveeeerss, Motheeeerss, Soonss, Friendss.” Following this deviation, the poem returns to a repetitive groove pattern, employing these same words but pronounced sharply and dryly with the stressed syllable of each word hitting as percussive elements on each beat. Again, the carefully woven cadences resonate with flamboyance and vibrancy, directly mirroring the expressive nature of jazz.

The poet tries to paint *Jazzoetry* as a method of articulating thoughts by drawing from the blues as a foundation: through this older blend of both music and words, individuals of African descent are afforded a platform for authentic expression. Additionally, the poet’s remarkable switch of flows draws attention to the significance of family structures, again underscoring the vital role of community for Black poets. The cyclical enumeration of family members holds not only stylistic interest but also invites contemplation on a thematic level, potentially evoking the notion of a circular shape, wherein the poet finds himself in a surrounding loop. The cipher image, often associated with unity, is further implied in this passage as all the enumerated words contain the stressed vowel "O," reinforcing a sense of interconnectedness. Conversely, the term "friends" stands out as inherently distinct, potentially implying a belongingness to the community but not within the confines of the family unit, suggesting a nuanced distinction in the poet's portrayal.

Towards the poem's conclusion, the last few lines diverge from rhythmic enunciation and align more closely with a melodic song:

When I'm dealing with Jaaaaaaaaaaaaazz,

That haaaaaaaaaaas,
Turned me ooooooooooon
Blow your hooooooooooorn
Now turn me on now blow your horn now turn me on now blow your horn
NOW BLOW YOUR HOOOOOORN
TURN ME OOOOOON (2:59-3:20)

I would not qualify Nuriddin's delivery as singing, yet he elongates vowels, transforming them into prolonged breaths that harmonize with the saxophone. Notably, he chants "jazz" at a higher pitch, "has" at a slightly lower note, and "horn" at a slightly lower tone, creating a melodious sequence in sync with the beat. Subsequently, he smoothly transitions into a groovy rendition of "now blow your horn and turn me on," syncing perfectly with the bass' swing and pitch. Ultimately, these phrases are being screamed on the track, adding a contrasting dynamic to the overall delivery, and ending to the vocal performance. In this instance, the poet diverges from the previously analyzed structure of succinct punchlines to engage in a raw and unfiltered performance of the few final lines. The discrepancy between this ending and the written version, which sticks to the established rhyme scheme, likely suggests improvisation. It implies that the poet, stimulated by the performance, spontaneously delivered these lines with increased intensity, deviating from the structured composition to channel the immediacy of the moment. Fundamentally, these closing lines serve as a directive to allow the energy derived from the music to persist and perpetuate its impact by sensitizing individuals through the resonating sounds of the horn. The poet synchronizes his vocalizations with the saxophone, leading us to assert that the voice yields a comparable impact to the saxophone, thereby further blurring the boundary between the domains of language and music.

It seems relevant here to go back to Marion Brown's theory on improvisation to further analyze this passage and suggest that New Black poetry conveys the improvisational aesthetics inherent in jazz, notably, as Brown characterizes improvisation as the "immediacy expressed through spontaneous responses to particular musical stimuli" (Brown, 16). In our case, *Jazzoetry* fits into that definition as the poet, who is also a musician, responds in the moment to cues from fellow band members. On another level, this definition could be transposed to the general act of crafting poetry as the poet expresses an immediate performance in response to societal push and pull between rejection of White America and solidarity with the Black community.

Moreover, Brown laments the shift from improvisation rooted in ragtime to reliance on sheet music, expressing that "the spirit comes only from direct contact with the circumstances that nurture it" (17). Within the context of advocating for and creating an autonomous Black canon, this notion entertains the idea that subjecting Black creativity to Western standardization leads to the loss of the original essence born in that creation. Beyond that, this argues that true revolution and virtuosity seem to emerge from the instantaneous emanation of personal energy in relation to its context. In our scenario, the poet is essentially materializing the vitality of being "turned on" by jazz, marking a process of heightened awareness. Simultaneously, he engages in turning the listener on through his performance along the horn, sharing this profound experience with his community by manifesting Blackness. Thus, the genuine spirit and essence of this piece, both in meaning and form, is authentically conveyed through its conclusion. It relies on improvisation that evolves into a hypnotic chant—"turn me on, blow your horn"—and persists until the final burst of energy. In a broader sense, Nuriddin, employing various

stylistic devices, demonstrates liberated personal virtuosity reminiscent of a jazz musician, where spontaneity and individual sound emerge as the most captivating elements of the composition (18).

Examining Jazzoetry in a broader context, spontaneity and individual expression constitute fundamental traits of New Black poetry, as both improvisational aesthetics and rhythmical forms contribute to its fluidity. This stream-of-consciousness style of delivery provides insight into a Black poet's thoughts via a sequence of emotions and images, seemingly presented in real-time, and depicting spontaneous expressions as they flow over a musical beat. This direct and concise style mirrors the approach of a jazz musician in expressing personal sentiments through "scales and notes" in music whereas the poet would achieve it through “endless quotes.” *Jazzoetry* represents Nuriddin's amalgamation of jazz elements within his voice and words, intertwining sound and meaning to submit that jazz can exist within words and that words can be jazz, as "Jazzoetry is poetry” (1:26). As explored, fusion of music and language yields new stylistic elements rooted in rhythm, intonation, and lyrical content that engages with the African American understanding of music as well as their feelings and concerns about identity and community.

This innovative approach to performing Black poetry, seemingly a translation of jazz into verbal expression, contributes to the birth of rap. While not attributing the creation of rap to this specific piece, I acknowledge that it is a fragment of a complex process that is the rise of the innovative culture of Hip Hop. This culture, not only comprising words and music but also dance and visual art, emerged in the 1970s and progressively assumed the mantle from previous other genres of Black music. In my opinion, this is

partly due to the dynamic nature of Black culture which Max Roach insightfully describes as "fluid" and driven by innovation. As time progresses, newer generations emerge and outgrow the preceding ones with their own technique and concerns (Roach, 69). At the same time, we must recognize that Hip Hop draws elements from diverse cultures and genres, particularly Caribbean culture, evident in its rhythmic patterns and lyrical themes. Specifically, Latinx musical traditions as well as Jamaica's Disc-Jockey and sound system culture has notably shaped the craft of Hip Hop DJing and MCing.

As a result, Hip Hop emerged as a relatable and accessible means of expressing the Black experience and propagating Black consciousness within a predominantly white society. At the same time, this piece, and the evolution of Hip Hop could be regarded as a response to Miller's inquiry about the intricacies of Black literature. In that regard, *Jazzoetry*, and later rap, exemplify a form that transcends conventional literature to address the complexities of a Black worldview. Additionally, this fusion reinstates the poet as not entirely a figure of literature but also a figure of music, and thus reinstates them as, in the words of Touré, the "major philosopher, priest, myth-maker, and cultural hero of the Black Nation" (Touré, 5). The rapper thus becomes both a rhythm maker and a wordsmith, navigating the realms of words and music. Ultimately, this practice is an organic evolution of an oral heritage that sees the speaker expressing Blackness through perspectives and feelings, myths and history, self and community, words and sounds.

II - JAZZ PROPHET: THE MYTHOLOGY OF JOHN COLTRANE

In *Bird's Word*, another track featured on the *Chastisment* (sic) LP, The Last Poets recount modern Jazz's greatest musicians with a particular focus on honoring John

Coltrane through dedicated verses (Early, 375): “and along Came ‘trane! / Who blew away all the pain … / Telling us of a Love Supreme for Black People / That grew strong, and on” (3:22-4:08). Such references prompt me to extend the scope of this essay to pieces that reference the figure of John Coltrane. As Sacha Feinstein points out in *Jazz poetry : from the 1920s to the present,* the John Coltrane poem could be seen as a sub-genre of contemporary Black poetry (Feinstein, 115), as such poems generally pay tribute to both the multifaceted character of Coltrane and the influence of his music. Fundamentally, this specific genre signifies the previously noted phenomenon of channeling the thematic and sonic features of jazz into literature. However, in this context, jazz spirit is focalized through Coltrane as a cultural hero and spiritual force. He becomes a prism through which poets reflect Black consciousness, beauty, nationhood, and the ongoing struggle for liberation. At the same time, Coltrane functions as a steppingstone for the poets to venture into diverse sonic realms as they might draw inspiration from the saxophonist's extensive repertoire, particularly his commitment to experimentation. Interestingly, most Coltrane poetry attributes his quest for musical freedom to the social belligerence and artistic weaponization of the Black Arts Movement. Remarkably, Coltrane’s passing in 1967 galvanized a process of sanctification, endowing both his character and musical legacy with a quasi-religious admiration. McCoy Tyner, a member of Coltrane’s Quartet, remarks “surviving as long as he did as a black musician in this oppressive society makes him a martyr” (Tyner, 45). Such discourse amplified by BAM sets down political and social militant attributes to Coltrane, drawing upon interpretations of the artist's life and his compositions' inherent forcefulness. As Arthur L. Smith puts it: “Inasmuch as mythification sanctions

and direct the aspirations of a people, only a rhetoric that employs symbolisms and images larger than any segment of the nation's population can bring about national unity" (Smith, 40). Essentially, it is this specific nation-building mechanism that I will question through selected poetic works. At the same time, Samo Šalamon's investigation of "The Political Use of the Figure of John Coltrane in American Poetry" (2007) has outlined these topics extensively. I aim to build upon Šalamon's insights by examining works that also address my general argument about jazz and poetry.

A - Black musical excellence

First, Coltrane's aura emanates from his stature as a symbol of Black musical excellence. Visibly, John Coltrane stands as one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century, renowned for his innovative contributions to music. His introduction of novel styles and techniques solidified his status as a pioneering figure, consequently serving as a prominent model for the subsequent generation of musicians (Šalamon, 82). Within his relatively brief career, Coltrane played through various phases that each pushed the jazz scene to pivot towards new sounds. First, during his time with the Miles Davis Quintet in the 1950s, he crafted a distinctive style characterized by swift, intricate improvisation, and an exploration of new harmonic structures. Later, in 1960, upon forming his quartet alongside Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, and Jimmy Garrison, he further developed his artistic trajectory. Here, he embraced Modal jazz by refining the foundations established in his earlier collaborations. At the same time, his win over heroin addiction deepened his spiritual outlook on life, influencing later works. This

facet of John Coltrane's journey enriches a narrative characterized by resilience, dedication, and liberation.

As a result, *A Love Supreme* (1965) appears as a further transcendence of traditional concepts fused with a spiritual tone. Accompanied by a prayer, this album was an offering to God as explained by Coltrane in the liner notes. He was inspired by fellow saxophonists like John Gilmore of the Sun Ra Arkestra to depart from the modal style to further explore sounds and improvisations as part of the New Thing movement. This resulted in albums like *Ascension* (1966), *Kulu Sé Mama* (1966) and *Om* (1967) which marked a transformative period in his artistic journey and the morphing of the John Coltrane Quartet to incorporate emerging talents from the burgeoning free jazz scene including Alice McLeod (married in 1966), Pharoah Sanders, and Rashied Ali.

In this new phase, Coltrane was embarked on a spiritual odyssey through sound, an earnest quest to channel a raw and celestial sonic essence. Stylistically, this experimental phase detached itself from predetermined structures and explored non-Western scales. This era also manifested in expansive collective improvisations, often featuring multiple drummers, bass players, or saxophones, further pushing the boundaries of musical expression. This facet amplifies Coltrane's reputation as an innovator and portrays his persona as a maverick who forged his own path guided by his faith. Furthermore, his abrupt passing at the height of his craft in 1967 solidified his status as a jazz icon, inspiring numerous direct or implicit references, citations, and homage to his legacy in jazz compositions.

Considering the key role of Black music as a source of poetic material for Black poetry of the 1960s, Coltrane's exceptional stature remains a recurring motif in the

works of Black American writers. However, the question arises: why does John Coltrane hold a uniquely prominent position in the poetry of that era compared to other luminaries of his generation? In fact, John Coltrane's persona emerges as a cultural construct of individual genius. This perception often leads writers and cultural commentators to attribute excellence to a single artist rather than recognizing the collective contributions of a community or movement. However, in truth, Coltrane is a product of the collective intelligence of an active scene influenced by his peers, who collectively shaped sound and artistic paths. Nonetheless, Coltrane has been portrayed as incarnating the heart of the jazz spirit and the soul of the Black experience. In both “Ode to John Coltrane: A Jazz Musician's Influence on African American Culture” (1999), and “Miles Is a Mode; Coltrane Is, Power” (2000) Gerald Early and James Mellis present useful underlying factors that shed light on this mythification process. Mellis references Howard Rambsy's observation that poets of the 1960s and 1970s sought to elevate the memory of deceased Black historical figures into exemplars while accentuating their rebellious and nationalist dimensions (Mellis, 2). Specifically, both Mellis and Early pinpoint the promotion of Coltrane and Avant-Garde jazz by figures like Amiri Baraka as a significant influence in solidifying Coltrane's enduring political resonance (2; Early, 379). They similarly note that BAM ideology, which viewed art as a weapon, embraced Coltrane's music as a redemptive force—a vengeful spirit of excellence that could challenge and defy white conformity (Mellis, 2; Early, 380).

Coincidentally, the simultaneity of Coltrane's passing with pivotal figures in the Black liberation struggle, including Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, casts him in a similar light as a "martyr-rebel," a romanticized characterization that filled the works of

writers during that era (Mellis, 1). This essay agrees with these observations and will try, through various works, to analyze the different facets of Coltrane which are often ideologically manipulated as poetic and sonic material. Moreover, I add that Coltrane's increasingly spiritual outlook on his music certainly contributed to a mystic aura around his figure and music that yielded a space for artistic projections and creative reworking of his narrative to fit cultural revolutionary ideology. Expanding on this idea, I wish to demonstrate how Coltrane poetry, while often paying homage to his music, is often removed from Coltrane's actual deeds but establishes Coltrane as a Black allegory and a guiding spiritual force.

If Black music is indeed the crux of the Black nation, we should consider the idea of Coltrane functioning like a national personification of the Black American nation, encapsulating its values and customs and demonstrating beauty and resilience. In this context, Coltrane is mythicized into a modern-day folk figure, with his music functioning like a contemporary spiritual or blues. In this case, it provides revolutionary writers with a formal musical structure and thematic content drawn from Trane's various styles as well as his interest in spirituality and being a "force for good."

B - Spiritual resonance: trane's religious promise and black folklore

As a first case, Stanley Crouch's *After the Rain* is a poetic vehicle to explore these ideas. Featured as a speech on his LP, *Ain't No Ambulances For No Nigguhs Tonight* (1969), Crouch delivers a poetic rendition of Coltrane's identically titled composition as a prayer for spiritual rebirth. Crouch, recognized as a poet, jazz critic, and drummer of the West Coast jazz scene, is renowned for his blunt takes on cultural dynamics and the

intricacies of African American experiences in the United States. *Ain't No Ambulances For No Nigguhs Tonight* marks his first and only published poetry recording, preceding his first poetry volume of the same title. The recording likely came up due to Crouch's booking as an opening act for a jazz concert, where he took the opportunity to give a preview of his forthcoming works. This record is published under jazz producer Bob Thiele's newly established Flying Dutchman label[3], which demonstrated an interest in contemporary jazz acts and recorded spoken-word material with subsequent releases such as *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox (*1970) by poet and singer Gil Scott-Heron and *Soul and Soledad* (1971), a compilation of speeches by political activist Angela Davis. This recording is significant to my argument as Crouch's speech is chiefly concerned with Black music and operates as a critic of white presence in it, along with a rehabilitation of Black musical genres through poetry. At the outset of his performance, Crouch engages in crowd interaction and addresses the appropriation of Black music by white artists who profit from Black creations, asserting that "[Janis Joplin], and The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones and the rest of those people are *Imitation-Niggas* and that is the reason why they are successful" (Crouch, 1.3:56-4:03). This rhetoric portrays Crouch as an agitator who aims to disrupt the status quo by exposing representatives of the opposition (Smith, 27). Thus, this segment serves as a platform for him to introduce revolutionist concepts, including the profound influence of Black American culture and the perceived inferiority of white American culture, particularly within the realm of art and culture. He expounds:

[3] Bob Thiele departed from Impulse!, where he had been the producer for all of Coltrane's records from 1962 until the musician's passing.

> We have, I believe, spiritually, emotionally, and aesthetically subsidized white America as long as we've been here…What has been considered, say innovational, is whatever some white person was able to get his hands on that somebody Black had already done (1.4:24-4:44).

In other words, Crouch highlights the historical context of his nation's cultural development, asserting that Anglo Americans have appropriated and taken advantage of Black cultural force and innovation. In acknowledgment of this situation, the complete performance has music and retribution as a recurring theme through a repertoire of poems that encompass a wide spectrum of Black music, ranging from the title track *Ain't No Ambulances For No Nigguhs Tonight* which takes place at the Watts Festival, to the boogie with *Blue Moon, the Hog in the Spring: A Boogie Tune,* to older jazz forms with *Chops are Flying* to the blues with *Howlin Wolf: A Blues Lesson Book,* to late 1960s contemporary jazz with *Pharoah* and *After the Rain*. This selection of poems might manifest a will to repossess these Black genres and paint them in contemporary fierce light as *Chops are Flying* is an homage to the overlooked Black talents of jazz. On the other hand, through the blues in *Howlin Wolf*, Crouch explores the concepts of prominent Black masculinity and the authentic nature of love between Black men and women, specifically its connection to sexuality. In doing so, he posits that the essence of the blues is something inherently elusive to white people, who lack the capacity to genuinely experience or articulate its essence. Concurrently, the John Coltrane motif appears in the performance on the opening of *Blue Moon:* "The motion would be raised way way up like Elvin Jones behind John Coltrane" (16:55-17:00). This introduces a vivid portrayal of the Quartet, centering on the kinetic energy and dynamism inherent in drummer Elvin Jones' performance alongside Coltrane.

Within this given context, *After the Rain* emerges as one of the more succinct and serene compositions featured during this event, and distinguishes itself as the most hopeful poem of this LP. It bears a resemblance and could be considered a companion to *Pharoah.* In doing so, it functions as an additional foreshadowing indicator of Coltrane's presence. In truth, my analysis of *After the Rain* sees the composition as a prayer—a solemn spiritual plea for freedom and unity inspired by Trane's music. The aim is to emphasize that, while not overtly manifested in its structure, the thematic essence of this poem amalgamates elements from various Black musical genres to fashion a spiritual drawn from jazz. To be precise, let's look into how both the formal construction and symbolism can be tied back to a gospel mode of expression. To frame the discussion, Coltrane's composition initially debuted in 1963 as the closing piece of *Impressions* (1963) and stands out as a slow-tempo ballad. The peaceful and contemplative atmosphere of the track emanates from Coltrane's gradual unveiling of emotions through extended phrases in modal harmony. This slow and emotive style is mirrored by the poet through a steadfast and earnest vocal delivery, providing a heartfelt introduction to Crouch's set: "John's words were the words bird and the other winged creatures sang/How the darkness could and would someday sink behind the sun. (2.19:54-20:02)" Thematically, the interchangeability of poetry and music is noticeable as the poet characterizes Coltrane's horn sounds as "words," while he connects them with those of "bird and other winged creatures"[4] essentially manifesting that Trane's music speaks of the alluring sound of liberty. At the same time, the term "bird" carries a

[4] In addition, the imagery of birds echoes the poem *Blue Moon* performer earlier: "all the trepidating tears we once wish were birds that those Black men's bravery would win against the sky as huge birds with feathers of spears."

double significance, invoking an allusion to the esteemed Charlie Parker, widely known as "Bird." Parker, a trailblazer on the saxophone, stands prominently as a mentor figure in Coltrane's musical career. Thus, this dual interpretation stands as an acknowledgement of the artistic lineage connecting these two luminaries of jazz. Moreover, the symbolic connotation of winged creatures extends this interpretation beyond the realm of music. It subtly hints at the imagery of celestial creatures, thereby potentially contributing to a process of sanctification in light of the premature passing of both artists, and particularly with regards to their profound musical contributions. Either way, this facet enhances the spiritual and religious undertones pervading the poetic narrative. Sonically, an assonance becomes discernible between the phrases "words were" and "words bird," instigating a sweet-sounding cadence that stands as a unique occurrence in Crouch's prose delivery.

Subsequently, Crouch embarks on a series of reflections on the imagery presented by the Quartet, employing a list structure to enumerate the promises inherent in "John's words:”

> How we, when we grew to ourselves past what we were.
> How we would dance outside bucking the eyes of all stars and all light.
> How we would be as gentle as the rebuilt wings of a broken sparrow.
> How we would lick back the rain and wash ourselves with light and our eyes would meet his.
> Our God, our own, our Allah, our Brahmin.
> And we, like all oceans, would know and love each other.
> Salam (2.20:02 - 20:30).

The gospel features of this structure reside in the repetition of "How we" as a rhetorical device that emphasizes crucial themes and messages like scriptures. This repetition not only engages the audience in a participatory manner, akin to a refrain, but also aids the

poet in crafting a promise of overcoming adversity through a tapestry of symbolism centered on light and water. Notably, Crouch endeavors to artistically depict the aftermath of rain symbolically, envisioning the restoration of light through the sun as a manifestation of spiritual awakening. This is articulated as a progression, "when we grew to ourselves past what we were," signifying both the reclaiming of self and the gradual, organic ascent of spirits towards the heavens: “and our eyes would meet his”. Precisely, the incorporation of gospel motifs in this passage unfolds on three distinct fronts. Firstly, it embarks on an exploration of regeneration, employing the metaphor of the sparrow to underscore the concepts of fragility and flight. Following this, the poem transitions to the notion of cleansing, depicting it as a manifestation of awakening. Finally, the work concludes by contemplating the idea of unity, invoking the symbolism of oceans as the ultimate promise. Nevertheless, the poem also endorses non-Western traditions, as the idea of God progressively aligns with Eastern religions, a categorization emphasized by Crouch as "their own.” This cultivation of ownness and the spiritual tone of the poem also aligns with the rhetoric of the Black revolution, particularly in its resemblance to the oratory style of Black preachers. Here, the poet provides the audience faith to captivate their imagination as well as their bodies (Smith, 37). Through this process, the myth of Coltrane becomes exhortative, as religious symbolism reinforces Black hope and offers a necessary respite from the pressures of white society (34).

In parallel, my argument gains nuance when put in perspective with Bernard W. Bell's article, “The Debt to Black Music,” where he emphasizes that contemporary Black poetry owes a substantial debt to the patrimony of Afro-American spirituals and

folksongs. As Bell contends, these musical forms convey a narrative that denounces oppression and celebrates the possibilities of the human spirit (Bell, 17). Moreover, my essay has demonstrated a correlation with Bell's assertion that Black music epitomizes a synthesis of Black America's African heritage with its American experience (19). In my opinion, the poem at hand aligns with Bell's theory and implies a broader argument: the degree of "Blackness" in literature is inherently tied to the music it pertains to. To elaborate, Stanley Crouch, drawing inspiration from the gospel form—a traditional manifestation of spiritual Black music—utilizes Coltrane and his music—a contemporary expression of Black music—as a foundational element for constructing his poetic imagery. At a superficial level, Crouch bestows spiritual qualities upon the original composition, paying homage to Coltrane and offering a promise of brighter days ahead. Yet, on a deeper level, this juxtaposition of gospel structure with jazz music positions Coltrane and his musical contributions within the ongoing tradition of Black heritage. It designates him as a figure akin to a folk or religious persona, evoking sentiments of hope and redemption. It functions as an affirmation and construction of new Black folklore, aligning with the lineage of American folklore of the oppressed that traditionally hinges upon themes of human spirit, social justice, and physical freedom (22).

C - A FORCE FOR GOOD: SONIC TRIBUTE AND IDEOLOGICAL PROMISE

I Love Music (1981) by Amiri Baraka is another poem that reflects and nuances ideas this essay's argument as a complementary reading of Coltrane according to the author's ideological agenda. In fact, we are looking at another form of pledge through Trane's

work. A promise made of forceful expression possessing a dual nature—destructive in its confrontation with specific ideologies and, simultaneously, constructive within literature. Despite the 1981 recording of *I Love Music* falling outside the conventional timeframe associated with the Black Arts Movement, which experienced a decline in momentum during the mid to late seventies, Baraka's creative output from that period vividly illustrates his sustained commitment to revolutionary ideologies. *New Music-New Poetry* (1981), released on independent label India Navigation, is a poetry recital accompanied by free jazz drummer Steve McCall and horn player David Murray. This album features Baraka's radical stance and musical concerns with pieces like *Class Struggle in Music* and *Against Bourgeois Art.* This LP also includes the initial version of *I Love Music*, which, in my estimation, serves as the benchmark when compared to other performances of the 1980s recorded earlier and later. While these performances were undoubtedly integral to Baraka's poetry sets during the 1980s, they were not officially published during that period. However, the rendition examined and transcribed in this essay is the performance of *I Love Music* with the Swiss/German group Arta, featured on the LP *What's ... ... What - Live At The Amerikahaus Munich 21.1.81*. (1981). My selection is based on the wider accessibility of this version compared to the American rendition.

To offer some background information, Amiri Baraka emerges as a founding figure of the Black Arts Movement, assuming the roles of ideological leader and prolific writer whose works and discourse have significantly shaped the Black nationalist ethos. Although one of the focal point of this essay has been an exploration of Baraka's vision of cultural liberation, with a particular emphasis on advocating for the development of a

new Black literature, my objective now is to study his poetic work through *I Love Music*. On one hand, this exploration aims to provide further supporting evidence for my argument concerning the intricate relationship between New Black Poetry and Black music. On the other hand, it underscores the specific incorporation of Coltrane's essence and music within Baraka's ideological framework, where art is regarded as a powerful tool for advancing Black liberation. In fact, Baraka's integration of Coltrane and his musical legacy into his body of work extends beyond the present instance. A notable precedent is found in his expansive poem *AM/TRAK*, dating back to 1979. In this earlier text, Baraka delivers a dynamic and poignant tribute to John Coltrane and captures the essence of illustrious figures of jazz history, including Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Duke Ellington among other masters, thereby crafting a global homage to jazz through Trane. Other compositions, such as *Come Back Pharoah* (1974) and *In The Tradition (For Black Arthur Blythe)* (1981), highlight Baraka's persistent inclination towards exploring and affirming significant jazz musicians of his time as subjects for his poetic effort. Alongside Baraka's deep knowledge and critical understanding of jazz, notably as a free jazz critic in Downbeat magazine (1964) and through his essay *Black Music* (1967), he embraced a revolutionary spirit extending beyond the realm of music. Actively participating in revolutionary movements, he joined the Newark rebellion of 1967 as a response to instances of police brutality. A fervent advocate for revolution, Baraka's literary works frequently echo the ideological strife and physical tumult characteristic of those rebellious moments. As highlighted earlier in this essay, Baraka approaches poetry with a utilitarian perspective, utilizing it both as a form of promulgation and a tangible catalyst for global rebellion. Consequently, Baraka

endeavors to convert literature into a palpable instrument of insurrection. *I Love Music* thus discloses Baraka's interpretation of Coltrane's essence as a "force for good," drawing inspiration from the saxophonist's own words. In this context, I argue that we are presented with a unique promise rooted in Trane's words and music, capable of unlocking ideological and literary possibilities.

The core of this poem finds its foundation in an introductory quote from John Coltrane, skillfully retold and riffed upon by the speaker. Notably, the opening segment of the poem is intentionally structured to repetitively communicate the poet's interpretation of what he believes to be Coltrane's message:

> Trane
>
> Trane said
>
> A force for real good, Trane.
>
> A force for real good, Trane.
> In other words. February 67
> By July he was dead
> By July.
>
> He said in other words
> He wanted to be the opposite
> But by July he was dead (Baraka, 0:39-1:11).

The poet integrates fragments of Coltrane's discourse, strategically incorporating dates to juxtapose a perceived "force for real good" with the untimely passing of the musician. This suggests that these fragments engross Coltrane's ultimate and most authentic purpose. To clarify, Baraka introduces a deliberate pattern of breaks, repetitions, and returns to previous segments of sentences to create an apparent sense of confusion. To an extent, this stylistic choice might mirror the unexpected nature of

Coltrane's passing. In essence, it evokes the idea of Baraka grappling with the articulation of his thoughts, with each pause and interruption reflecting the difficulty of coming to terms with the sudden loss. This technique also evokes a sentiment of abrupt cessation shortly after an enlightenment, hinting not only at the grief inflicted upon the poet by Coltrane's death but also contributing to a martyr-like interpretation of Coltrane as someone devoted to pure intentions in the face of mortality. The following segment shifts focus to Coltrane's musical legacy, as Baraka meticulously catalogs some of the saxophonist's compositions. This detailed listing seems to stem from personal admiration, recognizing the deep-seated impact of Coltrane's musical oeuvre:

> But he is
> Offering
> Expression
>
> A Love Supreme, Afro Blue in me singing
> It all because of him
>
> Can be
>
> Screaming beauty can be
>
> Afro Blue can be
>
> You Leave Me Breathless can be
> Alabama
> I Want to Talk About You
> My Favorite Things
> Like Sonny can be (1:14-1:42).

Once more, if we consider the sanctification hypothesis, the term "offering" implies a connotation of Trane's sacrifice. Building upon the preceding passage, this amplifies the idea of Coltrane as committed to selflessness. Simultaneously, it suggests that his music transcends his mortal existence. In fact, the conjunction "but" inherently contrasts his

demise, while the switch from past tense “was dead” to the gerund “is offering" implies that the action perseveres even through the passage of death. Besides, as Coltrane is seen as a producer of expression through musical form, Baraka’s choice of works from 1958 to 1965 predates the experimental period of Trane's career. This leads me to contemplate that Baraka establishes this post-bop era as the quintessential sound of Coltrane, essentially defining it as a new classic—a fresh foundation and reference for expression. In fact, Baraka articulates how this mode of expression possesses an infectious quality which urges toward recitation and exemplifies this through his own form of spoken music, stating that "A Love Supreme, Afro Blue is in [him], singing it all because of him.”

Crucially, this passage and the following introduce a framework of permission, a pivotal element that molds the composition’s entire structure. Basically, this resides upon the phrase "can be" which constantly appears as both an oral interjection, emphasized in its pronunciation by Baraka, and a significant statement granting permission through Trane's music:

> Life itself, fire can be,
> Heart explosion, soul explosion, brain explosion
>
> Can be, can be, can be, can be oouuaaaheeenoineuahou
> ewhenouyaoueweeee. aeeaaouuuhyteekou
> Deep deep deep
> Expression, deep, can be
> Capitalism dying, can be
> All see, oouuaaaheeenoineuahou nouaahyouunaiieee (1:42-2:19).

In transition from the realm of Trane's works, the speaker navigates towards broader conceptual notions of life. In this context, the "can be" structure serves as a connective thread, linking Coltrane's compositions’ essence with these fundamental ideas.

Simultaneously, it interconnects all these ideas in a sequence, weaving a universal wholeness that is further elaborated in the conclusion. It stands as a testament to the profound impact of this music on the human body and soul, depicted through the vivid imagery of heat and explosion—a dynamic and intense representation of pressure and saturation. As a result, the form morphs as this prompts the poet to repeat "can be" in increasing volume until he himself erupts into an oral improvisation, unleashing an intense stream of saturated and undecipherable sounds. Accordingly, the band, responding to Baraka's impulse, engages in a freestyle phase, mirroring the spontaneity and energy of the poet's expressive outburst.

Paradoxically, in this context, the "force for good," which might reflect Trane's peaceful and contemplative tone, is wielded by Baraka in a vehement fashion, reminiscent of the style found in Coltrane's later works. This is why I find it crucial to take in account the performative aspect, as Baraka's works are often intended to be felt and experienced through the author's execution, rather than merely read, and imagined (Bernstein, 8). In other words, Baraka serves as a prime example of a poet whose dynamic performances transcend the confines of written words, transforming them into actions through the manipulation of recital patterns without prefabricated forms. Considering this, Baraka's vocal performance suggests that he aimed to express concepts and feelings that words fail to convey. As a result, he resorted to his voice as an instrument to articulate the core of Trane's music along with the essence of revolution through a dissonant interplay of sounds. Simultaneously, Baraka exhibits acute awareness of the intertwined origins of jazz and poetry, deliberately shaping his verses like musical compositions with the intent to dismantle neocolonialism. This is

made clear in the liner note of *New Music - New Poetry* where he introduces the concept of *Poetrymusic,* essentially his version o*f Jazzoetry*:

> Poetry, first of all, was and still is a musical form. It is speech *musicked.* It, to be most powerful, must reach to where speech begins, as sound and bring the sound into full focus as highly rhythmic communication. High Speech. (sic)

Through this lens, it becomes apparent that Baraka's sequence of emotionally charged sound interjections, expressed in bursts of improvised onomatopoeias, also servesd as a device to anchor his poetry within a sonic landscape inherently bound to Black music, functioning as a form of "High Speech." Incidentally, it is worth noting that Baraka employs a diverse palette of sounds using various techniques—some more percussive in nature, while others emulate the tones of a horn. In my perspective, this also clarifies the connection between the idea of "expression" and the event of "capitalism dying." In his performance, Baraka promptly channels his intrinsic agenda—Marxist revolution—and the core of his poetry—Black music—onto Coltrane's deeply expressive and spiritual art. Essentially, although Coltrane's music may not overtly carry an anti-capitalistic or revolutionary message, Baraka skillfully interweaves his own convictions seamlessly into this musical lineage. In this process, the poem transcends the confines of literature, and emerges into the auditory, social, and mental space of its listeners. Therefore, it encapsulates an absolute essence, a completeness that defines both everything and its opposite: “Full full full can be/Empty too.” This concept becomes particularly pronounced towards the end of the poem, as the author expresses profound existential ideas derived initially from John Coltrane:

> Afroblue can be
> All of it meaning

Essence revelation
Everything together
Wailing in unison
A terrible wholeness (2:52-2:58).

These constituents epitomize the apex of both Coltrane's jazz and Baraka's poetry, as the poem probes the fundamental core of its existence— a sheer powerful, profound, ever-present grave Black consciousness through sound. Stylistically, it manifests as a final series of blows, accentuated by the drummer hitting the kick drum and crash cymbal on every accent of Baraka's concluding lines. In a manner reminiscent of *Jazzoetry*, this portrayal aligns jazz and words as a universal, all-encompassing, and profound entity. Ultimately, the concluding terms "terrible wholeness," in my view, allude to the unity of revolutionary ideology, Black sonic aesthetics and poetics embedded in this poem, while the mention of "essence revelation" suggests the consciousness process that the amalgamation of these three elements might generate.

Having illustrated the ideological and sonic connections within this poem, let's step back a bit and look at its connection to literature, which is emphasized just before the conclusion:

Sean O'Casey in Ireland can be
Lu Xun in China can be
Brecht, Weill and Gorky, Langston Hughes, Sterling can be
Trane, Bird’s main man can be
Big Maybelle can be (2:37-2:47).

Once again, the common thread with the arts is established through an ideological standpoint, as all these writers symbolize the working-class experience within the realm of literature. Taking an internationalist Marxist approach, the poet intricately lists these 20th-century literary figures from around the globe, recognized for their exploration of

socio-political themes, particularly the struggles of the working class, or, in the case of O'Casey, nationalistic concerns. Simultaneously, the acknowledgment of the collaborative efforts of Brecht and Weill highlight a correlation between music and literature. Moreover, the focus shifts to emblematic African American writers, such as Langston Hughes—a pivotal figure in shaping the canon of Black poetry—and Sterling Brown, credited with pioneering the field of Black literary studies (Zu-Bolton, 2). Crucially, both authors are recognized for their deep connection to music as one is hailed as a trailblazer in the domain of Jazz Poetry, while the other is credited with establishing the acknowledgment of music as an important form of Black literary material. In the end, this literary realm is contrasted with the heritage of Black American music, conveyed by influential figures like Trane, Bird, and Big Maybelle. In line with James Mellis's perspective, this poem effectively contributes to the symbolic construction of Coltrane and the function of Black music as driven by a political agenda (Mellis, 2). However, in transcendance of those aspects, Trane becomes a fundamental element for exploring the inherent connection between literature and music. This transformation portrays the recital of poetry and its oral attributes as both a part of Black music and a contributing act to the revolution.

D - Memory and the Black Nation's Musical Redeemer

As a final piece of my analysis of Coltrane poetry, I chose from the rich repertoire of Jayne Cortez, who, similarly to her peers, portrays Coltrane as a cultural redeemer and ideological force in her composition *How Long Has Trane Been Gone* (1968). In truth, my analysis sees this piece as a promise of nationhood with a reinstatement of

Blackness and an alert towards ignorance of such. The intention is to highlight John Coltrane as social glue, and his emergence as a new mythical figure within the narrative of the Black nation. In effect, the importance of community, and, on a broader scale, nationhood are transferred through the figure of the great jazz musician. Generally, Cortez's body of work presents a distinct Black feminine perspective and engages with the role of the artist in revolutionary politics while celebrating Black artists and cultural figures. In her songs and poems, she frequently embraces a structure reminiscent of the blues and jazz, a style that aligns with the themes explored in this essay. As a writer and activist, Cortez played a significant role in the Black Arts Movement. In Watts, she contributed to her artistic community by establishing and directing the Los Angeles' Watts Repertory Theatre Company in 1964. After establishing herself in New York in 1967, she took another stride by founding her independent publishing company, Bola Press in 1972. This venture served as a platform for publishing not only her poetry works but also the records of her band, The Firespitters, during the 1980s. These albums are distinguished by the fusion of spoken word poetry and jazz music.

That is the reason why my analysis focuses on the 1974 version of *How Long Has Trane Been Gone*, even though it was initially penned in July 1968, exactly a year after Coltrane's demise, and later included in Cortez's first poetry collection *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Wares* (1969). The version under examination was performed as a duet with renowned bassist Richard Davis and is featured on *Celebrations and Solitudes* (1974), her debut record. This piece, rather than functioning as a eulogy for Coltrane, serves as a call for awareness regarding the history and essence of Black individuals through the figure and music of the great horn player. Once more,

this poem is navigating amidst ideological positioning, sonic aesthetics, and poetic expression. The ideological underpinning of the work is rooted in a palpable sense of urgency and deep-seated angst directed towards the commercialization (whitening) of Black art and Black people's neglect for their own essence. The work's poetic expression is intricately interwoven with the tapestry of Black musical expression, with particular emphasis on John Coltrane's exceptional talent. Here, Coltrane is exalted to a pedestal, cast as a leader whose music works as a prompt for Black unity. Sonically, the poem finds resonance in its performative framework, notably in its synergy with Davis' exploration of tones. This collaborative interplay affords us a gateway to a rich tapestry of sound shapes and patterns, engaged in a meaningful dialogue with the music itself.

Primarily, the poem harnesses Coltrane's essence for political impetus while it enters a dialogue with the audience, articulating a dissatisfaction with the commercialization of Black music and the gradual dilution of its identity-forming impact. This sentiment aligns with Stanley Crouch's expressed animosity towards the insufficient acknowledgment among Black individuals of their rich musical heritage. The interrogative nature of the first half of the poem imbues it with a reproachful tone and a sincere concern for memory. As a main device, Cortez assigns accountability for Black grievances by pointing her finger to the white power structure and its ignorance within the Black community. First, the song's inception marks a reclaiming of the Black essence inherent in jazz and blues, shedding light on the very Blackness embedded in their creation. The proclamation "Black Music/all about you" specifically addresses the African American community, positioning it as the source and intended audience for this musical form. As elucidated earlier in this essay, particularly in the analysis of

Poetry is Black, there appears to be an inseparable connection between music (or expression) and the Black experience—an association seemingly overlooked by the intended recipient in this context:

> And the musicians that
> write & play about you
> A Black brother groanin
> A Black sister moanin
> and beautiful Black children
> ragged under-fed laughin'
> not knowin
> Will you remember their names
> or do they have no names
> No lives
> Only products
> to be used when you wanta
> dance & cry (Cortez, 0:32-1:01)

Given that music serves as a genuine expression of the community and a creator of a collective psyche, the commercialization of this music appears to create a rift, that distances the core of the music—the people—from their own essence. In this instance, the focus on sounds such as "groanin," "moanin," and "laughin" alludes to the diverse range of expressions that Black people can convey. This becomes more significant as Davis' bass riffs complement Cortez's high-pitched delivery of these terms; these bass sounds appear to contribute to the illustration of these words as audible expressions. At the same time, the deliberate anonymity of these Black individuals reinforces Cortez's argument regarding ignorance, as they are defined solely by the tonal quality of their expression. Furthermore, the notion of jazz and blues being reduced to a tool to "dance & cry" intentionally confines them to stereotypical characteristics, pointing to their understanding as entertainment, a mere source of amusement (Byrd, 30).

Essentially, Black music is painted as a conduit for memory of Blackness as phrases like "Will you remember their names/or do they have no names" function as rhetorical inquiries, adding to a confrontational framework that positions Cortez against an audience that appears indifferent to the genuine experiences of Black individuals—men, women, and children—that find expression through the music:

> You takin—they givin
> You livin—they creatin
> Starving dying trying
> to make a better tomorrow
> Giving you & your children
> a history
> But what do you care about
> history—Black history
> and John Coltrane (1:02-1:22)

Cortez exposes this producer-consumer divide, suggesting a capitalist system that exploits musicians, and Black people in general. A system that casts them as martyrs sacrificing themselves for the survival of the Black community without receiving the recognition they deserve. In this unfolding narrative, employing an unmasking approach, the phrase "what do you care" serves as a direct challenge to individuals feigning concern for a situation they evidently do not care about. In contrast, she introduces the figure of John Coltrane, depicting him not merely as a musical talent but as a bestower of Black history. This deliberate use of Trane aligns with Baraka's political approach which acknowledges Coltrane's social impact beyond the realm of music. Moreover, Cortez observes the specific ways in which Black music was neglected or erased. She points her finger at the "club owners & disc jockeys," (1:46) characterizing them as accomplices who "really don't give a shit long as [they] take"

(1:47). This biting illustration vividly captures the greed and predatory nature of the industry as she goes on to express:

> but what happened
> I'll tell you what happened
> They divided Black music
> doubled the money
> and left us split again
> is what happened (2:05-2:16)

In my view, this represents a blatant symbol of Cortez's stylistic approach evident throughout the poem—bold, sharp, and distinctly colloquial. Much like the technique observed in Nuriddin's work, this functions as a punchline, deftly playing with the intricacies of the record industry's financial dynamics, specifically the allocation of shares in compositions. This exploitation of Black music, benefiting the industry at the expense of the Black community, has had tangible consequences on the community itself. In fact, Askia Muhammad Touré articulates this perspective in his article, “The Crisis in Black Culture,” which posits that this crisis stems from the political and economic control exerted by white powers over Black creations and intellect. Specifically, he identifies a neocolonialist system that, unable to exploit raw resources from Black people, resorts to the exploitation of their cheap labor and their "National Black Culture," particularly found in music (Touré 7). This exploitation contributes to the economic impoverishment of the Black nation through what Touré terms "cultural imperialism," wherein minimal, if any, of the generated wealth is reinvested in the Black communities that serve as the inspiration for the music (7). Therefore, this composition initially serves as a critique of a system, exposing the chain connecting presumed Black consumers and producers with white owners, creating a sense of

detachment within the Black community. Furthermore, this highlights the poet's adept use of her voice as a tool for conveying deeper meaning. Cortez employs a range of vocal techniques, shifting between tones that vary from stern and accusatory to neutral, with precise articulation. Notably, she employs a dynamic pitch modulation throughout her recitation, often oscillating from higher pitches for setups and descending to lower tones for punchlines or at the end of stanzas like on “into nothing”, “No nothing” and “Black people been gone.” Additionally, the higher tones at the end of lines contribute to a questioning or even sarcastic tone. This creates a compelling structure that is further enhanced by Davis' bass accompaniment. In truth, Davis uses glissandos throughout the composition which mirrors the pitch instability in Cortez's delivery. While the bass serves both percussive and melodic functions, the structure here appears more ambiguous, relying on sound production rather than clear, structured musical phrases or grooves.

Beyond this foundation, the latter part of the poem operates as a response to the depicted situation, offering John Coltrane as a redeeming yet overlooked solution that is fading into obscurity. To begin with, it confronts the concept of John Coltrane's death and its aftermath like *I Love Music* does. However, in this instance, Cortez notes the unacknowledged presence of John's music and aura:

> John Coltrane’s dead
> & some of you have yet
> to hear him play
> How long, how long has that Trane been gone (Cortez, 2:17-2:27)

Accordingly, central to this poem is the recurring phrase "How long, how long has that Trane been gone” that acts as a recurring motif, underscoring the passage of time and

the music that has slipped away seemingly unnoticed. Furthermore, the double-entendre “Trane”/“train," embedded in Coltrane’s nickname evokes the image of a missed opportunity. In this context, it symbolizes a realization that events have transpired unnoticed by the addressees, while pointing to the passing of historical Black figures, or unrecognized Black musicians, thereby reinforcing the poem's objective of unlocking consciousness:

> And how many more Tranes will go
> before you understand your life
> John Coltrane had the whole of
> life wrapped up in B flat
> John Coltrane like Malcolm
> True image of Black masculinity (2:27-2:26)

In this stanza, Coltrane's music is initially envisioned in a manner reminiscent of Baraka's earlier concepts of wholeness and "essence revelation.” Likewise, Cortez perceives Coltrane's music as a profound understanding of Black life, a revelation that unveils itself through the expressive language of musical notes. However, primarily, the reference to Malcolm X invokes a recurring device within the poetry of the Black Arts Movement, where a Black political leader becomes poetic material as a cultural icon. Truly, Malcolm X's figure exemplifies this trend in Black Literature in the sense that it displays a myth-making process. This phenomenon owes in part to his autobiography and similar literary works, which highlight a specific narrative of his life and actions, subsequently distilled into poetic material in much the same way as Coltrane's legacy. In this context, Coltrane is portrayed not merely in his musical persona but elevated to the status of a Black ideal. Cortez, indeed, draws a parallel between Coltrane and Malcolm X to stress their roles as emblematic figures in recent Black history.

This alignment with the concept of Black masculinity also conveys a sense of leadership symoblized by Black men who resisted oppression through tied modes of expression, oral and musical. At the same time, it can be perceived as a portrayal of two men profoundly devoted to their spiritual life after experiencing enlightenment, yet tragically meeting untimely demises. Consequently, this serves as an instance of the strategic use of Trane, whose legacy is constructed as an icon of ideological influence. In reality, amid the backdrop of political and social turbulence in the United States of the 1960's, the saxophonist maintained a conspicuous silence regarding his political perspectives or alignment with Black nationalistic movements or even the Civil Rights Movement (Mellis 2). As noted earlier, the jazz scene offered a platform for dissent and reflection of the nation's social tension, with contemporary artists like Charles Mingus, Sonny Rollins, and Max Roach actively supporting the movement through their compositions and actions. One of Coltrane's enigmatic contribution to this discourse was the recording of *Alabama*, a composition commonly believed to be a response to the Birmingham attacks of 1963. However, Samo Šalamon elucidates that there exists no definitive evidence to substantiate this claim (Šalamon, 84). I align myself with the perspective of the artist being primarily engrossed in his sonic pursuit. What leads me to adopt this perspective is Frank Kofsky's complete interview with John Coltrane from November 1966, the same source from which Amiri Baraka based *I Love Music*. Specifically, following his attendance at one of al-Shabazz's speeches, Coltrane was questioned about the connection between jazz music and Malcolm X. Although Coltrane briefly expressed being "quite impressed" by Malcolm X (Kofsky, 225), he refrains from either directly aligning himself with the political leader nor condemning

his views. Instead, he provides a broad statement about music as a mode of expression shaped by its environment and his personal aspiration to reflect positive influences: “Well, I think that music, being the expression of the human heart or the human being itself, does express just what is happening. The whole of human experience at that particular time is being expressed” (225). This answer demonstrates the jazzman’s artistic sensibility and once again alludes to the idea of jazz as an expression of the essence of existence. It sanctions the function of the artist as a “medium through which truth and divine messages come” (Tyner, 41). While Coltrane was undoubtedly aware of the socio-political milieu in which he existed, this statement suggests that his primary interest lay in expressing profound introspection about life rather than actively pursuing a specific political agenda (Šalamon, 84). However, both Baraka and Cortez, among others Black writers of their time, tackled this facet as a driving force for their ideological visions, while providing a thoughtful homage to Coltrane's musical brillance. In the framework where music is considered a valuable Black resource, particularly for shaping a Black narrative and purpose, Trane is therefore also elevated as an allegory for the cause. He and X, both spiritual Black men, met an unexpected demise but, more importantly, were influential figures in the intellectual and artistic zeitgeist of the 1960s among Black communities.

Concerning that socio-political image of Coltrane, community and nationhood are two concepts that also receive attention in the latter part of the poem. In a palpable sense, Coltrane's music is envisioned as a force that should be popularized and disseminated as a healing, and assembling influence. This is likened to words, once again blurring the boundary between oral and musical expressions:

John Coltrane
A name that should ring
throughout the projects mothers
Mothers with sons
who need John Coltrane
Need the warm arm of his music
like words from a Father
words of comfort
words of Africa
words of Welcome (Cortez, 2:58-3:12)

This passage further develops the notion of Coltrane as a prominent masculine figure, like a father, not only in the literal sense for sons in need of a role model, but also potentially in a religious context. Additionally, the progression from “comfort," to "Africa," and "welcome" used to characterize Trane's words mirrors Stanley Crouch’s interpretation of “John’s words” (Crouch, 1). However, here, a process of Black consciousness is also visible and aligns with James Mtume's assertion that a Black musical stimuli ignites a rediscovery of an original being, evoking a sense of peace and belonging. This significantly adds to the portrayal of Coltrane as a guiding reference, a Black northern star. Besides, Cortez’ view of the nation is interestingly exposed as:

John palpitating love notes
in a lost-found nation
within a Nation (Cortez, 3:20-3:25)

This portrayal once again positions Coltrane as a spreader of love and goodness through music, a concept that lines up with Keorapetse Kgositsile's discourse[5] used by Madhubuti. Conceptually, Cortez characterizes the Black nation as a distinct entity within a broader nation. The term "lost-found nation" conveys the historical loss of a nation through enslavement and the contemporary quest for separatism as the

[5] “Listen to the songs that move people to the innovation of all kinds of dances and crazy hollers and tell me if that is not love”(Madhubuti, 29).

rediscovery of that original nation. Simultaneously, it hints at the Lost Found Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad since 1937 and gaining prominence in the 1950s and 1960s as a separatist political force. This further strengthens the association with Malcolm X, well-known as a minister and activist for the Nation of Islam. This connection is carried on by Cortez who commands to act for the creation of a Black state:

> Rip those dead white people off
> your walls Black people
> Black people whose walls
> should be a hall
> A Black Hall Of Fame
> so our children will know
> will know & be proud
> Proud to say I'm from Parker City, Coltrane City, Ornette City,
> Pharoah City, Living on Holiday street next to James Brown Park
> in the state of Malcolm (3:32-4:00)

This alternative Black nation seems to stem from Coltrane's "Love notes", as Cortez commands Black people to construct their own memory with their own cultural legacy. This holds particular significance for this essay as it encapsulates and exemplifies my argument concerning Black nationalist sentiments expressed through music. Indeed, Cortez, in envisioning a Black future, explicitly rejects established white traditions and instead celebrates the greatness of contemporary Black figures, establishing a Black canon that serves as a foundation for future development. In fact, she is mapping her vision by enumerating place names titled after influential Black musicians from jazz and Rhythm & Blues, thereby projecting a new Black space. This method of constructing the Black nation recognizes music as the essence of its culture and national identity, placing it on a parallel plane with political leaders. In terms of rhythm, Davis initiates a

bass groove before transitioning into heavy glissandos and string bending sounds towards the stanza's conclusion. These devices enhance the sonic instability and add a sense of urgency to the overall delivery.

Ultimately, this leads to the piece's resolution, where Cortez brings the audience back to the diverging actuality of the present situation:

> How long how long
> will it take for you to understand
> that Trane's been gone
> Riding in a portable radio
> next to your son lonely
> Who walks walks walks into nothing
> No City No State No Home No Nothing
> How long
> How long
> have Black people been gone ? (4:02-4:34).

This concluding stanza serves as a stark contrast to the envisioned potential Black nation presented just before. It emphatically underscores the vanity of such dreams and gradually deflates the optimistic vision of a Black future, compelling the listeners to confront the harsh reality that "Trane's been gone." In this context, his music lingers on through the radio, but a sense of lateness permeates, suggesting that Coltrane's aura has failed to cultivate a Black utopia. Consequently, the endless and purposeless walk of the lonely son mirrors African American history and its social situation—a history devoid of memory and direction. It touches on a sense of failure of the Black nation, manifested through the perceived failure of Black music as a vessel for awakening. Ultimately, this expresses a profound concern for the future, as there appears to be no Black future without Trane, as without the memory of Coltrane, Black people are left without essence and purpose. This sense of being adrift is also communicated through auditory

elements where Cortez's vocal delivery appears to harmonize with the resonance of tautly plucked bass strings, evoking an anxiety-inducing ambiance. The final stanza reaches its climax with a resounding strike on the bass strings, marking the culmination of a binary groove that menacingly oscillates between two notes.

Conclusion

New Black poetry finds itself navigating between three significant forces: ideological stance, poetic expression, and the influence of jazz. The ideology of *Black Cultural Nationalism* saturates the works of this era and provides a framework for exploring revolutionary ideas or themes within poetry. This formal essence emerges from the rhetoric of the Black revolutionist as it exhibits both aggression towards external forces, exemplified by the poetry of Amiri Baraka, and the cherishing of the community, as seen in the works of The Last Poets. However, within this framework, jazz also emerges as a pivotal force shaping both content and structure of this genre. With its roots deeply intertwined with oral traditions, jazz can reflect the hopes and concerns of the Black experience in 1960s America while stylistically pushing boundaries towards liberated forms. This influence is mirrored in the growing importance of sonic aesthetics in the performance of Black poetry, characterized by rhythmic drumming and groove-based compositions, as observed in *Poetry is Black*. Moreover, in *Jazzoetry*, jazz becomes both poetic material and sonic inspiration, aiming to evoke an authentic sense of Blackness while demonstrating the interconnectedness of verbal and musical expressions. Improvisation, rhythm, and flow thus become the essence of this poetic form. This connection was further explored through the lens of John Coltrane, who

serves as a conduit for articulating political concepts amidst social upheaval while affirming the African American heritage and narrative. Simultaneously, Coltrane poetry holds crucial significance due to its spiritual dynamism emanating from the convergence of the artist's music and career, his mythification by Black revolutionaries, and the traditions of Black folk culture. Writers such as Stanley Crouch, Amiri Baraka, and Jayne Cortez draw from Coltrane's music, viewing it as a source of sonic shapes and as a promise for the Black community. Coltrane is therefore constructed as a myth of salvation through poetry, epitomizing a national icon of the Black Nation through Black music, which serves as a primary source of consciousness and individuality within the African American community of that time. All in all, New Black Poetry is a potent and multifaceted literary source as it essentially becomes the verbal means of expression that can amalgamate the Black revolutionist’s themes and rhetoric, the Black preacher’s spirit and devices, and the jazz musician’s technique and color.

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