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The Poetics of Chant and Inner/Outer Space: The Black Arts Movement

if you had heard her
chanting as she ironed
you would understand form and line
and discipline and order and
america.¹

– Lucille Clifton, “study the masters”

In the short story “Northern Iowa: Short Story and Poetry” (2007), Amiri Baraka, the most acclaimed poet of the 1960s and early 1970s Black Arts movement, revels in African Americans’ use of free verse: “Verse is a turn, simply. Like a wheel, it has regular changes.... Except what we *want* is *vers libre* – free verse. Never having been that, *free*, we want it badly. For black people, *freedom* is our aesthetic and our ideology. *Free Jazz, Freedom Suite, Tell Freedom, Oh, Freedom! And on!*”² As free verse abounds during this cultural movement, the artists give poetry a new sound and appearance that is as radical as the political and cultural revolution it heralded. In its embrace of free verse, the sound of Black Arts poetry fully matches what Houston A. Baker names “deformation of mastery.” As Baker explains, a continuum exists between *mastery of form* (African American writers’ skillful use of the dominant forms, the “master’s tools”) and the *deformation of mastery* (African American writers’ use of these tools in a manner that changes the dominant forms themselves and destroys the master’s house).³ As a hip hop chant has put it: “The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire / We don’t need no water / Let the motherfucker burn.”⁴

The soundtrack of the Black Arts movement was jazz, soul, rhythm and blues, and the spoken word that paved the way for hip hop. According to the poet and music critic A. B. Spellman, most Black Arts poets secretly wanted to be jazz musicians.⁵ The musical sound Black Arts poetry captures, often through the play with homophony and non-semantic sounds, bears out that claim. Take Amiri Baraka’s emblematic lines, in “It’s Nation Time” (1970):

The Black Arts Movement

It’s nation time eye ime
It’s nation ti eye ime
Chant with bells and drums
It’s nation time⁶

Black Arts poetic jazz was the difference, in Baraka’s words, between knowing how to play an instrument and knowing how to utilize that instrument. During both his Beat movement identity as LeRoi Jones and his Black Arts move away from the “slave name,” Baraka constantly wrestled with the difference between being well trained (“mastering the form,” in Baker’s terms) and well prepared to innovate (“deform the mastery”). For Baraka, the difference innovation makes is also the difference that comes from intuition or instinct: “Knowing how to play an instrument is the barest superficiality if one is thinking about becoming a musician. It is the ideas that one utilizes *instinctively* that determine the degree of profundity any artist reaches.”⁷

As words became their musical instruments, many Black Arts poets discovered that making a poem work on the page was the “barest superficiality.” The poems had to work on the page and in the complicated streets. Creative power is not just a matter of reaching inside, to one’s “instinct” – it is also a matter of reaching out, from the realm of inner consciousness to the outer realm of collective action. Thus an in-between space between song and word (often referred to as “spoken word”) was created as the poets discovered the power of chant.

In his aptly titled *Black Chant* (1997), Aldon Lynn Nielsen looks at African American poetry in the liminal period immediately before the Black Arts movement to explain what really happens when poets translate jazz music into jazz poetry, and he distinguishes between the “composed” and the “improvised” in jazz poetry. The “improvised” are the parts of many jazz poems that must be performed in order to be fully audible. The “composed” are the parts that, on the page, appear to be less experimental and less of an attempt to capture orality within the limits of written form. Nielsen argues that African American jazz poems defy the difference between the composed and the improvised. Black Arts poetry, in particular, explodes this imagined difference between the oral and the written. The terms “spoken word” and “performance poetry” are often used interchangeably to describe the more populist forms of contemporary American poetry. During the Black Arts movement, poets embraced the rhythm of chant as the standard sound of poetry. Jayne Cortez, for example, confesses, “I guess it’s a speak-chant type thing.”⁸ The back cover of Woodie King’s anthology *Black Spirits* (1972) announced the poems’ ties to performance: “Many of the poems in this

book as read by their authors are available on the Black Forum record label, LP456, entitled *Black Spirits*.⁹

Among the "speak-chant" techniques of Black Arts poetry is frequent explosion of words that is controlled by the use of anaphora – the repetition of a first word, in each line of a stanza, as a means of translating a verbal chant into the space of precision and controlled musical notes. In the second stanza in the following passage from the poem "Gwendolyn Brooks," by Haki Madhubuti, the word "black," at the beginning of each line, provides the form (the foundation) for the open form of the words that follow.

black so black we can't even see you black on black in
black by black technically black mantanblack winter
black coolblack 36degreesblack coalblack midnight
black black when it's convenient rustyblack moonblack
black starblack summerblack electronblack spaceman
black shoeshineblack jimshoeblack underwearblack ugly
black auntjimamblack, uncleben'srice black williebest
black blackisbeautifulblack i justdiscoveredblack negro
black unsubstanceblack.¹⁰

Baker's dialectic of mastery of form and deformation of mastery takes the shape, in this poem, of the fixing of the word "black," followed by the twisting and turning of that word, and then the continued return, after the line breaks, to the fixed word "black." The words "& with black came poets" depict poetry as the vehicle that opens up the word "black" into the nuances and subtleties of what A. B. Spellman identified as Black Arts poetry's "Negritudinous surreal dream."¹¹ The surreality in this poem consists in the play between blackness and the abstraction of blackness ("black unsubstanceblack"), tied to the all-encompassing refrain "black," as each line circles back to the repeated first word.

As the chant begins to define the sound of Black Arts poetry, many poets deploy this anaphoric technique, where the repeated first word links the irregular lines and makes the word a type of mantra, a sound that can create a spiritual or psychological transformation. If "black" is the mantra in Madhubuti's "Gwendolyn Brooks," in Larry Neal's poem "The Narrative of the Black Magicians," it is the word "form":

O Ancestor faces form on film our minds
form our contours out of deep wailing saxes.
form in the voice our would-be leaders.
form child.
form in the rush of war.
form child.
form in the sun's explosion.¹²

When "form" becomes the mantra of the chant form itself, we see an emphasis on becoming, as in the ontological sense invited in "Gwendolyn Brooks" with the repetition of "black," but we also see all the more clearly its aesthetic sense, delivering a poetics of becoming.

Neal knows the rules and knows how to break them too. His use of the period, at the end of each line, followed by the lower case first letter in the word "form," stages the breaking of the rules as the breaking of each line of the chant to create a slower and still more urgent chant than the faster, louder chant of "Gwendolyn Brooks." There is also a difference of tone, which in these two poems is the difference between the chants that make an audience move collectively as they nod, clap, smile, or raise the Black Power fist, and the chants that make a listener want to close her eyes even as she stands in the midst of the crowd listening to Black Arts poetry being performed next to one of the outdoor murals, at a bookstore reading, or in a community center. Neal's chant that leads to the closed eyes produces, in the reader or listener, a stillness to receive and create. The rush of motion, followed by the repetitive pause produced by the word "black," in Madhubuti's chant, by contrast, constantly threatens at the end of each line to not return to the framing word "black." The layering of "black" ("double black," "blackblack," "blackisbeautifulblack,") constantly threatens to create new words, strange spellings, and new graphic use of the white space on the page.

The chants that made the audience *move* shared a great connection, during this social movement, to poems that literally moved across the page. These poems signal the second step of the Black Arts poetics of chant. After the mantras of "Black" and "form" had been fully galvanized, the poets, remaining in the state of en(chant)ment, deformed the visual norms of poems. This deformation was staged in the many poems with very irregular line lengths and, often, the breaking of lines; first a few indentations form the left margin, and then, with each new break, closer and closer to the right margin, the edge of the page, before returning to a line that begins in the left margin, only to move back to the edge of the page in the next lines. In the poem "friends i am like you tied," A. B. Spellman connects this move to the "far end of the page" to the freedom of "moving on down the line." A few lines after the self-reflection, "a.b. break something action i've / acted who mans the far end of the i?," he performs the move to the "far end": "moving on down the line you now we" (*Black Fire*, 248–249).

Chanting was an aesthetics of linkage ("you" becoming "we") as well as breakage. The role of breakage is underscored in Nikki Giovanni's iconic chant that shapes the break of the line into the missing question mark and

the need to kill a dominant ideology. In the poem "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro" (1968), Giovanni questions the usefulness of a chant if it does not lead to concrete, revolutionary action. Her mantra is "can," as opposed to Neal's "form" and Madhubuti's "Black." She chants:

Can you kill
Can you kill
Can a nigger kill
Can a nigger kill a honkie
Can a nigger kill the Man
Can you kill nigger¹³

The constrained lack of indented lines in this inquisitive chant is itself a form of resistance to constraint. When compared to the poems that have the multiple indented lines (where *black* words move across *white* space), this chant begs to break out of the controlled form. Indeed the speaker asks, later in the poem, "Can you cut it off." The call for aesthetic warfare, figured in this section of the poem as the call for the cutting off of a "blond head," is staged as a rage that cannot be contained by the even left margins. When compared to the poems that move more dramatically across the page, Giovanni's chant becomes the meta-poem that explains why "killing," aesthetic warfare, must attack the visual default settings of poetry.

Amus Mor, one of the most under-recognized trailblazers of the movement, captures the shift from controlled chant to playing on the page to the deformation of the stanza. Spanning eight pages, his "Poem to the Hip Generation" (1972) has jagged-edged margins on the left and the right until the final two short stanzas, which have justified margins on the left and a tight compactness that the other open stanzas lack. The beginning stanza introduces David ("he was David" are the last words) by visualizing the "first steps" of both David and "the nation" (*Black Spirits*, 134). As the first three lines following the opening line are indented, successively, closer and closer to the right margin, the birth of David slowly unfolds. This birth is tied to the biblical creation story, an "electric storm," urban roof tops, soup lines, kitchenettes, and a "nation's first step." This birth is the birth of David's jazz; we learn, in the fourth stanza, that David enters the "academy / of Lester the president." The visual steps in the first lines of the poem thus present David's own "first step" toward jazz:

david dug genesis
did not dream
heard the electric storm
that was his intro (134)

The word "dug" is the spectacular vernacular that captures David's love of the biblical story. There is something about the biblical language that makes David begin to move over the roof tops and gain a new self-image. He does not move into the self-enclosure of dreams but rather an open space that feels like "an electric storm," the tumultuous wind that you can only feel on the roof tops that are so close to the electricity lines spanning across the city.

The word "dug" also captures David's digging (his questioning), throughout the poem, echoed in the repeated words "who are we / where are we going / what are we here for." Mor makes the digging much more than the creation of a metaphysical hole when he ends the poem with answers to these questions: "we are the hipmen / ... where are we going / into the sky / ... why were we sent here / only to love." Just as Sun Ra's response to the Black Power call and response "What time is it? Nation Time" was to declare "It's Planet Time" (the name of his 1973 album), Mor, in this poem, makes the move to outer space, "going / into the sky," the birth of the black nation. The opening stanza's "first steps of nation" are rewritten in the final stanzas as the first steps into outer space. In this closing part of the poem when Mor makes hipness, outer space, and love the answer to the cosmic questions about identity, action, and the future, his lines are no longer literally moving across the page with the uneven left margin. In this final stanza, with its left-justified lines, the poet pauses to breathe deeply and rest after the long jazz riff performed throughout the poem. The return to the normative stanza shape is a return to the controlled Black Arts chant after the play with the enchantment of Black Arts outer space.

The "poetics of outer space" and "the poetics of inner space" clarify many aspects of Black Arts poetry. Gaston Bachelard's use of the term "poetics of space" undergirds my use of these two terms. Just as Bachelard theorizes about the intertwining of the inner and the outer, Black Arts poetics collapses the boundaries between the inner space of black consciousness and the outer space of activism and collectives. The movement placed great emphasis on the role of poetry in public spaces (hence the painting of poetry on outdoor murals, such as the painting of Baraka's "SOS" on *The Wall of Respect* [1967] and Nelson Steven's *I am a Black Woman* mural [1973], which includes the painting of Mari Evan's poem). The movement also emphasized the creation of "Black space" within oppressive, dominating white space. The "Black space" of the poet's page and the "Black space" of communities attempting to find space for self-determination were rendered directly in Broadside Press's 1966 reproduction of Gwendolyn Brooks's 1960 poem "We Real Cool" (Figure 4).¹⁴ The words in the poem are white against a black background and capture the inner world of the seven young "pool players" at "the Golden Shovel." The broadside format, moreover,



Figure 4. Reproduction of Gwendolyn Brooks broadside, "We Real Cool." Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Reprinted by Consent of Brooks Permissions.

suggests an alternative place of pedagogy, a *blackboard*: a space defined by an aesthetic that differs fundamentally from the dominant *school* of poetry that this social movement labels “white.” During the Black Power movement, many Black liberation community elementary schools were created. Madhubuti was the founder of one of these alternative schools, the Institute of Positive Education. The visual interpretation of “We Real Cool” is not only tied to the indoor space of the alternative (black-oriented) classroom; the image also evokes the public art of graffiti. Brooks herself identifies this

poem with the public “accessibility” cultivated in Black Arts poetry: “My aim, in my next future, to write poems that will somehow successfully ‘call’ (see Baraka’s ‘SOS’) all black people: black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate: I wish to reach black people in pulpits, black people in mines, on farms, on thrones.”¹⁴ “We Real Cool” is a pre-Black Arts poem that “calls” black people in this wide open space. The line “We left school” hails this outer space. The inner space of the young men, their defiant self-image, can only exist outside of the dominant “school.”

Brooks wrote "We Real Cool" before she became a vital member of the Black Arts movement and a mentor figure for many younger Black Arts poets. As opposed to many of the young poets who rejected the use of sonnets and other "closed" forms of poetry that they viewed as white forms, Brooks, during and after the Black Arts movement, continued to write poems that neither took up the typical Black Arts chant rhythm, the common experimentation with line indentation and the visual form of the poem, nor dwelt in any easily recognizable African American vernacular. Nonetheless, Brooks, after what she herself describes as her "conversion" during the Black Arts movement, consciously and complexly situates her post-1967 conversion poetry in the "Mecca" of the movement. Her poem, "In The Mecca" (1968), places Black Arts poets in the very center of her meditation on searching and being lost in structures (actual buildings as well as poetic structures). The poem tells a story about the lost child "Pepita" in a building that is now part of the "Black Belt" ghetto but used to be an elegant upper-class residence. The diction in the poem, best described as "King's English," becomes, for Brooks, as fluid as the street vernacular of "We Real Cool." Throughout "In the Mecca," the search for the lost child is inseparable from the speaker's movement through linguistic and material space. The Mecca is the master's house (the ornate building that formerly had upper-class white residents) that is now, on the surface, simply an African American slum. As the speaker searches for the lost child, the speaker finds an exquisite language that captures that which is in between the ornate and the ordinary. For example, a description of Mrs. Sallie, the missing child's mother, plays with essence and fragmentation: "Our prudent partridge. / A fragmentary attar and armed coma. / A fugitive attar and a district hymn."¹⁵ The image of the "prudent partridge" conveys the way that this mother has been made to "perch" with such careful balance, even though she has the whimsical spirit that yearns to wander. She is the mother searching for her child who has never been able to get lost in the whimsical aspects of life. Perched like the partridge, she has never allowed herself to sing outside the regimented bars of those "district hymn[s]."

The chewy language voiced throughout "In the Mecca" starkly opposes the character of the aspiring poet Alfred ("Alfred is un- / talented. Knows."), who makes the art such a stale, highbrow performance. As Alfred quotes Leopold Senghor, he makes the 1930s and 1940s Négritude movement itself into a type of cultural capital. His posturing makes the speaker think of Senghor the President of Senegal, not Senghor the poet who wanted to own his own words instead of using the colonizing toys. After squeezing herself around Alfred's toxic art of imitation and his attempt to take up too much space (he "who might have been a poet-king"), Brooks calls directly for "Don Lee," who wants a "new art and anthem":

Don Lee wants
a new nation
under nothing;
a physical light that waxes; he does not want to
be exorcised, adjoining and revered;
he does not like a local garniture
nor any impish onus in the vogue;
is not candlelit
but stands out in the auspices of fire
and rock and jungle-flail;
wants
new art and anthem; will
want a new music screaming in the sun. (423-424)

"Don Lee" is also the "slave name" that is discarded, in 1973, when its bearer renames himself "Haki Madhubuti." The words in the spiritual "Amazing Grace" – "I was lost but now I'm found" – capture the way that the speaker feels when she meets Don Lee in the midst of the Mecca. In this "lost but now I'm found" poetic narrative, Brooks uses the precision of the iambic meter to set up her steady pace through the "black Mecca" literally created by "white flight," the term sociologists use to describe the quick exit, in segregated communities, by white residents once a neighborhood begins to turn "black." The "waxing" Brooks ties to Don Lee signals that her formalist poetics and the Black Arts free verse meet in the open space created when she, Don Lee, and the other Black Arts poets she mentored find a black aesthetic that is the outer space of a community's interior (not the internalization of the outer that makes Alfred, the false poet, keep choosing the wrong words).

The poetics of the Black Arts movement often staged the "perfect" words as the words that can hail ideal (black) readers and make them want to enter into an individual and collective consciousness-raising movement. In the

iconic poem "SOS" (1966), Baraka makes the call for blackness sound like the frantic words in a walkie-talkie.

Calling black people
Calling all black people, man woman child
Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in
Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling
you, calling all black people
calling all black people, come in, black people, come
on in.¹⁶

The speaker must talk quickly and loudly in order to be heard over the static of this two-way radio transmission. The beauty of the poem is its ability to evoke the static without needing any direct representation of this noise. The repetition of the words "calling" and "urgent" and the sparse language show that the speaker knows that he must avoid any unnecessary words to ensure delivery of the message, in spite of the static and necessarily poor reception. The poet's precise craft becomes inseparable from the crafting of the counter-ideology, the message aiming to destroy the static (the constant interference created by the dominant aesthetic and power structure). Remember the "electric storm," in Amos Mor's poem "Poem to the Hip Generation," where the electrical interference makes David, the jazz poet, begin to run across the roof tops. Baraka, in "SOS," aims for that same flight as he calls for an inward motion ("come / on in"). The move inward (to a black consciousness that makes "Black" mean both community and the deconditioned individual mind) is, for Baraka, a vexed and difficult journey, but also if the ideal (black) readers pause to begin to think about being free, a very *natural* move. The journey inward is not an easy move to a comforting essence, one of the assumptions made when the Black Arts movement is too quickly packaged as a flawed first step, a type of identity politics that did not understand the limits of essentialized (contained) blackness. When "SOS" is painted on *The Wall of Respect*, the outdoor mural, the words "come / on in" literally gain the brick wall texture of "come / on out." On the page, the poem invites the walkie-talkie response – that which in our twenty-first-century African American vernacular takes the shape of "Holla back." The final words "come / on in" are a call for the response that the painted poem exemplifies. The pull inward, in Black Arts poetry, is also a push outward.

For women of the Black Arts movement, hollering back was not always the delivery of the kind of chant that celebrated the calls of the male poets and the performed black male identities that occupied so much space during this social movement. For Nikki Giovanni, Mari Evans, Carolyn Rodgers,

Sonia Sanchez, Johari Amini, Julia Fields, and many other women poets, the space of the in-between became very useful as they, in the words of Brooks, "civilized a space / wherein to play their violin with grace."¹⁷ Julia Fields's "I Loves a Wig" (1975) is a persona poem that assumes the point of view of a working-class African American woman who views the movement as bourgeois and critiques its assumption that wearing a wig signals self-hatred. The poem counters the depiction of internalization in Baraka's "An Agony. As Now." (1964) – "I am inside someone / who hates me. I look / out from his eyes."¹⁸ These women poets testify that black women's liberation was not tied to a necessity of purging (instead of internalization), but rather finding words to express black women's hunger during this Black Power movement: black women's need to *consume*, and not just participate in black male poets' acts of purging.

In Nikki Giovanni's poem, "Of Liberation," the purging process is explicitly rendered without any recognition, by the speaker, of the need to purge sexism: "The sisters need to make flags / (there are no nations without a flag)."¹⁹ This normative gender role-playing is performed only after a step-by-step purging of whiteness: "Everything comes in steps / Negative step one: get the white out of your hair / Negative step two: get the white out of your mind / Negative step three: get the white out of your parties / Negative step four: get the white out of your meetings" (46). The speaker in this poem pauses, immediately before this stanza, to emphasize her lack of any desire to criticize black men: "It has been pointed out: 'The last bastion of white supremacy / is in the Black man's mind' / (Note – this is not a criticism of brothers)" (46). Purging, in other words, privileges a male-oriented audience. As the woman speaker colludes in her own oppression (women flag makers versus male nation-builders), she revels in the Black Arts purging, but the final words are "Listen to your own Black hearts" (49). This move inward, after the speaker's strident listing of the problems and plan of action, changes the tone of the poem, as the speaker gestures toward a very subtle recognition, at the end of this performance, that the inner space of black women's trauma and oppression has been effaced in this masculinist understanding of Black liberation.

The latent hunger, signaled in the reference to "your own Black hearts," is brought to the surface when Audre Lorde, in "Naturally," a poem that is both a part of the movement and critical of the movement, calls for "black bread."²⁰ Lorde's Black Arts poetics of inner and outer space is very compelling because she herself balanced on the edge between being a credentialed Black Arts poet – by virtue of publishing with Broadside Press, one of the two most influential Black Arts presses – and a poet whose work, while deeply informed by, never fully participated in the poetics of this social

movement.²¹ The speaker in this poem, with sighs and sarcasm spurred by real frustration, questions the movement's mantras, "Black is Beautiful," "Black Pride," and "Natural Black Beauty." Contrasting the outer space of cities and capitalism with the limited spatial dimension of the body, the poem's closing stanzas question the effectiveness of the Black Arts and Black Power movements' use of body politics: "And who trembles nightly / With the fear of their lily cities being swallowed / By a summer ocean of naturally woolly hair?" (18). This social movement reveled in the ferociousness of the Afro and other natural hair styles, but Lorde likens this bodily aesthetic warfare to "a summer ocean" that really does not pose any threat to the real sites of power (the "lily [white] cities"). In the final stanza, through a focus on cans of "Natural Hair Spray," "made and marketed in Watts," Lorde depicts the commodification of this bodily warfare. As opposed to the celebration of purging in Giovanni's "Of Liberation," Lorde's image of Watts laborers spending money on products they have themselves produced rewrites Black Arts purging as a useless "spray" that can never "swallow" the "lily cities." The poem's closing proposition, "Proud beautiful Black women / Could better make and use / black bread," calls for a different internalization, a "swallow[ing]" that would fight against the cultural consumption of blackness, by both capitalism and the Black Power movement, and begin to look for a type of consciousness-raising less invested in bodily signs of aesthetics and more invested in black currency ("bread" being a slang reference to money).

The poetics of inner and outer space gains a diasporic reach in the work of Keorapetse "Willie" Kgositsile, a South African exile who gains a central role in the Black Arts poetry movement with poems shaped around the broken boundaries between African American and African space. There is a call and response between Brooks's poetry and Kgositsile's. Brooks, in the introduction to Kgositsile's *My Name is Afrika* (1971), offers a poem entitled "To Keorapetse Kgositsile" in which she proclaims "MY NAME IS AFRIKA"! / – Well, every fella's a Foreign Country. / This Foreign Country speaks to You."²² Kgositsile's "Exile" (1975) cites Brooks' poem "Kitchenette Building" (1945), but whereas Brooks's poem ends with an image of the shared bathrooms in kitchenette buildings and the lack of enough "lukewarm water," Kgositsile, in his response, begins with the terror of the water during the Middle Passage: "And the ocean, my brother knows, is not our friend."²³ After this invocation of the Middle Passage, Kgositsile moves, in the next stanza, to the need for a "community alarm" that would resound throughout the "oceans," signalling a "wake up" call that would be local and cosmopolitan. Recalling Brooks's words, "We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan," the oceanic "community

alarm" becomes that which would awaken those who have been "grayed" by the "involuntary plan."²⁴ Kgositsile depicts this "plan" as colonialism when he writes, "Did you say independence?" and "Lumumba, do you hear us?" (49). Brooks depicts this "plan" as the shackles that continue, post-slavery and post-Great Migration, to reduce African Americans, in the urban landscape, to "things." As Kgositsile responds to Brooks's poem, he insists on the intersections between the plan of the Middle Passage, the "Black Belt" neighborhoods in Chicago, and colonialism in Africa. Kgositsile's reshaping of "Kitchenette Building" into "Exile" demonstrates his desire to add a diasporic dimension to Black Arts poetry even as he appreciates the local specificity of this poetry. Just as Brooks sets up a phenomenology of space and sound as she wonders if "giddy sounds" like "Dream" can survive in the oppressive structure of the kitchenette buildings, Kgositsile, in the penultimate stanza in "Exile," sets up a phenomenology of space and sound: "I stand among my silences / in search of a song to lean on" (49). Kgositsile's poetics of inner and outer space "leans on" Black Arts sounds as he creates a transnational sound.

This diasporic extension in Black Arts poetry was yet another way in which simple understandings of form were deformed in the poetics of this vital social movement. Once we gain an appreciation of the interplay, in this poetry, between inner and outer space, we see the poets' keen awareness of the spatial dimensions of a poem – a poem could work on the street, on the page, and across an ocean. The use of music and performance enabled this poetry to circulate widely among people who were not usually reading poetry or buying poetry books. The slim broadside poetry volumes were sold at public gatherings and community poetry readings. Standard single-page poetry broadsides enabled this grassroots poetry to become entirely portable, as captured in Haki Madhubuti's tribute to Gwendolyn Brooks: "pee wee used to carry one of her poems around in his back pocket."²⁵ Cultural movements such as the Black Arts movement rely on an everyday type of collaboration between community leaders, writers, organizers, visual artists, event participants, and audience members. This organic collaboration lies fully in the zone of *process* as opposed to the *object* that we tend to fetishize as texts. To what extent are literary and cultural movements inevitably reconstructed and remembered as textual objects as opposed to process-oriented, anti-object collaborations? Black Arts poetry foregrounds process (the repetition in chant) and never hides the seams of the text (the edges between the inner and the outer). "Sound for sounding" are the words Amiri Baraka uses, in his preface to Larry Neal's poetry volume *Black Boogaloo* (1969), as a means of explaining sound as process as opposed to sound as object. Before ending the preface with the question "What does

boogaloo mean?," Baraka counsels, "Post 'literary' because we are men who write.... Literary sound like somethin' else ... sound like it ain't sound. And sound is what we deal in ... in the real world ... sound for sounding."²⁶

NOTES

1. Lucille Clifton, *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988–2000* (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, Ltd., 2000), 25.
2. Amiri Baraka, *Tales of the Out & the Gone* (New York: Akashic Books, 2007), 133.
3. Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xvi.
4. The chant circulates widely but it was introduced in the rap single "The Roof Is on Fire" by Rockmaster Scott and The Dynamic Three (Jersey City, NJ: Reality Records, 1984).
5. A. B. Spellman, personal interview, Washington DC, April 10, 2007.
6. Amiri Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), 242.
7. LeRoi Jones, "The Jazz Avant-Garde," *Black Music* (1968; New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 71.
8. Graham Lock and David Murray, eds., *Thriving on a Riff: Jazz and Blues Influences in African American Literature and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128.
9. Woodie King, *Black Spirits: A Festival of New Poets in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).
10. Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti), *Directionscore: Selected and New Poems* (Detroit, MI: Broadside Press, 1971), 88.
11. A. B. Spellman, "Big Bushy Afros," *International Review of African American Art* 15.1 (1998), 53.
12. LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal, eds., *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968), 314.
13. Nikki Giovanni, *Black Feeling Black Talk/Black Judgment* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971), 19.
14. This broadside is reproduced in James D. Sullivan, *On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broadside from the 1960s* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 37.
15. Gwendolyn Brooks, *Blacks* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987), 407.
16. Baraka, *Jones/Baraka Reader*, 218.
17. Gwendolyn Brooks, *Annie Allen* (1949; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 38.
18. Baraka, *Jones/Baraka Reader*, 52–3.
19. Giovanni, *Black Feeling*, 48.
20. "Naturally" first appeared in 1970, in the Black Power movement's most groundbreaking feminist anthology, *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Mentor, 1970), 18.
21. Third World Press (Chicago, Illinois) is the second, founded during the Black Arts movement and still thriving.
22. Keorapetse Kgositsile, *My Name Is Afrika* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 15.