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The Poetry of Afro-surreal Jazz: A Cultural Revolution

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Abstract

Preceded, and most probably influenced, by the French surrealists' concept of Négritude, the Black Arts Movement was able to generate a new aesthetics derived from the African heritage, which made it a pivotal contribution to the American arts. Thus, this paper is designed logically to examine the poetry of Afro-surreal jazz as a manifestation of this cultural revolution. To achieve this, it approaches the poetry of Afro-surreal jazz on many levels, starting with theory and heading to application. Initially, the paper historically traces the parodic relationship between Surrealism and jazz. It detects the Harlem artists' "dilemma" of not being able to identify a Black art of their own by adhering to the mainstream Whites' cultural standards. Then, it studies the surreal turn that accompanied the Black Arts Movement, which bestowed on the Black arts, especially jazz music and poetry, surreal forms that abide by no regulations. Finally, and upon careful consideration, the discussion ends with a novel metaphoric decoding of the musical Afro-surrealism in Henry Dumas' "play ebony play ivory."

Keywords: Surrealism, Black Arts Movement, Jazz, Musical Afro-surrealism, Amiri Baraka, Henry Dumas.

You will step out of the pages
of the blinding-blend of the book.
And gaze astounded at
The Endless space of the Cosmic Void.

__ Sun-Ra, "The Cosmic Age"

Introduction: A Fragile Cultural Identity

There is no doubt that the Harlem Renaissance has authorized the birth of a new distinctive African American literature. However, it left its artists, critics, and audience with abundant questions about the Blackness of their art. In the aftermath of this movement, debates about what is meant by Black art and who is qualified enough to judge the Blackness of art became common in the intellectual and cultural arenas.

Some critics have started to point out the failure of the Harlem Renaissance to define Black art exclusively on the levels of forms and themes. For example, George Hutchinson discusses the Harlem

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Renaissance as part of American Modernism, arguing that both Black and White writers' literary production of this era has been affected by their interest in the "American cultural nationalism," and that explains why the "New Negroes" of the Harlem Renaissance usually tend to stress both: their blackness and their "Americanism'" (Hutchinson 1996, 1). This tendency is sometimes interpreted as Black people's attempt to be integrated within one homogeneous national cultural identity that is centrally White. Hutchinson goes further in his discussion to claim that no Black renaissance was possible in Harlem without the interracial cultural and intellectual interaction between Blacks and Whites (Hutchinson 1996, 1-15).

The argument of the "two-ness" of the Black artist was not unfamiliar in the 1960s because it was initiated early at the dawn of the twentieth century by W. E. B. Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois tries to diagnose the state of the double consciousness of the Black artist as someone who fatally strives to cling to his African roots and to show his Americanness at the same time. This split guarantees the Black artist no true self-consciousness due to the veil that he inherits when born as an African American. This veil enforces him to perceive the world around him through the measures of others. Thus, double consciousness creates a sense of discontent with one's own culture, for the Black artist feels that his African cultural heritage does not vindicate his Americanness. Du Bois writes; "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro" (Du Bois 2003, 9).

Nonetheless, Black critics of the 1960s[1] and the following years show a better understanding of the so-called Harlem Renaissance's failure. As an attempt to evaluate the legacy of this movement in, Nathan Irvin Huggins states that "the most important gift that the renaissance has left to us: [is] a lesson from its failures" (Huggins 1971, 308). Huggins sees that the Harlem Renaissance's legacy is bound by White standards as the "white commerce" and patronage were in charge of deciding and defining what successful art was. He explains, "As long as the white norms remained unchallenged, no matter what the Negro's reaction to them, he always needed to return to the white judge to measure his achievement" ((Huggins 1971, 306-307). Huggins concludes that the Black artist of the Harlem Renaissance was overwhelmed by "the white eminence" (ibid 306) which deprives him of originality.

Therefore, the Black intellectuals of the 1960s articulate their dissatisfaction with the White limitations imposed on their art that prevent them from expressing their genuine Blackness. Although the Harlem Renaissance artists stress their interest in the rediscovery of "Africa as a source of race pride" to achieve a "franker and a deeper self-revelation" (Brown 1969, 61), it is argued that they fail to find the suitable structures, models, and forms that are uniquely African American. Instead, the most celebrated poets of that era, such as Countee Cullen and Claude McKay, use English hymns and Shakespearean sonnets to narrate their experiences in America (Henderson 1980, 28). These forms never define their art as an African American production but as American literature that "incidentally *happened* to be Black" (Henderson 1980, 8).

Weaponizing the Poem

The Black artists of the 1960s let go the romantic dream of the Harlem Renaissance to produce art that appeals to the White critics, audience, and publishers. Their best alternate, as Amiri Baraka states, is producing art that is authentic and revolutionary. This art is mainly dedicated to the Black audiences; especially the youth, to teach them self-determination and self-defense instead of self-pity and mourning (Baraka 2014, 12). Their ideas and aspirations could be gathered under the broad umbrella of the Black Arts Movement. Led by Baraka, whose idol was Malcom X, this movement gets more politicized, popularized, nationalistic, and definitive than its predecessor: the Harlem Renaissance. Indeed, the Black Arts Movement is an inclusive movement that employed the views of "cultural nationalists of all persuasions" like political Blacks, mystical-spiritual Blacks, revolutionaries and radical Blacks who supported the movement with both methodology and ideology (Baraka 2014, 15). The nationalist strand of the movement directed its avant gardes to assert their need for a distinctive art that is unmistakably Black, dedicated to Blacks, and express the Blacks' experiences in Black molds. Amiri Baraka avers in his essay "Black Arts Movement": "We wanted Black Art. … We wanted a mass popular art, distinct from the tedious abstractions our possessors and their negroes bamboozled the 'few' as Art. We thought it was Ain't. White Ain't. And we wanted Black Art" (Baraka 2014, 16).

To put this ideology into practice, critics started to theorize the dilemma of Black Art. In an essay entitled "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," Black history scholar James T. Stewart explains that "the dilemma" of the Black artist of not being able to correspond effectively to his reality could be solved if he constructs models of his own. Had he continued building his assumptions on White models, the Black artist would never have met the demands of his natural culture. To serve this point, this artist should realize first his "estrangement" and "unfitness" within the Whites' culture. Then, he has to believe in his ability of processing change. Stewart asserts that the Black artist of the forties and the fifties was "misguided by white cultural references" which led him to "willful self-destruction" (Stewart 1968, 8). Thus, Stewart suggests, the Black artists of the sixties had to construct models that are "non-white." Stewart adds, "Our models must be consistent with a black style, our natural aesthetic styles, and our moral and spiritual styles" (Stewart 1968, 3). Such models are later referred to as Black aesthetics.

The Surreal Turn

The process of change/transition from White models to Black ones took the term of a surreal process as the following discussion intends to illustrate. To start with, one must refer to André Breton's primal definition of Surrealism in his "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924):

> SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner-the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.
>
> ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy*. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other

> psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton 1969, 26)

Both definitions empathize the dynamic, resistant nature of Surrealism as a movement that defies all forms of establishments and control. It is automatic and has no stable aesthetic or moral concerns. Surrealism also denies the validity of reason and fixed forms to solve "all the principal problems of life"; instead, it appeals to unexpected and deformed forms like dreams, automatic writing, and disoriented thoughts to spell out the artists' inner struggles that are caused by the splitting reality they live in.

The early Black surrealists of France admired the revolutionary spirit of Surrealism as they were looking for an escape from the White Westerner's hegemony that lays hands on their culture, literature, and identity. However, the editors of the single-issued magazine *Légitime Défense* (1932), in which a group of Martinican critics pledged allegiance to Surrealism, accepted this spirit as it was without "reservation." Yet, according to Jean-Claude Michel, the poems published in *Légitime Défense* "were not, in fact, neither urging for a black revolution nor evoking any ancestral Africa" (Michel 2000, 34). For example, the reader of the poetry collection *S.O.S* by Etienne Léro, the first Martinican to identify himself as surrealist and editor of *Légitime Défense*, would most probably fail to recognize the race of its author as Black surrealist (Michel 2000, 33).

The publication of this magazine resonated well with the recent awareness of Surrealism. Later Black surrealists in France like Amie Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor saw Surrealism as "the miraculous weapon" that would enable them, quoting Césaire, "to shout out so loudly the intense Negro cry that the very base of the world should be shaken" (Michel 2000, 46). On the other hand, they understood the necessity of having Surrealism reversed and subverted to serve the development of their racial identity as Blacks. "We accept Surrealism", explains Senghor, "as a medium and not as an ending in itself, as an allied, but not as a master" (Michel 2000, 55), which means that Black Surrealism essentially refuses to be a copy of White Surrealism, but it merely accepts the haunting of its revolutionary spirit.

The creation of a unique Black surrealism needed a brand-new material that is exclusively Black. Césaire, Senghor, and other French Black surrealists found such raw material in the obscurity of their African heritage as they coined the concept of Négritude. Négritude is not a movement of fixed definitions and characteristics, but a manifestation of the Black people's acceptance of the uniqueness of their existence and their ability to foreground their history and culture in their struggle for liberation and artistic expression (Michel 2000, 95). Césaire introduced the concept of Négritude in his long text *Cahier D'un Retour au Pays Natal* (1939) or *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. The book, which consists of 109 strophes of mixed prose and verse, tells the story of a student who left his university in Paris and travelled all the way to his native land: Martinique. In three parts, the story shows a gradual transformation of the way the writer perceives his existence. In the last part, the speaker becomes aware of his Négritude and tries to define it. He gives it different names like "alien riches," a "genuine falseness," and a "strange pride" that suddenly enlighten him (Césaire 2013, 35). In his native land, the

speaker reclaims the power that the "white world" with its "rigidities" robs him of (Césaire 2013, 39). In this land, which he sees as beautiful, the speaker is able to create, not imitate:

> My eyes fixed on this
> town that I prophesy, beautiful,
> grant me the courage of the martyr
> grant me the savage faith of the sorcerer
> grant my hands the power to mold
> grant my soul the sword's temper
> I won't flinch. (Césaire 2013, 39)

Apparently, the conceit of this reversed journey to Africa or "the native land" is a cry for an urgent cultural and artistic adoption of the African heritage by Black artists. Building upon what Césaire and Senghor have written, Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Black Orpheus* (1948) reinvigorates the myth of Orpheus. The expedition of the Black artist to his native land is like Orpheus' journey to the land of the dead to take his wife Eurydice back. Orpheus has been allowed to leave the land of the dead with Eurydice alive after he amused Charon, the ferryman, and the guardians with his phenomenal music. Thus, this compassion suggests that the cultural heritage of the forgotten African civilizations can be summoned to life again by a reversal journey, whether real or metaphorical, to Africa. "The point of departure" in this journey, according to Sartre, is Négritude (Sartre 1975, 31). Négritude means the absolute "negation" of the others' truths to build the Negro's Truth (Sartre 1975, 30); it also means "for the black to die of the white world to be reborn of the black soul, as the platonic philosopher dies of the body to be reborn of truth" (Sartre 1975, 31). After this mystic death, the Black artist can return to his native land.

Sartre believes that if they succeed in their return, the Black artists will gain the ability to see the world with a fresh vision: their own vision. The veil that they have inherited because of their hyphenated African identities will be torn apart. Most importantly, they will enjoy the privilege to *see*, not only to be seen, and to examine rather than being examined. It is a reversal "gaze"; a gaze to be fixed upon the Whites to deliver a clear message that the Blacks have now manufactured their own "black torches" to enlighten the world as the White torches function as "only small lanterns balanced in the wind" in the meantime (Sartre 1975, 8-9).

Musical Afro-surrealism

Indeed, the concept of Négritude was not immediately materialized as Césaire presented it in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939) (Césaire 2013, xv), and the Black Orpheus' mystic return was not accomplished due to the inception of WW II. However, Négritude was a "harbinger" for the upcoming Black art movements in the 1950s- (Césaire 2013, xv), not only in France but most significantly in the United States. In America, the Black intellectuals shaped their Négritude more politically and artistically, giving it the name of the Black Arts Movement that rose concomitantly with other political and ideological movements such as the Black Power Movement and the Nation of Islam (1960s – 1970s). The Black artists of this era stress their belief that "the African story is still untold" (Clarke 1968, 17). Leading thinkers of this movement, like Larry Neal, Stokely Carmichael, James T.

Stewart, Harold Cruse, John Henrik Clarke, and Peter Labrie among other playwrights, musicians, novelists, and poets demand that the Black writer celebrate "his ancestral home" due to the fact that "the entire history of Africa will have to be literally rewritten, challenging and reversing the European concept" (Clarke 1968, 17). Thus, it is safe to say that the same understanding of the French surrealists; which was to refuse the White molds of literary expressions and looking for genuine ones, is reached by the African American artists; however, they needed to sculpt it and give it a concrete shape.

A few years later, Baraka coined the concept of Afro-surrealism in his brief introduction to Henry Dumas' *Ark of Bones and Other Stories* (1974). Entitled "Henry Dumas: Afro-Surreal Expressionist," Baraka articulates his belief that "Art is science because it is a form of *knowing*" (Baraka 1988, 165). Therefore, the more an artist masters the Black folklore, history, and language, the more he is able to unfold "the Black Aesthetics - form and content – in its actual contemporary and lived life" (Baraka 1988, 165). Thus, Afro-surrealism is able to "retold and foretold" the African story (Baraka 1988, 165); more importantly, it is able to create and recreate the medium, the language, and the form to embody these stories. Afro-surrealism, according to Baraka, is the "the most violently antagonistic [genre] of contradictions, colors, shapes, animates the personalities, settings, language of the work" (Baraka 1988, 166). In other words, Afro-surrealism abides by no White regulations and restrictions. It is multi-layered, contradictory, dialectic, and free from all preconceived limitations.

Although Breton usually tends to avoid discussing music as a surreal medium (Stallings 2004, 201), Baraka creates a tight bondage between Afro-surrealism and music. Baraka sees that Afro-surreal poetry, along with its symbols, is capable of singing loud and performing the Black experience like cymbals (Baraka 1988, 164). Also, in his *Black Music*, Baraka defines Black music and jazz as a surreal or mystical journey toward self-consciousness:

> The Black Music which is jazz and blues, religious and secular. Which is the New Thing and Rhythm and Blues. The consciousness of social reevaluation and rise, a social spiritualism. A mystical walk up the street to a new neighborhood where all the risen live. Indian-African anti-Western-Western (as geography) Nigger-sharp Black and strong. (Baraka 1967, 210)

Drawing a definition of Musical Surrealism from Baraka's writings, it can be defined as a high poetic description of a narrative precision, with a clear theme: the revelation of truth. Musical Afro-surrealism essentially embraces change, transition, excursions, and multi-layered ambiguities. Jazz poetry written by American Blacks in the 1960s and 1970s is exemplary of musical Afro-Surrealism (Baraka 1967, 164-166). Baraka writes in his poem "Black Art":

> We want a black poem. And a
> Black World.
> Let the world be a Black Poem
> And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
> Silently
> or LOUD

Notwithstanding, in this particular era, jazz music has been regarded as the "purest expression of the Black man in America" and a "social activity" that reflect the collective, resisting attitude of African Americans in a way that other arts can never do (Stewart 1968, 3-9).

Musical Afro-Surrealism (Jazz): An Avant-Garde of Avant-Gardes

As the previous discussion shows, musical Afro-surrealism is a customized implementation of the avant-grade movement of Surrealism by the 1960s' African American artists to make it serve as a resistance tool. However, this paper tends to highlight three notable aspects that could make musical Afro-surrealism an idiosyncratic version of Surrealism due to Black Surrealism's unavoidable entanglements with the Jazz Aesthetics in America.

The first of these aspects, Musical Afro-surrealism is prominently demarcated when its automatism is examined. To illustrate more, Black jazz poets' perception of automatism goes beyond Breton's definition of the term as the absolute "absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (Breton 1969, 26). Breton crafts his refusal of moral or aesthetic limitations that might restrain the surreal spirit. This explains why automatic writing usually leads "white surrealists" to find "release" (Sartre 1975, 37). For Sartre, White Surrealism is impassive and impersonal and goes "beyond race and condition, beyond class" (Sartre 1975, 36).

On the other hand, automatism guarantees the Black artist no release. Their words, like Césaire's, "are compressed, one against the other, and contended by [their] furious passion" (Sartre 1975, 37). This contrast is explained by musical Afro-surrealism's adherence to what William J. Harris calls "the Jazz Aesthetics" in his attempt to feature Baraka's poetics (13). The Jazz Aesthetics stresses the fact that African American artists exist in a radicalized, politicized world in which they are considered "second-class citizens"; consequently, the Black artists cannot give up the belief that "art should act in the world and that there are political criteria for judging art" (Sartre 1975, 13). That is, the Black musical Surrealism is ushered by a radical Afro-surreal automatism that functions as "a force for social change" (Jackson 2020).

The second aspect, musical Afro-surrealism or Blacks' jazz is not about making music but essentially about what meanings, intents, and attitudes are delivered by this music. In an essay entitled "Jazz and the White Critic," Baraka argues that White musicians and critics' reason for appreciating jazz is "the way music is made," and this causes a major flaw in their jazz criticism (Baraka 1967, 13). According to Baraka, the White critic believes that jazz can be learned and taught as a "clichéd" type of music because it is stripped "too ingenuously of its social and cultural intent" (Baraka 1967, 14). Thus, the White critic, whether consciously or unconsciously, is trying to objectify jazz by "formalizing" and "institutionalizing" it (Baraka 1967, 18). Nevertheless, surreal Black jazz advocates a resistance of such systemization. Jazz cannot be monolithic or molded because it represents "different singings" and "different versions of reality" in an attempt to totalize the "different expressions (of a whole)." By "the whole," Baraka means all African Americans or what he describes as "a nation, in captivity" (Baraka 1967, 184-185).

For the third aspect, musical Afro-surrealism is a conscious manifestation of African Americans' resistance of White cultural and political domination in the sense that it is revisionist, deconstructive, and sometimes violent; that is to say, the involvement of many African American jazz poets with Bohemianism, Beatnik, and Marxism, before and after the age of jazz, enables most of them to be acquainted with the prevailing and bourgeois forms according to Whites' standards. Jazz poets revise these high forms and then interrupt their peace by the loud jazz tones, the spontaneous repetition of lines and mystical content. The disruption of these forms is violent because it can be seen as a "parricide", according to William J. Harris. Interestingly, Harris uses Bloom's theory of literary influence to explain "the symbolic murder of domineering literary fathers" and replacing them by Black ones; a parricide (Harris 1985, 26). Baraka shouts loudly:

> We want "poems that kill."
> Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
> guns.
> ….
> Airplane poems. rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
> rrrrrrrrrrrrrr …. tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh
> …. rrrrrrrrrrrrrr …. Setting fire and death to
> whities […]

Metaphorically and politically, in Fanon's view, this surreal act of violence is a recreation. In the preface to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Sartre resonates Fanon's belief that "this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is man recreating himself" (Fanon 1963, 21). Thus, the surreal destructive method of jazz can also be creative; it is able to recreate what Baraka identifies as a "Black Poem".

Metaphoric Decoding of Afro-surreal Jazz Poetry

The previously approached method of surreal recreation leads the way for Afro-surreal jazz poetry to experiment with radicalized forms and content that cannot be approached separately. It is important to stress the fact that jazz poetry consists of an original intermediality between music and linguistic expressions. Herein, this paper finds it functional to refer to *Translating Jazz into Poetry: From Mimesis to Metaphor* (2017), in which Erik Redling suggests interpreting the relationship between jazz music and jazz poetry using a metaphoric perception rather than a mimetic one. That is, a mimetic perception treats jazz music and jazz poetry as hierarchical oppositions, through which poetry is seen as an imitation of jazz music. This perception is limited to the visual form of the poem and some typographic anomalies, like using upper-case letters, lower-case letters, slashes, spaces, and other aids that would suggest pauses, stuttering, or changes in tone (Redling 2017, 7). The drawback to be detected here is that the mimetic perception neglects the metaphorical meaning of the poem and abandons explaining how the typographic anomalies affect the theme of the poem and its interpretation.

On the other hand, the metaphoric perception studies how music and linguistic expressions equally correspond to each other in jazz poetry; this correspondence leaves a room for literal and figurative interpretations (Redling 2017, 31). Turning to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory[2] (1980), Redling tries to understand jazz poetry (the target domain) in terms of jazz music (the source domain). He ends up with different musical conceptualizations of poetic expressions that adhere to change. For example, in Baraka's poem "The Speed," Redling states that the poem's visual form of the short lines and the vertical column indicates a "fast tempo" or a fast rhythm (Redling 2017, 103). The metaphoric perception does not limit its scope of studying jazz music in jazz poetry to the poem's typographic anomalies or its visual form. It also cites the direct and the indirect references to jazz saxophonists, bands, composers, and musical instruments. To illustrate more, the following part of the paper intends to decode Henry Dumas' poem "play ebony play ivory" using the metaphoric perception.

A Metaphoric Decoding of "Play Ebony Play Ivory" by the "Afro horn": Henry Dumas

Henry Dumas (1934 – 1968) is a militant jazz poet who appealed to cultural nationalism and Black Arts Movement. Despite his short life of thirty-three years, Dumas is referred to as the "Afro horn" by Toni Morrison; Quincy Troupe also identifies him as a "poetic ancestor" (Leak 2014, 14). More relatively and as mentioned earlier, Baraka first coined the concept of Afro-surrealism to discuss Dumas' works (Baraka 1988). In fact, Dumas' poetry is all-embracing as he shows no traces of unconditional bondage to any physical or psychological formations. His life as a field boy in Arkansas, among other factors, was a determinant factor in shaping his intellectual consciousness as an African American writer, he was also influenced by his arrival in Harlem at the age of ten, his experiences in Saudi Arabia, San Antonio, and Texas as an airman in the U. S. Air Forces, and finally his intellectual engagement at Rutgers (1958 – 1965) (Leak 2014, 12-13). Dumas' interaction with the Black writers made him aware of Malcolm X as a source of intellectual inspiration for the jazz musicians which altered his early disdain of the movement (Leak 2014, 47). Thus, around 1965, Dumas associated himself with Jay Wright and Sun Ra with whom he "chase(d) down jazz spots and blues basements for the unfettered expressions of black culture they found there" (Leak 2014, 112). He experimented with new forms and techniques to show how mysterious, impulsive, expressive, and surreal jazz could be.

Following D. Scott Miller's definition of Afro-surrealism in his relatively recent "Afrosurreal Manifesto" (2009), it is safe to say that most of Dumas' works are Afro-surreal due to many features. In poems like "Tis of Thee," "Emoyeni, Place of the Winds," "Nogma" and "The Temple of Ihadan," Dumas creates an unknown world beyond the visible world where surreal experiences prevail. This world defies the given role to the "Negro" in the real world as Dumas reveals his realization in "Thought": "One of the greatest roles/ ever created by Western man/has been the role of 'Negro'" (Dumas 1988, 93). Thus, Dumas tries to push the "Negro" to a further world where he is not classified or modified; in a place where he sings, dances, subverts, flies, and strives for "melding, mixing, [and] cross-conversion" (Miller). Decoding Dumas' imagined worlds needs an inevitable reference to African mythology to understand how the old myths of Osiris, Shango, Mwali, Tao, Yert, and many others are related to the lives of the new breed of Africans scattered all around America. Above all and most prominently, readers can hear

the music of Dumas' surreal worlds as he believes that what makes African Americans exceptional in America is their ancient and inherited ability of singing.

In "play ebony play ivory,"[3] Dumas employs many techniques to set the parodic relationship between Afro-surrealism and Jazz. By using a skillful metonymy, the poem's title and visual form suggest a successive playing of the piano black (ebony) and white (ivory) keys. It is worth mentioning that ebony is a rare and expensive tree that is native to some parts of Asia and Africa; "a typical ebony trees is colored dark brown to jet black and is durable, which makes it highly desirable for the production of amongst other high valued musical instruments, ornaments, and furniture" (Jahanbanifardm et al. 2020). Thus, the words ebony and ivory connote directly the music of the exotic Africa: the habitat of ebony trees and African elephants.

The first of eight stanzas demands a fictitious pianist to move the piano's keys and chords to play a surreal music. Moreover, as suggested by the word "primeval," this music is ancient, unreasoning, and has the ability to speak. The poem's form and diction reflect a state of instability of its rough and inharmonious sounds. That is to say, the first stanza consists of six indented and un-indented lines. Indentation could suggest a short musical rest before playing loud beat. The lines also lack punctuation which creates enjambment and a fast tempo.[4] If divided, the stanza can be read as two sections; each starts with "play ebony play ivory" and they both have the same metrical pattern.

play ebony play ivory	/ / ˇ ˇ / / ˇ ˇ
play chords that	/ / /
speak primeval	/ / / ˇ
play ebony play ivory	/ / ˇ ˇ / / ˇ ˇ
play notes that	/ / /
speak my people …	/ / / ˇ

A protraction of describing the striking music is indicated by the ellipsis at the end of the first stanza. In the second stanza, the speaker reinforces his demand for playing music by repeating the refrain "play ebony play ivory" twice. However, he elaborates that this music cannot be static; it has to be continuously played while it explodes one time and subsides the other. As noticed, the second stanza establishes another symmetrical pattern that is different from the first stanza.

play ebony play ivory	/ / ˇ ˇ / / ˇ ˇ
play til air explodes	/ ˇ ˇ ˇ /
play til it subsides	/ ˇ ˇ ˇ /
play ebony play ivory.	/ / ˇ ˇ / / ˇ ˇ

Nonetheless, symmetrical patterns vanish after the second stanza since the period in the last line marks an act of improvisation; which, in jazz, is the spontaneous creation of music while being performed after repeating certain patterns (Glossary of Musical Terms, 134). For further explanation, improvisation is a kind of surreal automatism by which the jazz poet allows his unconscious thoughts to surface and take the lead; accordingly, his poetry is unrestrained and does not recognize *standard* forms. In jazz

poetry, improvisation suggests tonal and topical variations, as manifested in the following stanzas that vary in size, rhythm, and theme.

Hence, instead of repeating the refrain "play ebony play ivory," an urgency accompanied by a fast tempo is awakened by a string of seven lines with one single period in the third stanza. The speaker explains with a serious tone that this music is played for "songless" and "dead" audiences that have no ability to sing due to their "muted sour tongues" and "broken chords." The speaker asserts again the need to play for the "aging people" who poison and rot "the heart of earth." All these attributes work together to characterize the old and traditional, rigid White forms (the aging, standardized forms). Dumas, alongside the Black artists of the 1960s, thinks of the White forms as dead and idle forms that cannot serve the Black artist. These "aging" forms are unable to appreciate the earth's heart beats which metaphorically means the improvised jazz music that pulsates naturally. Trying to engulf this music with rigid forms rots it. Therefore, the Black musician can avoid poisoning his music by making it surreal, automatic, liberated, and by using his own African instruments, particularly ebony and ivory. Larry Neal writes, "The dead forms taught most writers in the white man's schools will have to be destroyed, or at best, radically altered. … The text could be destroyed and no one would be hurt in the least by it. The key is in the music" (Neal 2000, 78).

Relevantly, the structure of the fourth stanza suggests that it could be played with ritardando; which means slowing down the tempo gradually (Glossary of Musical Terms, 139). The rhythm seems to slow down towards the last two lines that are taller than the preceding lines of the same stanza; this lays emphasis on their meaning. Another point, the parallel use of the long vowels /3:/ in "heard" and /i:/ in "breathe" also indicates a slow tempo.

they cannot sing
they cannot play
they cannot breathe the early rhythm
they never heard the pulse of womb

Herein, the speaker further explores the characteristics of the "dead" audiences by establishing a comparison between them and the fictitious band. The speaker foregrounds this comparison using an anaphora; repeating "they" at the beginning of each line defines the audience as the "other" who cannot sing or play. Then, the speaker asserts that breathing "the early rhythm" and hearing "the pulse of womb" are two experiences that "they," in reference to the White audience, cannot be familiar with. Both experiences are related to the birth of jazz music. Explicitly, the "early rhythm" or the blues and the spirituals might be seen as a womb that stretches and changes to allow the growth of its fetus: Afro-surreal Jazz.

Moving to the fifth stanza, the rhythm gets more vibrant as punctuation puts forward. The stanza starts with a highly energetic phrase followed by an exclamation mark "so up!" to create an upbeat.[5] The upbeat is also suggested by the expressions "bursting lungs" and "morning breath." In the third line, the speaker shouts "up!" again before the beat goes down when the speaker asks the pianist to "play long and play soft." Closer to the end of the poem, an indentation suggests a short pause, and the refrain "play ebony play ivory" is chanted once more.

While the fifth stanza ends with a caesura, the sixth stanza is believed to be improvised in theme and melody. In fact, the poem starts to identify the pianist and his band in comparison with the White audience. The definition starts with the speaker asking his "people" to play; he asserts that the band members are all Black people who play music even by the act of breathing. Unlike the "songless" White people, the speaker claims that all Blacks have keys and chords and are able to sing. The stanza's lines are asymmetrical; they vary in size and rhythm. It has short and long lines that change in turn; however, this does not create a disjunct melody. On the other hand, the lines are well connected by the repetition of the words "play" and "my people" which emphasizes the notion that music is rooted in the African American culture. Consistently, "all my people" falls into perceiving jazz as a distinctive "social activity" which affords individuals a "collective form" of expression to develop (Stewart 1968, 9).

For the second time, and with the demand for playing music, the poet uses an ellipsis to suggest that the poem is not inclusive and cannot tell the pianist what to play exactly. That is, Afro-surreal music cannot be modeled and has no one "ideal form." In jazz, "a poem may thus differ from performance to performance" because the surreal technique of automatic improvisation lies "at the very heart of jazz music" (Henderson 1980, 61). The speaker chants in the seventh stanza:

> now touch
> and hear and see
> let your lungs scream
> til they explode
> til blood subsides
> and flesh vibrates …

Metaphorically, the diction can suggest a rhythm here. For example, words like "hear" and explode" indicate a loud beat, while "subsides" indicates a dropping beat. In a crafty manner, the speaker drags the band members' full attention by using surreal but beautiful sensual images. In Miller's theorization, surreal images strive for "the beautiful, the sensuous, the whimsical" (Miller 2009). Dumas' images in this poem are surreal; he was able to make music heard, seen, and felt. This music has a magical spirit that possesses its people: soul and body. Such a possessive spirit can go above and beyond, as the ellipsis suggests at the very end of the stanza.

In the final stanza, the speaker instructs the pianist and his band, in reference to all Black artists, to play Black music that speaks. The surreal world of the musician band with its magical instruments of ebony and ivory is connected to the real world because its music speaks and tells stories of real life. Baraka, in fact, describes Dumas as an Afro-surreal expressionist because of his innovative mastery in "creating an entirely different world organically connected to this one" (Baraka 1988, 164). This Afro-surreal world contains a lot of mysterious and ambiguous images; however, they "are also stories of real life, now or whenever, constructed in weirdness and poetry" (Baraka 1988, 164).

Moreover, in "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" (1962), Baraka calls this surreal world a "no-man's-land" that is "a black country, completely invisible to white America, but so essentially part of it" (Baraka 2009, 134). It is invisible because the "commercial Negro writer assures the white American that,

in fact, he does not exist" (Baraka 2009, 133) by his futile attempt at literary assimilation. Inversely, Dumas' free and improvised jazz delivers a band to his surreal world, equips them with African instruments, and lets them play "chords that speak" to tell their real-life stories. In conclusion, the anaphoric style of repeating "play" in the last stanza emphasizes that as long as this band's members play music, they attain existence and visibility.

Conclusion

Afro-surrealism and jazz were integral contributors to the African American literature of the 1960s. By distorting the hegemonic White forms and recreating new ones, Afro-surreal music was able to function as a pillar in building a distinctive African American cultural identity. Moreover, and due to its earned characteristics for being influenced by European Surrealism in particular, Afro-surrealism is essentially a resistant and combatant form of writing. Jazz poets, like Henry Dumas, appeal to it as a means of defiance. No doubt, the intermediality between music and poetry in their works needs a thorough examination on the aesthetic and metaphoric levels so as to be interpreted.

شعر الجاز السريالي الإفريقي: ثورة ثقافيّة

نور القيسي، سميرة الخوالدة
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، الجامعة الأردنيّة، الأردن

الملخص

تحت تأثير مفهوم "الزنوجة" الذي أوجده السرياليون الفرنسيون من السود، عملت حركة الفنون السوداء في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكيّة على تطوير فن يستمد جماليته بصورة أساسية ومتفردة من التراث الإفريقي، ليصبح بذلك إضافةً محوريةً للفنون الأمريكيّة الحديثة، ويعدّ شعر الجاز الأفرو- سريالي أحد نتاجات هذه الثورة الثقافيّة. لذلك تتناول هذه الدراسة شعر الجاز الأفرو- سريالي على عدة أصعدة، فتبدأ أولاً بتتبع العلاقة بين السرياليّة والجاز تاريخياً، فتدرس معضلة فناني "نهضة هارلم" المتمثلة في عدم قدرتهم على تحديد هويّة ثقافيّة خاصة بهم بسبب التزامهم بالمعايير الثقافيّة الغربيّة السائدة. ثم تنتقل الدراسة للنظر في التحول إلى السرياليّة الذي رافق حركة الفنون السوداء والذي منح السود مادة وقوالب فنية جديدة ومتميزة، وبخاصة في مجالي الشعر وموسيقى الجاز. وأخيراً تختتم الدراسة نقاشها بتحليل التقنيات والأساليب الشعريّة المستخدمة في قصيدة شاعر الجاز هنري دوماس "اعزف الأبنوس، اعزف العاج" وبيان معناها المجازي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السرياليّة، حركة الفنون السوداء، الجاز، السرياليّة الإفريقيّة الموسيقيّة، أميري بركة، هنري دوماس.

Endnotes

[1] 1960 is used as a reference point to the beginning of the Black Arts Movement.

[2] The Conceptual Metaphor Theory is a linguistic theory that "describes the relations between two different domains (music and poetry in this case) not as literal resemblances of inherent features but as metaphorical correspondences in which one domain is conceptualized in terms of the other" (Redling 31).

[3] Dumas' poems are found in the posthumously published collection *Knees on a Natural Man: The Selected Poetry of Henry Dumas* (1989), edited by Eugene B. Redmond.

[4] tempo: the speed of the musical beat (Glossary of Musical Terms, 141).

[5] upbeat: the weak beat that comes before the strong downbeat of a musical measure (Glossary of Musical Terms, 142)

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