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## World Beats

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THE BEAT MANIFESTO: AVANT-GARDE POETICS,  
BLACK POWER, AND THE WORLDED CIRCUITS OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN BEAT WRITING

*The Beat Manifesto*

The subterranean in Kerouac's writing is always connected to a potential line of flight and escape. As both Maria Damon and Aldon Nielsen have pointed out, a key reference point for the recurring images of escape in Bob Kaufman's work has to do with the Underground Railroad. Kaufman's poetry, especially those poems assembled in his best-known collection, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (1965), is able to link the U.S. counterculture and European avant-garde on one hand with civil rights and the slave narrative tradition on the other. Damon goes on to contend that for all his thematic and linguistic complexity, Kaufman has yet to enter the Beat canon, much less the U.S. or post/modernist canons. As she says, his "beatitude" remains "uncanonized"—a statement only slightly less true today than when it was made twenty years ago.<sup>1</sup> Why should this be the case? Kaufman first made the acquaintance of Kerouac and Burroughs in New York in the 1940s and would become a fixture of San Francisco's North Beach bohemian scene. In the late 1950s Kaufman launched a series of mimeographs under the title *Beatitude* that would serve for decades as a important outlet for West Coast writers. His 1959 *Abomunist Manifesto* is a neo-Dada masterpiece. Kaufman's relative obscurity (often self-willed) can be read productively, in the mode of the subterranean and alongside fellow African American Beat writers Amiri Baraka and Ted Joans, as having something to do with his ability to plug Beat energies into an array of extra-Beat sources, places, and times, launching from the "margins" (another term from Damon's work on Kaufman) of the Beat movement a more forceful critique of the literary and political status quo, and in the process unearth hidden

linkages that are present but often obscured in the work of his Beat peers.

One thing this view from the margins has begun to clarify is the Beat movement's relationship to literary and cultural history: in particular, the history of the twentieth-century international avant-garde. Central to the avant-garde's legacy for future generations of radicals—and, really, world culture at large—is the genre of the manifesto. Exploring the ways in which Beat writers have adapted the formal and rhetorical features of the avant-garde manifesto, an initial claim is that the Beats owe as much to international traditions of futurism, Dada, and especially surrealism as they do a strictly American tradition of Whitmanian democracy and the open-road mythos. John Clellon Holmes's essay "This Is the Beat Generation," which served as a public introduction to the notion of "Beat" when it appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on November 16, 1952, is but the first of many published attempts at self-definition and self-assertion on the part of Beat writers. While the Beats never produced a "Beat Manifesto" as such, a whole range of Beat texts contain what we might call a *manifesto function*, as key figures like Holmes, Kerouac, and Ginsberg, in addition to many "minor" Beats, felt themselves compelled to define and redefine their aesthetic and social practices and to state and restate their opposition to American conservatism after World War II. To reevaluate Beat writing in terms of its engagement with the international avant-garde is to reassess the role played by African American writers in the Beat movement as a whole. The work of Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman evinces a remarkably intense and long-standing commitment to avant-garde poetics and politics, which is central to their worlded conception of oppositional art and performative communities.

The manifesto tactics informing such disparate texts as Baraka's poem "BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS," his celebrated play *Dutchman*, and his manifesto for "The Revolutionary Theatre," in addition to Joans's *Black Manifesto* and Kaufman's *Abomunist Manifesto*, are also operative in those which, like Holmes's *Times* article, seek to define the Beat movement as such. The performativity at work in Joans's and Kaufman's manifesto-texts is a persistent feature of Kerouac's many attempts at explaining just what "Beat" means. In one of the best-known instances, his 1959 *Playboy* essay "The Origins of the Beat Generation," Kerouac's genealogy takes on cartoonish proportions as it expands to include everyone from Count Dracula to the Three Stooges.<sup>2</sup> Holmes's account is similarly expansive yet contains what now seems like a shocking exclusion: not a single artist, poet, or performer can be found among the myriad

hipsters and hooligans who populate his *Times* article. As Ann Charters has noted, “Nowhere in this early article did Holmes refer to Beat Generation writers, because he did not think of himself or his friends Ginsberg and Kerouac in this way, although he shared with them the new sensibility he had described.”<sup>3</sup> Such equivocation and ambivalence betray an insistent openness and a refusal of dogma that, far from sapping the strength from these texts, are a source of their lasting interest and importance to Beat studies. The conspicuous self-effacement on the part of Holmes and Kerouac reminds us that even the earliest, most canonical articulations of Beatness are anything but prescriptive or hegemonic and that the “Beat Manifesto” has been written by a diverse body of constituents, each of whom has transformed the movement in his or her own way. Even Ginsberg’s “Howl,” which for many does succeed in capturing the essence of the Beat Generation, registers a productive tension between the controlling vision of the poet and the absolute freedom he celebrates in his protagonists.

Holmes’s *Times* article finds a precedent in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1909 “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” which marked a direct engagement with and appropriation of the forces of bourgeois journalism and the mass press when it appeared on the front page of *Le Figaro* and in papers and journals across Europe. As the manifesto became a dominant mode of self-representation among the various avant-gardes, the form became increasingly self-reflexive. Manifesto writers began to recognize the irony of announcing the radical singularity of their aesthetic project with a manifesto form that, only a few years after Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto,” was already somewhat banal. Tristan Tzara’s 1918 “Dada Manifesto” begins, “To proclaim a manifesto you have to want: A.B.C., thunder against 1, 2, 3, lose your patience and sharpen your wings to conquer and spread a’s, b’s, c’s little and big, sign, scream, swear, arrange the prose in a form of absolute and irrefutable evidence,” drawing attention to what he saw as the tired predictability and general inconsequentiality of the form.<sup>4</sup> Parodying the rabid contrarianism typical of the manifesto, Tzara soon took to writing them on behalf of fictional characters with names like Mr. Antipyrine and Mr. AA the Antiphilosopher. But while the Dada manifestoes practically revel in their futility, the form continues to exert its strange power. André Breton’s first and second *Surrealist Manifestoes* could well represent the zenith of the genre, and the richly multi-valent responses to Breton’s *révolution surréaliste* on the part of Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman are significant in their own right.

Ever since Marjorie Perloff’s landmark *Futurist Moment*, the manifesto form has been central to our understanding of the historical avant-

garde and its hallmark claims on the radically new. Two recent studies warrant particular attention. Janet Lyon has argued for a genre with rather porous boundaries, and her expanded conception is especially relevant when considering the manifesto function of Beat texts. Lyon also draws our attention to the tortuous temporality of a genre that attempts simultaneously to offer a new version of history, to create the demand for action, *now*, in the present, and to project a vision of a future in which its project will have become reality.<sup>5</sup> Martin Puchner has emphasized the manifesto's performative qualities, both in terms of its seeking to *create* a new movement or worldview in the very act of naming it and giving voice to its demands—there were no futurists, in other words, before Marinetti announced their birth on the front page of *Le Figaro*—and in terms of the genre's notable theatricality.<sup>6</sup> (The former is the performativity of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, where “constative utterances,” statements of fact, are contrasted with “performative utterances,” statements that effect some action or change in the world. The classic example of Austin's performativity is the wedding vow that, in its very utterance, *makes the marriage happen*.) But in their desire to break with tradition, to produce an event in the strongest sense of the term, manifesto writers are often confounded by a form that, as Tzara indicates, has become utterly conditioned and conventional. The performative force that both actuates and delimits the manifesto form gives rise to the characteristic impulse among avant-garde groups to continually rewrite their foundational texts, returning to the scene of the crime to recapture original energies and clarify original positions.

In *performing* a group's oppositional poetic or political practices, the manifesto is a highly transgressive genre, and the mixing and denaturing of genres has been a primary concern for manifesto writers.<sup>7</sup> Puchner, largely following Perloff in her discussion of Marinetti's *arte di far manifesti* (art of making manifestoes), accordingly develops a concept of “manifesto art” to read a whole series of important works of avant-garde poetry, painting, and sculpture in terms of their dual nature as manifesto and artwork. Puchner also argues most forcefully that with the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels created a model, less for the content (whether political, artistic, etc.) than for the form (the manifesto form itself), that generations of subsequent protest would take up and transform.<sup>8</sup> Tracing such a lineage reminds us of what is at stake when avant-garde writers and artists, the Beats included, strive to change the world with their art. For all the hits it has taken over the years, the most cogent formulation of an avant-garde politics remains that of Peter Bürger, in

whose dialectical analysis the defining move of the avant-garde is “to reintegrate art into the praxis of life,” to bridge the gap between art and politics, between art and the world.<sup>9</sup>

Perloff’s discussion of collage as a signal contribution of avant-garde art highlights a certain affinity between the manifesto form and the Deleuzian assemblage with its heterogeneous, rhizomic form. She quotes Blaise Cendrars, who writes in *La prose du Transsibérien* (1913), a mixed-media text that Perloff describes as the “hub of the Futurist wheel”: “I have deciphered all the confused texts of the wheels and I have assembled [*j’ai rassemblé*] the scattered elements of a most violent beauty / That I control / And which compels me.”<sup>10</sup> Methods involving collage or pastiche are hallmarks of modernist and avant-garde art that have clearly been influenced and inflected by the Benjaminian shocks and juxtapositions of modern print media. While an obvious example of this would be the *découpage* of Picasso’s synthetic cubism with its newspaper cutouts (another glimpse of *Le Figaro*) forming part of the composition, the manifesto form is also affected by similar forces of juxtaposition and the mixed-media and mixed-genre qualities of the newspaper (headlines, photography, *faits divers*, fiction, advertisements, etc.). Breton’s first *Manifesto of Surrealism* is formed out of several distinct modes with completing voices, demands, and typographies. After the polemical rhetoric in first section, denouncing realism and its attendant logic and epistemology, introducing Guillaume Apollinaire’s term *sur-réalisme* as a countermeasure, and praising Freud’s systematized exploration of the unconscious, Breton includes a list of quotations from his surrealist colleagues before moving on to quote a seemingly random list of facsimiles of newspaper headlines. As with many manifestoes that perform a group’s own practices and poetics, by incorporating these disparate elements Breton’s manifesto seems to introduce the elements of chance and randomness that in many ways are at the core of the surrealist movement he is in the process of introducing.

Perloff is especially interested in the hybrid nature of Marinetti’s manifestoes, and of futurist “manifesto art” more generally—its relation to the “everyday” and the heteroglossia of the public sphere. She writes, “The Futurist manifesto is also theatrical in a deeper sense, occupying as it does a ‘space that lies between the arts’ and conflating verbal strategies that do not conventionally cohere: the ethical and pathetic arguments of classical rhetoric, the rhythm, metaphor, and hyperbole of Romantic lyric poetry, the journalistic narrative of everyday discourse, and the dialogic mode of drama which acts to draw the reader (or viewer) into its verbal orbit.”<sup>11</sup> Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” appearing in

newspapers across Europe, was a weapon in the arsenal of avant-garde tactics appropriating modern forms of popular culture and mass communication. His manifesto functions as a birth notice (the advent of the futurist movement), an obituary (for what Bürger will call “art as an institution”), and, most important, an advertisement.<sup>12</sup> A persistent theme of the avant-garde manifesto, testified to by Marinetti and Breton, as well as by Guy Debord and Gil Wolman in their situationist “User’s Guide to Détournement” (1956) is that the (print) advertisement holds a great deal of potential for transforming artistic practices. Its potential lies in the fact that it is a more or less *empty* form, that it is a necessarily *public* form, that it can accommodate the most unexpected juxtapositions, and, for Debord in particular, that it is a *revolutionary* form in that it leads to the creation of desires that cannot be fulfilled within the reigning capitalist order.

Whereas Marinetti clearly saw the advantage of posting such a public announcement of the futurists program, later avant-gardists were more wary of mass media forms. Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto,” perhaps in response to Marinetti, takes several swipes at journalists, beginning with the idea that only journalists feel the need to figure out what the word “Dada” means, while the Dadaists themselves could care less: “*The magic of a word—DADA—which for journalists has opened the door to an unforeseen world, has for us not the slightest importance,*” writes Tzara, whose 1918 manifesto proclaims: “DADA MEANS NOTHING” (149). Tzara compares “comprehensible” art to mere journalism, which suggests that the artist who must pander to an audience by creating easily digestible and commodifiable works of art is no better than the newspaper writer who must appeal to something like the lowest common denominator and acceptable public tastes. In its wariness of the mass press, Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto” seems to prefigure Jean Baudrillard’s argument in “Requiem of the Media,” where, slyly adapting McLuhan’s dictum that “the medium is the message,” Baudrillard asserts that the very form of the mass media, whether print media or more specifically in Baudrillard’s discussion, television, will always preclude its revolutionary use.<sup>13</sup> Citing the example of the protests that lead to the May 1968 insurrection, he argues that once televised, they ceased to be an *event*. That is to say, popular media depends on reproducibility and is therefore fundamentally incompatible with the eventness or singularity of a revolutionary event. Moreover, “broadcast” media, in print or on the air, are capable only of unidirectional communication, which is again incompatible with a truly social project. At the same time, avant-garde groups like the Dadaists have sought to co-opt notions of the popular to create performative com-

munities based on shared beliefs and a common enemy. Werner Sollors has referred to Baraka's "populist modernism," for instance, as the bedrock of his 1960s black arts aesthetic.<sup>14</sup>

The manifesto is that which makes manifest. It calls forth the specter, calls on the specter to manifest itself. (Marx and Engels famously begin, "There is a specter haunting Europe.") Derrida writes, "The [*Communist Manifesto*] calls, it calls for this presentation of a living reality: we must see to it that in the future this specter . . . becomes a *reality*, and a *living* reality. This real life must show itself and manifest itself."<sup>15</sup> For Derrida the manifesto does not call the specter to appear now, at once. It calls, from the present moment of the manifesto, for the specter (which does not belong to any temporality or ontology) to manifest itself *in the future*, in a *future-to-come* that will not be conditioned by any manifesto. This is why the event called for in the manifesto form will always exceed the logic of the performative. The future-to-come simply cannot, or cannot simply, be made to come.

What, then, accounts for the power the manifesto still does seem to exert? Elsewhere in Derrida's work, the performative will always preclude the event (in the strong sense of the term), yet in *Specters* he opens a space for its possibility: the *Communist Manifesto* "does not consist in merely foreseeing (a gesture of the constative type) but in calling for the advent, in the future, of a manifesto of the communist party which, precisely in the performative form of the call, will transform the legend of the specter not yet into the reality of communist society but into that other form of real event (between the legendary specter and its absolute incarnation) that is the Manifesto of the Communist Party" (103). How can it be that the *Communist Manifesto* calls, not for the "advent" of the Communist Party, but for the advent, "in the future," of *a* communist manifesto? Why would the "legendary specter" be transformed, not (yet) "into the reality of communist society," but into the "real event" of a manifesto? I believe Derrida's statement—itsself as circuitous as the temporal logic of the manifesto form he attempts here to navigate—*performs* the necessary and productive displacements at work in the manifesto form. If the manifesto were to have called forth the specter at once, if it had conjured the ghost only to then exorcise it, its performative call would at once exhaust the force of the unconditioned future-to-come. What Derrida instead sees operating in the manifesto is a deferral of the event—the event of a communist manifesto, the manifestation of a communist society—that in turn serves to create the conditions under which such an event might be possible. The real event of this manifesto-to-come and this revolution-to-come (always *to-come*) will, in fact, be a spectral



event, unlocatable, oscillating between “the legendary specter” (*There is a specter haunting Europe . . .*) and its impossible “absolute incarnation.”

The highly equivocal attempts at self-definition on the part of Holmes and Kerouac, as well as the manifestoes written by Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman, enact similar processes of deferral and displacement as those described by Derrida in his work on the *Communist Manifesto*. At the same time, the temporalities of Ginsberg’s “Howl,” along with its unresolved tensions between individuality and collectivity, resonate powerfully with previous discussions of the manifesto by Lyon, Puchner, and Perloff. Lyon in particular urges that we ask, whom does the manifesto address itself to, and on whose behalf? The poetics and politics of representation in the manifesto, especially in terms of representation and gender and the discourse of gender equality as it plays out in revolutionary struggle, are major questions in Lyon’s book. She also writes about “negotiating universalism” in the manifesto (just as worlded thought must negotiate the global as a different kind of totality), saying that “all manifestoes pose both a challenge to and an affirmation of universalism.”<sup>16</sup> Even as it circumscribes group identity and allegiance, the best manifesto art remains radically open and inclusive. Timothy Yu’s reading of “Howl” as an inspiration and model for self-determination among a burgeoning Asian American avant-garde also speaks to the growing interest in Beat Generation writing from China to North Africa: not as something to be imported wholesale as consumable “counterculture” but as something to be *used*—to be manipulated and deterritorialized in ways that are meaningful within local contexts and histories the world over.<sup>17</sup>

This process of transgressive appropriation requires a worlded critical procedure equally attuned to geographic and historical specificity and to material practices that run counter to the sublime sameness of the global. To world the Beats is to emphasize not only their transatlantic linkages but also their interaction with third world and post/colonial spaces. With regard to African American Beat surrealism, a worlded perspective would, for example, consider the profound influence of Aimé Césaire, whose distinctive images of fecundity and decay are deeply rooted in Martinican soil and history and form a kind of figurative or descriptive dialect quite far removed from the language of Breton and other European surrealists. Like Césaire in his Caribbean context, Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman each argue powerfully for the African origins of surrealism as they seek to reactivate the movement’s anticolonial, antiracist energies. These currents of inspiration and influence are always multidirectional. In *A Transnational Poetics*, Jahan Ramazani places Baraka within a net-

work of criss-crossing transatlantic energies traveling from Whitman to Lawrence to Olson to Baraka to the “‘black British’ poets,” who “complete a parallel transatlantic loop by drawing on the example of the militant, vernacular poetics of the Black Arts movement, which in turn owed debts to the Beats and Black Mountain poets . . . and to Harlem Renaissance poets such as Hughes.” Ramazani, arguing for a “translocal” approach and a “particularized” understanding of literary internationalism, articulates yet another way to remap the sources and legacies of African American Beat writing.<sup>18</sup>

*African American Surrealism and the  
Worlding of Beat Literature*

Aldon Nielsen, who places Baraka at the center of his encyclopedic study of African American experimental writing, *Black Chant* (whose title is taken from a line in Baraka’s “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS”), will write in a later essay on Bob Kaufman:

Kaufman’s adaptations of surrealism were more historically engaged and more politically directed than were those of many among his white contemporaries. Despite the leftist and anarchist leanings of some older poets, such as Kenneth Rexroth, and younger Beats, such as Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti and McClure, few of them were ready to confront America’s racial politics as forcefully as did Kaufman and Baraka. . . . More importantly, though, Kaufman’s poetry joins a radical tradition of surrealism and racial politics that reaches back through García Lorca’s *Poet in New York* and Aimé Césaire’s *Return to My Native Land* to the radical politics of the French Surrealist Group.<sup>19</sup>

“More historically engaged and more politically directed”—which is also to say more worlded. Unlike Baraka, however, Kaufman figures little in *Black Chant*. The essay cited here, which discusses Kaufman’s “occlusions” from histories of Beat and modernist writing, can be seen as his attempt to rectify earlier omissions in his own work. Nielsen uses very curious and evocative language to describe the fact that only a “few American critics,” Maria Damon most notably, “have broken the silence surrounding what must be seen in retrospect as a veritable transubstantiation, whereby Kaufman raised the body of black arts from within the entombment of modernity, retaking at the same time the terrain of the American cultural future anterior” (136). The materiality of his description is striking. Nielsen’s references to (Christ’s) resurrection position

Kaufman as a martyr figure and call to mind the devastating poem “Benediction,” where he writes, “America, I forgive you . . . I forgive you / Nailing black Jesus to an imported cross / Every six weeks in Dawson, Georgia.”<sup>20</sup> They also point to Kaufman’s frequent “incorporation” of modernist martyrs like Federico García Lorca into his poetry (136).

Nielsen’s essay is primarily interested in Kaufman’s poetry as a connective and transformative substance. Kaufman’s significance lies in his ability to translate, and thereby transform, modernism through the strange logics of his pantheon. “By conjoining [Crispus] Attucks and Lorca,” he writes, “Kaufman effects a yet more radical translation of Lorca and of modernism, conjuring a transmigration of African-inflected verbal innovation that transfigures modernism, placing Kaufman himself in the position of both father and son to the modern, temporally as well as racially miscegenated” (136). The temporality described here is the “future anterior” that Nielsen refers to throughout his essay, which is also the *will have been* of the Derridean future-to-come. In a more Deleuzian register, Kaufman’s poetry consistently makes uses of a heterogeneous assemblage of influence—Nielsen invokes the future anterior to complicate strictly linear conceptions of literary and cultural history, which is a rhizomic gesture to be sure. With Lorca still in mind, Nielsen writes, “Kaufman rewrites and mis-remembers, dismembers, his modernist model, reauthorizing his own poetics” (139), using Lorca’s words to argue even more forcefully than Lorca for the African origins of European modernism. In a move common in Kaufman’s poetry, and in Baraka’s and Joans’s work as well, “Kaufman lays hands upon the body of Lorca’s texts and makes them black American signifying structures” (139). Nielsen’s insistence on the physicality of this process: “lays hands,” “intimate contact,” “transubstantiation,” is yet another way of framing the materiality of worlded Beat writing.<sup>21</sup>

Critical work on Kaufman, Baraka, and Jones has tended to emphasize the disjunctions between African American Beat writing and the Beat movement as a whole. Robert Lee, for example, echoes earlier readings of Baraka’s work by Nielsen, Werner Sollors, and Kimberly Benston when he tries to define a clean break between LeRoi Jones the Beat poet and Amiri Baraka the black nationalist, and a clear choice between aesthetics and politics, bohemia and the barricades. Lee writes that for the Baraka of the 1950s Beat period, “‘Black’ . . . signified more a call to consciousness and culture” than the basis for world revolution. He continues, “Equally, for Joans and Kaufman . . . theirs were literary black-resistance voices rather than allied to a specific politics.”<sup>22</sup> Instead of this either/or logic, a

more nuanced subterranean reading would emphasize simultaneity and overlap and mark the continued presence of early Beat and avant-garde influences throughout their later, more radical careers. Here again their marginality serves to make visible a hidden multiplicity at the center of the Beat movement. Those who study African American Beat writers (and other marginal figures associated with the Beats) are often in a better position to open up the study of the Beat Generation, not least because of the simple fact that Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman have all produced recognizably “Beat” writing that expressly acknowledges a different set of influences than those touted by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, or Ferlinghetti (or give those same influences a very different inflection). Lee is exemplary in this regard when he writes,

all three typically took up the Beat interests in Zen and Eastern-transcendental spirituality but frequently linked it to the blues—with Africa as a prime source of reference and imagery. Similarly, if their poetry could be sexually celebratory and playful, à la Ginsberg, it could also broach the racial taboos of sex, a Beat articulation (long continued in Joans and Kaufman) of the “black” senses. Given, overall, then, a heritage “up from slavery” and formed as much by jazz or spiritual or rap as by Blake and Whitman, Williams and Pound, who better to have adapted Beat to a black dispensation, . . . to have made it signify?” (162).

The almost Deleuzian turn of phrase, “a Beat articulation of the ‘black’ senses,” immediately suggests its converse: what would a *black* articulation of *Beat* senses look like? Ultimately, “Beat senses” (and their articulation across the wider culture) are no more fixed than Lee’s “black senses,” and in assuming a Beat stance or inhabiting a Beat position from which to decry society’s shortcomings, African American writers such as Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman also helped shape and transform the Beat movement itself.

Baraka, not surprisingly, dominates Lee’s 1996 essay on the “Black Beats,” but Lee’s discussion of Joans’s life and work is revelatory in its own way. Referring to two of Joans’s best-known collections, *Afrodisia* and *Black Pow Wow*, Lee writes that Joans’s best-known poetry exhibits a “largely freeform, ‘spoken’ poetry in which blues, jazz, sex, Black Power, Africa and surrealist motif . . . plait one into another” (167–68). The manner as well as the content of his description is worth noting. It is a typical list-form, paratactic, rhizomic description of Beat influences. These kinds of descriptions pop up everywhere in the literature on the Beats, and Kerouac himself frequently deploys them when trying to ex-

plain the meaning of “Beat.” They do not signify a discursive laziness on the part of Beat scholars; rather, they are properly rhizomic descriptions of essentially rhizomic phenomena. Joans almost says as much in a 1975 interview with Henry Louis Gates Jr., where he explains somewhat cryptically, “I am connected to every living person on earth. I’m connected to the *correct* people, not the *right* people, but the correct people. There’s a big difference.”<sup>23</sup> And where Kaufman is concerned, Lee traces a poetic genealogy as rich as that of Joans or Baraka or, for that matter, Ginsberg or Kerouac. He writes that “Kaufman strikes his own Beat affinity in ‘Afterwards, They Shall Dance,’ a poem in which he claims a lineage with Dylan Thomas . . . Billie Holiday . . . Poe . . . and . . . Baudelaire. Only a dues-paying black Beat, one suspects, would end [the poem] in terms which resemble both Ginsberg’s ‘Sunflower Sutra’ and a dreamy, flighted blues” (171). One might ask what exactly Lee means by a “dues-paying black Beat,” but at the very least he seems to suggest that Kaufman’s background and experiences allow for a more capacious vision of Beatness than that of the more canonical Beat writers.

Looking back over Baraka’s long and varied career, it does become tempting to mark a clean break between his early Beat period and the developments that follow. This view is well represented by Werner Sollors, who equates Baraka’s Beat-inflected writing with an ineffectual, narcissistic bohemianism in contrast to the serious, engaged commitment of his more explicitly political art.<sup>24</sup> I want to suggest, however, that Baraka’s mid-1960s turn to black arts signals not a repudiation of the Beat and avant-garde aesthetics that characterize his early work but rather their evolution in accordance with the scope and ambition of his black nationalist and Marxist writing. Nielsen cites one interview in which Baraka explains, “I was always interested in Surrealism and Expressionism, and I think the reason was to really try to get below the surface of things . . . The Civil Rights Movement, it’s the same thing essentially, trying to get below the surface of things, trying to get below the norm, the everyday, the status quo, which was finally unacceptable, just unacceptable.”<sup>25</sup> Nielsen concludes that for Baraka surrealism has always involved “a political as well as an aesthetic logic,” and the fact that Baraka produces his most self-conscious avant-garde poetry during the headiest years of the civil rights movement should not go unremarked.<sup>26</sup> Far from indicating a turn *away* from the world or a dismissal of political engagement, Baraka’s avant-gardism reenacts the quintessential move to close the gap between aesthetics and politics, art and the world. And while the remarks cited by Nielsen deal specifically with a conflation of surrealism and civil rights,

they also point the way to a sustained critique within African American Beat writing of institutional racism and imperialist domination across the globe.

Todd Tietchen's locates Baraka's initial break with both white bohemia and the mainstream civil rights movement a few years earlier in another transnational crossing: Baraka's 1960 trip to revolutionary Cuba with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a group of African American intellectuals that included the controversial NAACP chapter head Robert Williams. Baraka's experiences are documented in his important early essay "Cuba Libre," first published in 1960 in *Evergreen Review*. In his *Autobiography* Baraka refers to the trip as a "turning point in my life," and Tietchen argues that changes Baraka made for the revised version of his "Cuba Libre" essay (published in 1966 in *Home: Social Essays*) reflect the author's growing radicalism in their new emphasis on fellow traveler and "proto-Black Power activist" Williams. The 1966 "Cuba Libre" now sets Williams and Castro together as "transnationally aligned" revolutionaries taking part in a long tradition of armed insurrection.<sup>27</sup>

Baraka's radicalism, and especially his future turn to third world Marxism, clearly has roots in the time he spent in Cuba; "Cuba Libre" reveals his growing dissatisfaction with white bohemia and its hollow, essentially bourgeois revolt and with the mainstream civil rights movement. His visit to Cuba grants him a new perspective on the parochialism of racial politics in the United States. He recounts one amusing episode at the Ministry of Education, where the group of Americans has just been regaled with statistics on the vast improvement in Cuba's schools under Castro. The wife of one delegate asks the minister "if in the new schoolbooks that were being manufactured, little Negro children were portrayed as well as white . . . to show the little Negro children that they are not inferior."<sup>28</sup> The minister appears confused, and Baraka cannot help but laugh at the woman's well-intentioned naivety. As Baraka tells it, when the minister finally catches her meaning and hands her a newly printed book showing "five children at a blackboard, two of them black . . . the woman almost swooned" (41).

The group's visit to Cuba culminates in an overnight voyage to the Sierra Maestra by train to join the massive celebration in honor of the attacks that marked the beginning of the revolution. Thousands upon thousands of Cubans, as well as young people from all over Latin America, were making the trek, and on the train Baraka was fiercely berated by a Mexican graduate student for being a *yanqui* and—when he heedlessly admits to being a poet and therefore "not even interested in politics"—

for being a “cowardly bourgeois individualist” (57). This and similar exchanges affected him deeply, as did his brief audience with Castro. Baraka asked him, “What about communism?” and Castro replied, “I’ve said a hundred times that I’m not a communist. But I’m certainly not an anti-communist. . . . I said also a hundred times that I consider myself a humanist. A radical humanist” (68). Upon his return to the States, Baraka felt compelled to write of his Greenwich Village compatriots: “The rebels among us have become merely people like myself who grow beards and will not participate in politics. Drugs, juvenile delinquency, complete isolation from the vapid mores of the country, a few current ways out. But name an alternative here. Something not inextricably bound up in a lie. Something not part of liberal stupidity or the actual filth of vested interest. There is none. It’s much too late” (78). By the time he returned to New York, it was clear that he had begun to rethink completely his role as a committed writer and the proper relationship between art and social change.

Baraka continued to look to the European avant-garde for guidance and precedent, however. In a series of texts from the early to mid-1960s, including “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” and the play *Dutchman* (both date to 1964)—William Harris calls them “transitional” in that they bridge the gap between Baraka’s Beat years and his subsequent commitment to black nationalism—his continued engagement with surrealism in particular most often hinged on Breton’s infamous provocation from the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*: “The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd.”<sup>29</sup> Baraka will translate Breton’s dictum into specifically racialized terms, and the specter of indiscriminate murder becomes a powerful trope in Baraka’s work for years to come. In an oft-cited passage from “BLACK DADA,” he writes,

Come up black dada

nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape  
 their fathers. Cut the mothers’ throats.  
 Black dada nihilismus, choke my friends  
 . . . . .  
 (may a lost god damballah, rest or save us  
 against the murders we intend  
 against his lost white children.<sup>30</sup>)

With “BLACK DADA” Baraka began addressing himself to, and speaking on behalf of, a “we,” and the poem’s deeply unsettling images of physi-

cal and sexual violence should be understood primarily in terms of their appeal to a collectivity. The scenes of racial bloodshed that appear with increasing frequency in Baraka's work of the 1960s and 1970s are never simply a matter of style or the overheated rhetoric of *épater la bourgeoisie*; they are nothing less than a call to arms and revolution. Also significant is Baraka's invocation of Damballah at the close of the poem, which registers the subversive syncretism of worlded African slave traditions that have provided a model for his own transformations of Breton's surrealist revolt.

In his celebrated play *Dutchman*, Baraka dramatizes Breton's scene of originary surrealist violence in the highly charged interactions between Clay, protagonist and self-proclaimed "Black Baudelaire," and the white Lula. While it is Clay who, finally driven into a rage by Lula's constant goading, threatens bloody murder, in a crucial reversal of events, it is Lula who takes the decisive action in which the play culminates. In his work on Baraka, Sollors does recognize Clay to be more a "Black Breton" than a "Black Baudelaire," but in Sollors's reading, Clay's death is meant to mirror Baraka's own rejection of white bohemia and its avant-garde aesthetics.<sup>31</sup> But if we instead read Clay as a fundamentally tragic figure, defeated by his own weakness and lack of commitment, his death then signals not Baraka's rejection of surrealism but rather his redoubled effort, absolutely following Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, "to make for [him]self a tenet of total revolt, complete insubordination, of sabotage according to rule" (125). Clay's death becomes a key reference point in Baraka's 1965 manifesto for "The Revolutionary Theatre."

Baraka's polemics in the "Revolutionary Theatre" manifesto follow much the same lines as those in *Dutchman* and "BLACK DADA," but what makes Baraka's manifesto especially important to the present discussion are its strongly internationalist designs and its worlded view of human oppression. When he writes, for example, "The Revolutionary Theatre is shaped by the world, and moves to reshape the world," I take him at his word as calling for a politically engaged art that indeed has the "world" as its proper object.<sup>32</sup> In this as well, Baraka recognizes surrealist precedents. When Ginsberg was living in Paris in the early 1960s, he discovered the censored radio recording of Antonin Artaud, the former surrealist and architect of the Theatre of Cruelty, performing his late work "To Have Done with the Judgment of God." Ginsberg obtained several copies of the recording and sent them to Baraka and Michael McClure, among others. In 1961 Jones had just started publishing the *Floating Bear* newsletter along with Diane di Prima, and they would go on to co-



found the New York Poets Theatre later that year. Both *Floating Bear* and the Poets Theatre became important venues for publishing and presenting works by the Beats, the New York School, and the Black Mountain poets. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty aesthetic would become a touchstone for the Poets Theatre, and Michael McClure even incorporated the illicit recording of Artaud's in one of his productions there. The radio performance, recorded when Artaud was in the full bloom of madness, addiction, and poverty, seems to fit rather neatly into the Beat allure of beatitude and "crazy wisdom," but there exists another, politically inflected Artaud who emerges in his writings on Mexico, offering an avant-garde critique of colonialism that Beat writers found appealing and productive in their own era of decolonization and Cold War geopolitics.

In his second manifesto for the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud turns the tables on the imperialist West, so to speak, by describing the violent spectacle of Conquest as a *model* for the performative violence that he believed was necessary to shock the West out of its moral and spiritual complacency. For this reason, the "first spectacle" of the Theatre of Cruelty was to be called *The Conquest of Mexico*:

The subject was chosen:

1. Because it involves the present, and because of all the references it allows to problems of vital interest both to Europe and the world.

From a historical point of view, *The Conquest of Mexico* raises the question of colonisation. It revives Europe's deep-rooted self-conceit in a burning, inexorably bloody manner, allowing us to debunk its own concept of its supremacy. . . .

2. By raising the dreadfully contemporary problem of colonisation, that is, the right one continent considers it has to enslave another, it poses the question of the real supremacy some races may have over others. . . . It contrasts the tyrannical anarchy of the colonisers with the deep intellectual concord of those about to be colonised.<sup>33</sup>

The majority of Artaud's manifesto is, in fact, taken up by a sketch of the play in question. And to the extent that Baraka's own manifesto articulates an aesthetic for his new Revolutionary Theatre, it begins to look a lot like Artaud's program for the Theatre of Cruelty: full of wild, convulsive gestures, dissonant sounds, and violent conflict, all meant to stir the audience into action. Baraka writes, "The Revolutionary Theatre . . . should stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting craziness—but a craziness taught to us in our most rational moments. People must be taught to trust true scientists (knowers, diggers, oddballs) and that the

holiness of life is the constant possibility of widening the consciousness. And they must be incited to strike back against *any* agency that attempts to prevent this widening.” Referring to the Theatre of Cruelty’s ur-spectacle, Baraka writes, “Even as Artaud designed *The Conquest of Mexico*, so we must design *The Conquest of White Eye*, and show the missionaries and wiggly Liberals dying under blasts of concrete. For sound effects, wild screams of joy, from all the peoples of the world” (236–37).

The world, indeed. Baraka’s manifesto enlists Artaud, and Artaud’s Mexico, as part of a much broader, worlded conception of social upheaval and artistic practice, and Montezuma appears, as he does in “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS,” alongside a host of anticolonial and black power icons. Following Artaud’s lead, Baraka proposes a first production for his Revolutionary Theatre: “The play that will split the heavens for us will be called THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICA. The heroes will be Crazy Horse, Denmark Vesey, Patrice Lumumba, and not history, not memory, not sad sentimental groping for a warmth in our despair; these will be new men, new heroes, and their enemies most of you who are reading this” (241). Taken here to polemical heights, the transnational imaginary evident in Baraka’s manifesto has, in fact, shaped Beat writing of all stripes. Baraka’s worlded assemblage of avant-garde poetics, Pan-Africanist politics, and the hipster slang of “knowers, diggers, and oddballs” makes it possible to speak of an overlapping set of rhetorical tactics employed by Beat writers in their outernational contexts. His manifesto was originally going to be published in the *New York Times*, but after reading it, they decided to pass. Sollors and others have argued that Baraka abandoned his “avant-gardism” (as Sollors dismissively calls it) as well as his Beat comrades when he left Greenwich Village to found the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School in Harlem. But it turns out that this founding document of the black arts movement, which laid the thematic and aesthetic groundwork for a new phase of black cultural nationalism, was profoundly inspired by Artaud’s anticolonial critique. The next two chapters on Philip Lamantia and William Burroughs will further elaborate Artaud’s legacy among Beat writers.

It would seem that by highlighting a set of texts that revel in threats of racial violence aimed, at least in part, at the author’s Beat peers, and are nearly contemporaneous with Baraka’s mid-1960s abjuration of Greenwich Village bohemia, I would be seeking to emphasize the *discontinuities* between African American Beat writers and the Beat movement as a whole. The same might be said of Ted Joans’s “Proposition for a Black Power Manifesto,” which offers a glimpse of the poet at his most

uncharacteristically polemical and makes it clear that “whiteboy, this *Ain't* your bit!!”<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, I believe that these texts, along with Kaufman’s *Abomunist Manifesto*, do far more to reveal their profound affinities with the Beat movement at large in a shared commitment to worlded traditions of radical and avant-garde poetics and politics. While Breton’s pronouncement that Joans was the “only African American surrealist” remains dubious—he clearly hadn’t met Bob Kaufman—Joans’s life and work are clearly marked by an avant-garde ethos indeed inspired by Breton.<sup>35</sup>

While Joans’s debt to surrealism has been widely noted, what I want to stress is the case he makes for the transnational dimensions of even the most canonical French surrealism. In his 1975 interview with Henry Louis Gates, Joans is insistent on the point of surrealism’s international character, describing the French surrealists as “internationalist” and Breton as a “man of all nationalities.” In the same interview Joans is himself described by Gates as “Afro-America’s Tri-Continental Poet” (4–5): a third worlding of the poet aligning him with that momentous manifestation of postcolonial consciousness and self-determination, the Tri-Continental Conference that took place in Havana in 1966. Joans’s project is no less than one of remapping the world in accordance with the capaciousness of his poetic vision. In 1962 he had begun living off and on in Mali, and his work mirrors this geographic shift with an increasingly Pan-Africanist emphasis and a closer proximity to the aesthetic tenets of the black arts movement. But like Baraka, Joans never disavows his early Beat and avant-garde influences; his poetry instead becomes increasingly interested in asserting that surrealism’s roots lie in African, and not European, art and culture.

Joans was born Theodore Jones on the Fourth of July 1928, in Cairo, Illinois, although not, as legend claims, on a Mississippi River steamboat. (Joans was a superb self-mythologizer.) Joans, who would often say, “Jazz is my religion and surrealism is my point of view,” had been exposed in his youth to each of these central influences. His father, a musician and riverboat entertainer, taught his son to play the trumpet, and Joans was first introduced to surrealism by way of an aunt who worked as a maid for a “wealthy WASP family.”<sup>36</sup> According to Michael Fabre in his overview of Joans’s life as a surrealist, “the aunt often brought home discarded items given her by her cosmopolitan employers, who knew Nancy Cunard and haunted art exhibitions. Among those throwaways Ted found a copy of the November 1933 issue of *Vogue*, with an article about Salvador Dalí discussing surrealism; the special number of *L’Illus-*

tration on the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition; copies of *Le Minotaure* . . . and *Révolution Surréaliste*.” A thirteen-year-old Joans, unable to read French, saved up to buy a dictionary and began translating these and other surrealist texts. “By that time,” writes Fabre, “he had already begun imitating the surrealist pictures he saw, including African sculptures that seemed strangely familiar to him.”<sup>37</sup> Inspired by Dalí above all, Joans made up his mind to become a painter, and in 1951 he received a degree in fine arts from Indiana University.

Joans set off for New York City, the capital of abstract expressionism. He met Jackson Pollock and the action painters but maintained his preference for surrealism. Joans soon established a presence in the Greenwich Village bohemian milieu, which included Beat poets Ginsberg, Corso, di Prima, and LeRoi Jones. It was Jack Kerouac who introduced Joans to the Harlem nightlife. In 1953 Joans briefly shared a one-room flat with jazz legend Charlie “Yardbird” Parker. He would later write in “Bird and the Beats,” “I also gave big costume balls to raise money for rent. At one such party Bird attended, it was dedicated to surrealism, Dada, and the Mau Mau. Bird arrived late but he hastily improvised his own Mau Mau image, plus aided other hipsters. He insisted that we play no recordings of his, or Dizzy Gillespie ‘his worthy constituent.’”<sup>38</sup> In fact, Joans’s most recognizable work dates to this period, namely the message “BIRD LIVES!” that began appearing on the walls and sidewalks of Manhattan after Parker’s death in 1955.

By the late 1950s Joans had begun writing poetry in earnest. Ginsberg encouraged him to read his work in downtown coffeehouses, and before long Joans had published several volumes: *Beat Poems* (1957), *Funky Jazz Poems* (1959), *The Hipsters* (1961), and *All of Ted Joans and No More: Poems and Collages* (1961). Many in the Village saw Joans as a true hipster paragon. His “employment” with the short-lived “Rent-a-Beatnik” agency, which started as an ad in the *Village Voice* reading “RENT genuine BEATNIKS Badly groomed but brilliant (male and female),” is a telling example of Joans’s playful attitude toward his boho status. A 1960 *Time* magazine article documents one response that sent Joans to a “way-out coffeehouse” improvised in a living room by the wife of a business executive, where Joans explained to those gathered, “I take a bath every day, man.”<sup>39</sup>

In 1960 Joans moved to Paris and the famed Beat Hotel. Shortly thereafter, he chanced to run across André Breton on rue Bonaparte and began meeting regularly with Breton and the surrealist group in operation at the time. Fabre mentions that “Joans was happy to learn that, during the

1931 Exposition Coloniale, the Paris surrealists had opened an anticolonialist exhibit displaying European ‘tribal fetishes’ like Bibles, crucifixes, and stereotyped images of blacks of the kind found on Banania cocoa boxes” (314). It is *this* surrealist movement Joans allied himself with when he called himself a “Black Surrealist.” It is a reminder that the same surrealist movement behind the spontaneous insights of automatic writing, a commitment to chance and the unconscious, and all the rest, also vigorously protested French involvement in the Moroccan Rif War and remained emphatically opposed to European imperialism—a sentiment shared by mainline Bretonian surrealism and the so-called dissident surrealism of Artaud.

Early on Joans had taken to signing his poems “1714” in tribute to Breton. (Written to resemble the initials A. B., 1713 was a kind of magic number for Breton). After Breton’s death in 1967, Joans wrote a moving elegy titled “The Statue of 1713.” This poem, which, like so much of Joans’s work, argues powerfully for surrealism’s African provenance, concludes,

trumpets roared black waves of sound  
 flutes screamed and accused asthma  
 the sun in all its glory spun wildly  
 the statue of André Breton  
 stands in the shadow of no others  
 yet casting its own long distant intelligent  
 shadow into hands, hearts and minds  
 of men  
 This immense statue created by fetishers  
 festooned with gri-gri from home  
 and abroad stands as a living piece  
 of sculpture (a poem)  
 an awesome magnetic monument  
 for the beautiful women and  
 brilliant men  
 that felt the  
 presence of André Breton!<sup>40</sup>

Joans’s surrealism is most transgressive when it resists moving into abstract notions of global or even African space. (His poetry, like much of Baraka’s nationalist writing, is far less disruptive in terms of gender, as if the radicalism of their racial politics could be sustained only by an essentially conservative view of gender dynamics.) The compressed

imagery and densely layered narratives in “The Statue of 1713” are properly dreamlike and hallucinatory, but they are grounded in a great deal of worlded specificity.

Written “en route Tenerife / 5 March 1967,” the poem describes, according to Michel Fabre, a reverie occasioned when, “shortly after Breton’s death,” Joans chanced upon “Paris’s small Statue of Liberty lying on its side on the Left Bank, on its way to a new location. He considered it an omen.”<sup>41</sup> In Joans’s poem, however, readers encounter the statue (now the figure of Breton himself) not in Europe but in Africa, making it explicit that surrealism is of African provenance. The revered statue of Breton has been meticulously crafted and lavishly adorned with the soil and spirit of the continent. And while elsewhere Joans is more likely to address a unified, undifferentiated Africa, in “The Statue of 1713” he describes “owl wings from Mali,” “Tuareg war shots,” and a pedestal of “rock that / tumbled up from Adrar des Iforhas” (220). Here, Joans’s Africanist vision gives way to a worlded conception of black power, rooted in local soils but open to unforeseen crossings and connections. Far from enclosing or isolating, the worlded view, by recognizing local histories and terrains, allows them to be in even more direct and intimate contact with one another. Hence the intimacy of the “ancient poster from Montmartre” that “serves as a rug for the chief fetishier” who carves Breton’s statue. On the shifting sands of the Sahara—“The desert like the metropolis is full of mirages”—the poem must constantly reorient itself, and as in all of Joans’s worlded poetry, here he directs a process of geographic and linguistic mapping:

The statue of André Breton  
 leans toward the East ignoring the West  
 both thumbs pointing outward  
 signifying faith in the South and North. (221)

Meanwhile, other “fetish brothers” have been “entrusted to / translate the surrealist manifestos into / Tamachek thus enabling one to read them / backwards as well as forwards.” The appearance of Lautréamont’s Maldoror midway through the poem—“I pull my mosquito net up to allow / Maldoror a chance to enter my bed / He is a hairy tarantula tonight” (221)—points to the multiplicity of Joans’s surrealist influences and acknowledges a longer lineage of avant-garde forebears. The Uruguayan-born Lautréamont allows Joans to cast a wider net spatially as well, while drawing attention to Joans’s ever-present erotics of influence and inspiration. Similarly, Joans’s poem “Eternal Lamp of Lam” re-

fers to the Cuban surrealist painter Wifredo Lam, who was of mixed Asian and African ancestry. The poem basically consists of the line “AFRO CHINO CUBANO / AFRO CHINO CUBANO WIFREDO” repeated over and over again.<sup>42</sup> Thinking back to Joans’s assertion that Breton was a “man of all nationalities,” one gets the sense that, for Joans, these writers and artists are the embodiment of the worlded and worldly spirit of surrealism.

Through much of the 1960s the “tri-continental poet” called Timbuktu, Mali, home while traveling extensively throughout Africa and Europe. As the decade wore on, he gravitated toward the black nationalist movement that his former Beat colleague Amiri Baraka had been so instrumental in shaping. Joans had met Malcolm X (his “Ace of Spades”) while still in New York and later befriended ex-Black Panther Stokely Carmichael. While Joans seldom adopted the violently polemical tone of Baraka’s writing during this period, his work does begin to take on a more provocative edge in the volumes *Black Pow-Wow* (1969), *Afrodisia* (1970), and especially *A Black Manifesto in Jazz Poetry and Prose* (1971), where he writes in the long opening piece, “Proposition for a Black Power Manifesto”:

To free our black selves with our own Black Power  
and by any means necessary!!

Our black victory can only be won by Black Power.

That victory will be won the black way.

Black Power is our action—now!

Now ketch this shit

I believe that the moment is at hand for the black people to rise up  
like a giant midnight ocean wave, or like a sharp fatal pain in the ass of  
racist United States

then with the swiftness of a cheetah’s paw snatch our destinies from the  
ofay oppressors

Black Power can do, will do, and shall be done. (12)

And to drive the point home a few pages later: “When I say ‘our,’ I mean just we the blacks. I am aware that a whole lotta white motherfuckers shall buy and read this manifesto; and some will perhaps identify with it; but dig me whiteboy, This *Ain’t* Your Bit!!” (15). Yet even as Joans agitated for a radically self-assertive black art, he never renounced his devotion to Breton and surrealism. Indeed, the transnational scope of

Joans's increasingly Pan-Africanist commitments can be seen as analogous to surrealism's internationalist, anti-imperialist traditions.

The black nationalism at the heart of Joans's manifesto art closely parallels Baraka's work in the late 1960s, but Joans remained somewhat more skeptical than Baraka of programmatic modes of resistance. This wariness is evident in the rather ironic earnestness of Joans's "Proposition":

Since this a piece of prose  
 Black Power prose  
 a proposal for a Black Power manifesto  
 and not really "the" manifesto  
 I wont be mad if a black cat cops-out on what I manifest. (34)

This sentiment is remarkable in the way it seeks to avoid the limitations of resistance based in dogma by merely "proposing" a manifesto based on spontaneity and the unconditioned promise of the future-to-come. His claiming to have written not "the" manifesto but rather the proposal for a "manifesto-to-come" startlingly prefigures Derrida's argument concerning the *Communist Manifesto*, which in Derrida's reading seems to be aware of its own limitations and necessary contradictions as it enacts a series of deferrals that will never quite exhaust its utopian promise of social transformation. Joans's "Proposition" manifests the call of the unconditioned in ways very near to what Derrida sees operating in the *Communist Manifesto*. Joans declares, for instance, "Rebellion yes, rioting no! We must remain ready to act in our revolution at all times. For a moment will come when passion has infected the air, things will be tense and uptight: the black community will be so mad that it can barely breathe, and it is then that the most extraordinary events happen independently of any of the preparations that have been made." From a pragmatic point of view, the revolution must always maintain the element of surprise; when Joans's manifesto urges "that we must be cool, even though there is a 'long hot summer'" (34), it recognizes that one must move beyond predictable, and therefore containable, forms of revolt. To be successful, any mass movement must retain a core of flexibility, creativity, and freedom, and Joans has learned from surrealism the power of this disciplined commitment to chance. By formulating his call to vigilance, and ultimately to arms, in these terms, Joans places himself and his manifesto squarely within a tradition reaching back to Marx, adopted and adapted by countless radical movements and avant-garde groups around the world.

Like many avant-garde manifestoes, Joans's "Proposition" also raises



important questions about genre and the manifesto form. Written in mixed verse, it nonetheless asserts itself as “as piece of prose / Black Power prose” (34) and actually forms part of a larger work titled *A Black Manifesto in Jazz Poetry and Prose*. While it could describe the whole of Joans’s oeuvre, the “jazz poetry” of the title refers more specifically to the notes taken by Joans at the 1967 Newport Jazz Festival in Europe and included just after the “Proposition.” Describing sets at the festival by performers including Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughn, and Thelonious Monk, who Joans calls “the surrealist of modern jazz—the Dadaist of traditional piano playing” (43), Joans judged performances on the basis of their “blackness” or “whiteness” and takes on a strong black arts quality corresponding to contemporaneous work by Baraka in that direction. Joans’s notes also allow the music of “our greatest black creators” (12) to enter into his manifesto and, in a sense, answer Joans’s calls for a radically self-assertive black art. The final section of the *Black Manifesto* comprises a set of poems themselves acting as manifestoes in their unyielding assertion of the primacy of African forms and modes of expression. Laying out Joans’s vision of an empowered Africa, the manifesto poems are not qualitatively different from other work by Joans in the late 1960s—somewhat less playful, but with the same black nationalist and Pan-Africanist concerns. In one poem, “Ego-Sippi,” Joans writes,

i’ve lived at TIMBUCTOO/TANGIER/HARLEM/ & HAARLEM  
 HOLLAND too double crossed the Atlantic which i shall  
 rename THE AFRICAN OCEAN blue  
 NOW I read my poem in ’Sippi  
 and allyall know thats saying a lot. (58)

Here we have the worldliness of the speaker, the global view, the overlaying of civil rights and anticolonial struggles, and a process of worlded remapping whereby the “double crossed” Atlantic becomes the *African Ocean*. The same forces at work on the language of these poems have also pervaded Joans’s “Proposition” and the *Black Manifesto* as a whole, and the manifesto-poems that relay “messages” or provide timely “warnings” recall di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*, a highly performative piece of Beat agitprop that clearly foregrounds its manifesto functions.

Joans’s manifesto-texts, and African American Beat writing more generally in its engagement with the European avant-garde, operate within the realm of *tactics*. Joans’s *Black Manifesto* puts forward a vision of collective revolt and liberation based on surrealist spontaneity and what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call pragmatics rather than a programmatic

party platform. Understood in terms of Michel de Certeau's strategy-tactics paradigm, the seeming contradictions that run through Joans's manifesto become vital to his larger poetico-political project. He can express the general aim: "To free our black selves with our own Black Power / and by any means necessary!!" adding, "Black Power is not an ideology of Western thought" (13); Breton, however, never entirely leaves the picture. In "Proposition" Joans also writes, "Black Power is dreams that are carried out into reality. Black Power has the real and beyond the real in which to move. Our African ancestry has enriched us with this marvelous surreality. Black Power warriors can change into invisible animals that can spring out of the electric wiring inside of whitey's house" (16). The electric presence of African surreality recalls a similar pattern of imagery from "The Statue of 1713," where "the pedestal on which it stands / made of marvelous owl wings from Mali / gives off artificial lighting / accompanied by Tuareg war shouts" and "The pedestal of Malian owl wings is weeping / causing showers of electric sparks to fall / on the sand." These sparks scare away bandits and carry "the truth of the poet" (220). Just as Baraka's "Revolutionary Theatre" manifesto does with Artaud, Joans's manifesto *makes use* of Breton, and without irony he can employ manifesto tactics to decry the entire "ideology of Western thought" within which the manifesto form developed. The circuitry in which Joans's "Black Power warriors" carry out their maneuvers becomes the image of worlded currents of resistance and revolution.

Just how densely performative these connections between black power, surrealism, jazz, and Beat poetry are for Joans is made clear in a remarkable letter he sent to Ginsberg from Paris in early May 1968:

Dear Allen G,

Received the check donated to me. I think I thank you even very much so. I hope that other white creative brothers come through. But they are perhaps very different from you when it comes to bread. . . . Anyway, I come back June to USA. . . . Surrealist group here in Paris will help also. I just need dough to cross that vast stretch of African Ocean. (I just renamed it, also the Pacific is the Asian Ocean.) Read my poems alongside the great black seer Aimé Césaire and famous white writer J-P Sartre. Jazz is being used effectively on this side for the black revolution. I introduced Stokely C[armichael] to Archie Shepp. Jazz mags now doing the job that blackshit-cow Ebony mag should be doing. Poetry is and always has been revolutionary. I didn't have to change my style like LeRoi has. Gregory C[orso] has it

wrong about me. I will never forgive him since I'm not Christ and they just like killed his shadow M. L. King.<sup>43</sup>

Joans's train of thought gets interrupted by history in the making (i.e., May 1968), which serves to focus his attention more pointedly to the stakes of a burgeoning black power movement worldwide:

I was just interrupted by the French students rioting in the street outside against the police and bourgeois authorities. Theirs is not, NOT a revolt! They are the sons and daughters of workers that are feeding upon the Third World's people. Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, and Mali are free. But other Africa, black Africa are not. I saw a lot of things happening in Africa. Eight years of eyes and ears!! Now I must return to the land of burn, baby, burn. Poetry for the black community. Poetry for the revolutionary whites. And this time I hope to be published!!

He concludes by making clear what he believes the stakes of his own work are, and the kinship he feels with certain white Beat comrades:

I close this thank you letter and shall keep in touch. If white America would have really *understood* what you said in your early poems, there would be more white revolutionaries of the John Brown ilk. Well Allen G, I still dig thee, for it was you that started me reading in public in the first place. May a black witch doctor raise his sun bleached rhinoceros bone toward Mecca for you, to ensure your safety in that jungle of white savagery called the Ununited States of A.

Surrealistically yours, Ted

Along with his letter, Joans sent Ginsberg a flyer of the event with Sartre and Césaire that he mentions, a night of performances that also included free jazz musician Marion Brown and Black Panthers Eldrige Cleaver and Huey Newton. It must have been quite a night! *This* is the Beat Generation that my work is invested in: politically aware and involved in the world at large. This is the Beat Generation that gets lost in many readings of major figures like Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs. It also gets lost when Beat writing is considered in its U.S. context alone.

In a discursive mode similar to that of both Joans's elegy for Breton in "The Statue of 1713" and Baraka's manifesto for "The Revolutionary Theatre," avant-garde strains in Bob Kaufman's writing are borne out in a web of allusions asserting the continuity, often invisible or submerged, of the Beat movement with the various groups of the historical European avant-garde and also a longer history of radical and antinomian art. He

writes poignantly of an “Ancient Rain,” which becomes the presencing of that history within the immediate context of the civil rights movement, Cold War dread, and Kaufman’s own struggle to come to terms with the meaning of his art. The challenge facing the poet is how to transform avant-garde texts and traditions to respond to a specific historical moment, and this remains something of an open question in Kaufman’s work. In “Sullen Bakeries of Total Recall,” which appears in *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* alongside a reprinted *Abomunist Manifesto*, he sorrowfully remarks,

I acknowledge the demands of Surrealist realization. I challenge Apollinaire to stagger drunk from his grave and write a poem about the Rosenbergs’ last days in a housing project . . . speeding to the voltage mass of St. Sing Sing, . . . And yet when I think of those ovens, I turn my head in any other direction.<sup>44</sup>

The “demands” of surrealism can be understood as yet another iteration of Breton’s “tenet of complete insubordination”—in a late interview with Gerald Nicosia, Joans too referred to surrealist “demands”—but Kaufman’s poem goes a step further, interrogating the relevance, even the possibility, of using what amounts to anachronistic avant-garde models to process the horrors of the Holocaust and the threat of nuclear war.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Kaufman acknowledges the perilous debt placed on later generations of writers who would presume to speak for and with the victims and martyrs of the past. A way beyond this very real impasse, however, is already suggested by the worldly and worlded nature of Kaufman’s commitment to “Surrealist realization.” This recognition of the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and historical and geographic specificity of influence and inspiration, rather than distancing or isolating us from other times and places, serves to bind us ever more tightly to them and their persistent demands on us here in the present.

In a number of Kaufman’s poems, one encounters the familiar *world as body* conceit, but one in which the poet’s mapping procedures—Kaufman refers to them as “memory worlds” in the poem “African Dream”—are radically generative because they are always being conjured in conjunction with other moments and spaces (civil rights, the Cold War, surrealism).<sup>46</sup> The multiplicity of Kaufman’s memory worlds is both a testament to multiple surrealisms and an uncanny artifact of the dense folds of revision and repetition that perfuse Kaufman’s corpus. An untitled poem collected in *The Ancient Rain* fleshes out the dream

of “African Dream” in a sequence that begins, “I dreamed I dreamed an African dream. My head was a / Bony guitar, strung with tongues.” The poem continues along these lines, its oneiric, synesthetic imagery echoing that of “African Dream.” Another poem, “Blues for Hal Waters,” further reworks this dream content, beginning, “My head, my secret cranial guitar, strung with myths plucked from / Yesterday’s straits.” The easy internal rhyme of “strung with tongues” has been replaced with the somewhat headier “myths plucked with / Yesterday’s straits.” But the most significant substitution in “Blues for Hal Waters” is this: the entire history of Kaufman’s “African Dream”—its echoes, repetitions, and surrealist transmutations—becomes the poet’s *secret* song. The last version of the poem-dream contains a hidden assemblage, the secret of its own making. This and other hidden continuities will eventually become the image of the “Ancient Rain” in the long poem of that name, which “falls silently and secretly” from “a distant secret sky” and describes in the most expansive terms possible Kaufman’s worlded vision of connectivity and transformation.<sup>47</sup>

However evocative these examples may be, nothing by Kaufman compares to his *Abomunist Manifesto* in terms of its foregrounding the multiplicity of sources and contexts for avant-garde Beat writing. Through all its wordplay and willful inanity, the *Abomunist Manifesto* remains seriously engaged with the history and rhetoric of the manifesto form, as Kaufman performs the very linguistic and semantic experimentation he calls for and forth from the world, seeming to insist more than anyone since Breton himself that an absolute poetic and artistic freedom is prerequisite for social transformation. The *Abomunist Manifesto* shares in many characteristics of the avant-garde manifesto, while also critiquing the manifesto form itself. It is in large part a parody of hipsterdom, and its very name indicates Kaufman’s ironic, neo-Dada stance toward the manifesto. Part of the burden of the manifesto is to name a group, and the name Kaufman gives his “Abomunists” (which, of course, don’t exist) is based on nonsense and a bizarre assemblage of terms (abominable, communist, -ists of any persuasion, read also “beatnik”). The overall form of the *Abomunist Manifesto* is also very much a pastiche composed of self-contained sections with headings such as “Lexicon Abomunon” and “Abomnewcasts,” each of which cannily point to a specific aspect of the manifesto form.<sup>48</sup> Here, the former speaks to the need for a new language to match the aesthetic or social project of a group claiming to be radically new—while also referencing the increasingly commodified, popularized “hipster speak” of the late 1950s—and the latter to the avant-garde man-

ifesto's appropriations of mass media forms. Fifty years after Marinetti's "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" was printed on the front page of *Le Figaro*, Kaufman's mimeographed manifesto began circulating up and down San Francisco's Columbus Avenue announcing the demands of the Abomunists. With echoes of the revolutionary pamphlet or religious tract, Kaufman scrambles the European avant-garde into a longer history, reaching back to the "Founding Fathers," Barabbas and Christ, and Hindu scripture—complete with "music composed by Schroeder."<sup>49</sup> Kaufman's manifesto is at once incendiary and risible; the Abomunists dare us to take them seriously, dare us to ignore their demands.

After a brief opening salvo titled, appropriately enough, "Abomunist Manifesto," Kaufman continues with nearly a dozen addenda, post-scripts, and clarifications. Out of this *mélange* is created a document that reenacts in one gesture the early history of the futurists or Dadaists, where an originary manifesto—Marinetti's "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," Tzara's "Dada Manifesto"—is quickly followed by a flurry of subsequent ones defining various aspects of the movement or reasserting its founding ethos. Kaufman's manifesto playfully but cogently performs this avant-garde drama, a defining aspect of the manifesto genre and the movements it has launched. Its very form recognizes the necessary multiplicity of the avant-garde manifesto: not just multiple manifestoes from each group but also the past and future transmutations the manifesto always carries within itself. So in the *Abomunist Manifesto* we get "Notes Dis- and Re- Garding Abomunism," an immediate equivocation or negation of the platform just presented. In essence, Kaufman's is a self-negating manifesto as "dis-garding" becomes "discarding." Faint echoes of *avant-garde* can also be heard in the "dis-" and "re-" *garding* of the manifesto. Later on, there are "Further Notes (*taken from* 'Abomunismus und Religion' *by Tom Man*)," and later yet, "Still Further Notes Dis- & Re- Garding Abomunism."

The selective history put forward by the manifesto is written in terms of its projected future as it describes a past that *will have been*, and the vast, imagined history of the Abomunists is a clear concern of Kaufman's manifesto: the history of the Abomunists but also history as itself abomunist. "Abomunism," according to Kaufman, "was founded by Barabbas, inspired by his dying words: 'I wanted to be in the middle, but I went too far out.'"<sup>50</sup> Past Abomunists have included Krishnamurti, Edgar Cayce, John Hancock, and Benedict Arnold, these last two implicating the very founding of the United States as somehow "Abomunist" (i.e., an abomination). Kaufman's crazed name-dropping in these sections is reminiscent

of the far-reaching and often unexpected Beat genealogies provided by Kerouac and Ginsberg, while early Abomunist history has been recorded in “the Live Sea Scrolls . . . one of the oldest Abomunist documents yet discovered” (82).

“\$\$ Abomunus Craxioms \$\$” skewers the axioms on which party platforms, whether hip, avant-garde, or square, are erected; Kaufman’s wise-*cracks* reveal the cracks that inevitably appear in any group’s doxa. The “Abomunist Election Manifesto” is one of the more parochial sections with its calls for “the abolition of Oakland” and “statehood for North Beach” (81), and as it calls to mind the long history of disenfranchisement not just in the Jim Crow South but across the United States, the “Election Manifesto” leaves us wondering about what faith Kaufman places in electoral politics. “Boms,” a brief series of word sketches, evokes the martial origins of the term “avant-garde” and foregrounds their composition by “Bomkauf” (Kaufman’s Abomunist nom de guerre), and they share in the poem-as-weapon thinking of Joans’s “hand grenade poems” and Césaire’s *armes miraculeuses*.<sup>51</sup> The aural and syntactic deformations at work throughout the *Abomunist Manifesto* make Kaufman’s text performative in the manner of Marinetti’s sound poem *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, where the creation of a new poetics (in Marinetti’s case, the poetics of war) is at once demanded and fulfilled by avant-garde manifesto art.<sup>52</sup>

“Excerpts from the Lexicon Abomunon” and “Abomunist Rational Anthem” pile layer upon layer of verbal irony and constitute the deadly playful core of the text’s lasting significance and appeal. From the early days of the Beat movement, hipster slang was easily identifiable and the beatnik argot soon appropriated by a wider public. Kaufman seems eager to disassociate himself from the Beat vernacular even as he codifies it in his “Lexicon Abomunon.” He writes, “At election time, Abomunists frink more, and naturally, as hard-core Abo’s, we feel the need to express ourselves somewhat more abomunably than others. We do this simply by not expressing ourselves (abomunization). We do not express ourselves in the following terms” (80). Kaufman’s simultaneous avowal and disavowal of the very movement it is attempting to define—“we do not express ourselves”—is similar to the “Beat Manifestoes” of Holmes and Kerouac, who distanced themselves from what they seemed to embrace. Read as an avant-garde poetics, the “Abomunist Rational Anthem” engages even further in a productive deformation of language. “Derrat slegelations, flo goof babereo,” it begins. “Sorash sho dubies, wago, wailo, wailo” (85). Its “rationality” is an appeal, not to the kind of instrumental reason decried by Breton in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, but rather to the distinctly

surrealist “unreason” of what Césaire called “my logics.”<sup>53</sup> In her chapter on Kaufman in *The Dark End of the Street*, Maria Damon points to the language games of the *Abomunist Manifesto* as prime examples of “unmeaning jargon” in Kaufman’s work, which, Damon argues, “differs sharply from meaninglessness. His unmeaning—as in unnamings—aims to destroy actively the comfort of meaning in service of the furious, spasmodic play of jazz energy. His jargon is both the special code of initiated hipsters . . . and . . . the bubbling up and over of untamable sound.” Damon underscores the political implications (and avant-garde origins) of Kaufman’s “nonsense poetry” when she relates it to Césaire’s surrealist project of “breaking the oppressor’s language.”<sup>54</sup>

None of this has been meant to suggest that Beat surrealism is the exclusive domain of Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman, in addition to Lamantia, who, with Joans, forms the closest *material* link between the Beats and the European vanguard. Avant-garde martyrs Mayakovsky and Lorca become important reference points in Ginsberg’s life and work, and a poem like “At Apollinaire’s Grave” makes it clear that Ginsberg counted the French surrealists among his poetic forebears as well. William Burroughs’s postmodernist approaches to narrative and authorship build on earlier Dada and surrealist techniques and share in their commitment to the processes of chance. A case could even be made for Kerouac’s “spontaneous prose” as taking part in the great surrealist tradition of automatic writing. What sets Baraka, Joans, and Kaufman apart is the much greater insistence with which an avant-garde poetics is linked to both oppositional and community-forming practices in their writing, to how they see themselves and their role as writers, and to how they understand the connection between radical art, political struggle, and social change. Even Baraka’s aesthetic pragmatism, characteristic of his work in the black arts movement and often read as a disavowal of his earlier Beat experimentalism, cannot be fully appreciated without a serious consideration of its avant-garde origins. Writing from the “margins” of the Beat Generation, Baraka, no less than Joans or Kaufman, reminds us of the centrality of the international avant-garde—in particular, the tactics of the avant-garde manifesto—to Beat writing. This signal contribution to the Beat movement, with its corresponding insistence on the worlded dimensions of the European avant-garde, forms the core of their rich and enduring legacy among the Beats.