DREAMS, DEATH AND BOTTLE-BREAK: MODERNIST ETHNOPOETICS AND THE BEATNIK QUEST FOR ASCESIS

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THE MERRIAM DICTIONARY DEFINES *ASCESIS* AS "SELF-DISCIPLINE." I will refer to the self-promotions of culture and identity more along the lines of the discipline of one's self, a rigorous self-examination to relentlessly bring mankind in line with his origins, or as Nietzsche would have put it, *Ursprung*. The quest for primordial manhood in the twentiety century brought many authors together along a fault line of one's imagination, history, and artifact. Amiri Baraka and the white beatniks who encouraged him did not solely underscore the archetype of man's historicity. Rather, they pursued a moment of realization that could draw characteristic momentum that could bleed modern man of his external temptations and pretensions. My sense is that the eccentric relationship between Baraka and the Beat writers who preceded him and encouraged his management of *Yugen* and *Kulchur*, constantly erasing and redrawing the tumultuous and imaginative powers of Beat to suppose deregalized glory in one's African moment of meditation and contemplation, posed a meaningful challenge to Norman Mailer's quest for self-realization as an American. White and Black modern apotheoses, whether thickening the ethnopolitics of modern realism or traversing the imagistic or symbolistic waves of the modern inscription of selfhood, call our attention to the undying bent of realistic portrayals and their brain-impact on modern American consciousness. They also promote the distinctly historicized notion of fantasy for living far outside the middle-class capital-

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ist norms which most Americans depend upon for structure and fulfillment. At times, Baraka's poetics mirror those of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: at others, a violent repossession of Blackness is more true of the form and content. As blackness and whiteness compete with each other for world domination, the evolving literary relationship builds portraits of history, consciousness, community, and selfhood. I wish to examine a deeper gradient of self-immolation and realization than my previous essay on *The Naked and the Dead*, tracing Mailer's positive appreciation for American selfhood and its quest for realization and control of its sensibility while projecting an expanded history upon consciousness and the unreal, which stands in relation to "the real" in that it supposes an outside world that holds key answers to man's nature and psychology.

Norman Mailer's guiding comments about the brilliance of Amiri Baraka's 1964 play, *The Dutchman*, serve only as an introduction to an astounding portfolio of renewed and refreshed beatnik influence upon America's then-preeminent literary author. For his part, Mailer's true tryst with beatnik prose, aesthetics, and lastly ascesis spindles together at the same moment, with 1964's *An American Dream*. At a glance the frame tale, in which an ex-military serviceman is charged with strangling his spouse, breathes and burdens the conception of modern man with a state of tension, anxiety, dreaming, ecstasy, and primordial movement much in the way fashionable with Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. At the same time, Mailer builds his finesse at exploiting and exposing the primitive and jocund angles of black jazz, America's popular music and the main vehicle for psychic/lifestyle expression among the Beats. Yet, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and with riots occurring in every major city in the Northeast during this year, I would say that we cannot forcibly integrate white-black antagonisms with the caprice and derogation of "The White Negro": Mailer tries out a much more evocative crossing of whiteness and blackness, building through humor and misunderstanding portraits of a changing American "story." From these premises, I have found that the wealth of Baraka's material and scholarship opens wide a door of transition and stasis. The then Le Roi Jones, the editor of *Kulchur* and *Yugen* magazines to which a number of Beat writers contributed, presided and was noticeably influenced by Beatnik attentions to jazz, prose style, and thematic power. From the Syracuse University Collection, it is especially important to recognize that Baraka grounded and tested out a number of his racialist theses while expounding the true signif-

icance and form of bebop music. These carefully planned steps to formalizing the art of musical and vocal expression, rather than to banish whiteness forever from the broad messages being presented, strengthened a general sense that African roots and even mythic transcendences were part of shaping a new, if modernistically agonized, archetype, one that Mailer and Kerouac had craved and were busy penning as being true to the form of modern whiteness. Ascesis carried with it the form of re-invention, transcription, anxiety, and legendation—qualities that would further power Baraka's journey away from middle-class, white American capitalism and moralism which supposedly was the lifebone of the emerging Modern Era. We cannot say, for example, that Baraka utilized the beatnik form of prose *per se.* Still, because Baraka was editor of *Yugen* and *Kulchur* and was a columnist in several New York newspapers, we must acknowledge that it was he who aggressively retextualized jazz theory and prose theory against the languages and philosophies of the Modernist period. Baraka's penchant for savagery, death, alienation, vocalism, and physical power would re-write the story of blackness in terms of artifacts and imageries as well as emotion: he would present a Black subject that had emerged from the deprivations of language and economy to provoke the power of his gods. As the beatnik vehicle roared on, it is clear that the impetus for Mailer was to bring modern man closer to his primal essences, to cast off the cultural pretenses of democracy and capitalism and breathe life into a creature of sense, one who as Sebastian Sampas had presaged would be an "All-Soul" but who had also matured from levels of truth and experience over the course of the twentieth century. Both men write from very provocative angles, destroying the aegis of White-Black contact that liberalism had built, and both profess the depth of race's misstatement that was part of race relations throughout the century.

To start with, it is evident from the archive that Baraka wasted no time in building a comprehensive cultural theory and theorems that stated the Black man's condition and values much more precisely than the primarily White Beatnik writers. On April 20, 1963, he wrote in "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" that "High art, first of all, must reflect the experience, the emotional predicament of the man, as he exists, in the defined world of his being. It must be produced from the legitimate emotional resources of the soul in the world. It can *never* be produced by evading these resources or pretending that they do not exist"(*Saturday Review* 20). A point of parity, then,

builds between Black literary humanism and Beatnik eclecticism, as Jones's praise for Kerouac restates the essential paradigm of Beat:

> Jack Kerouac's essay, 'The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose' is an amazing document because, not only does it outline exactly how he writes [. . .] but because it offers a general description of the processes involved in spontaneous writing [. . .] When he is describing (which is all any artist can do anyway . . . he is superb, a giant of swift exacting poetic insight. It is only when he encounters lags in his insight or spontaneity that he is duped by the formalists or the formal approach and tries painstakingly and often painfully to *conjure* intellectually... and writes these conjurings down . . . that his prose becomes stiff, awkward & *untrue*. Intellectual conjuring has nothing to do with the creative act, as such, though it may certainly be concomittant with it. (*Evergreen Essay* Box 1)

Truth be told, Le Roi Jones was gloriously enthusiastic about the springing up of a new generation of poets who had discarded formalism, traditional social and sexual relationships, and had once again made poetry speakable, sensible, apprehendable. "New Books of Poetry" (1959) attests to a project which was never finished, that pays tribute to Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Joel Oppenheimer, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, John Wieners, Ron Loewinsohn, Gilbert Sorrentino, and Robert Creeley. He is much more adept at stating the formal requirements for writing innovative poetry:

> Striking with his fiercest weapons first: SYNTAX. Creeley is always forcing you to rearrange your eye, to disregard, or abandon any 'gestalt' you bring to merely reading a poem...One must *Read* each word, pause at each caesura; *Try* to follow . . . you (reader) run the risk of being easily 'had." Or literarily, you run the risk of losing all sense, or all the sense Creeley is pushing you towards. ("New Books of Poetry" 4)

Other comments in this unpublished essay are more depressive: "By merely talking about books published in 1959, I do nothing really but chop

a small hole in the great wall" (1). Or, "Any discussion of 'recent' books of American poetry ought to be prefaced by a long article delineating, and thereby illuminating, the entire [sic] literary scene for the last generation." But the comments of this essay state the obvious triumph of Blackness in White-controlled America: with a complete eye, an attention to detail and imagery, a focus on readership and the movements of the human mind, and an ingestion of literary theory dating back to Civil War days, this anxiety of authorship calls upon both the stream of new African-American authors, poets, and short story writers, while amalgamating White-Black mutual interests in family, society, sexuality, travel, and lastly identity, if not the mythology that Mailer had been crafting so relentlessly over the same period. The capacity of Jones's own poetry, which may be called classically Eliotan modernism while looped behind a barbed wire of jazzy and bluesy depression, uncovering the ramshackle moments of faith, gaiety, and learning, transposes many of the themes of Jones's blackness onto White readership from the standpoints of self-indoctrination and transmigration of spirits. It could be brought into the city, paired with everyday humans, tend to mar the character and spirit of the richest nation in human history. Perhaps that is what is most interesting about the 1961 *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*: Baraka and his family life in the afterglow of an urban drought and devastation that challenges the roots of humanity, divinity, and speech, much in the way T.S. Eliot faces the damage to London and Europe in 1922. Of the connection of Eliot with Jones, Lee A. Jacobus writes:

> Jones' almanac is a moral almanac, like Eliot's record of the seasons; both their landscapes are moral landscapes, with the wind and the cold not only affecting, but reflecting the souls of men.The differences in their views lie perhaps in the feeling, on Eliot's part, that though the world has been wasted by man, God could somehow still inspirit it if he wished. Eliot's view is there is a moral order in the nature of things which man has somehow lost the key to. (Jacobus 115)

Yet *Preface* builds a quasi-Beat tendency, and maybe an historic or fatally historic tendency, to place racial, linguistic, and experiential signifiers in the fire of racialist misconception and diminution. The then-Beat-oriented Jones pays attention to themes such as savagery, sacrifice, homophobia, iso-

lation, far-visited or far-off mythologies that inveigh a type of learning that was barely in existence in the Western world, conceptions of man and woman which are anti-Christian, criticisms of music, comical and absurd moments of dream and travel. These moments complicate the form of blackness, as if to guise the mantle of African-American nationhood from any kind of true comprehension, but really so as to preserve the spirit of emotion, strength, community, and identity from the intellectual witch-doctors that could catch them under a magnifying glass. Modern times have, of course, found a rich array of scholars and writers who have gone to great lengths to recover "African" history, philosophy, culture, religious rites, and even literature: what Jones does is demonstrate the perceptual depths of that survival in terms of a primal being that has lived through the dimensions of social realism. Baraka renders the coming of regal and mythological glory of Africana as follows:

> She had her coming out party
> with 3000 guests
> from all parts of the country
> Queens, Richmond, Togoland, The Cameroons;
> A white hunter, very unkempt,
> With long hair
> Whizzed in on the end of a vine.
> (and spoke perfect english, too.)
> "Throw on another goddamned Phoenecian,"
> I yelled, really getting with it.
> John Coltrane arrived with an Egyptian lady.
> He played very well.
> "Throw on another goddamned Phoenician."
> We got so drunk (Hulan Jack
> Brought his bottle of Thunderbird),
> nobody went hunting
> the next morning. ("Preface to a Suicide Note" 7)

With regards to the literary scene, it is impossible not to take notice of Baraka's unique metamorphosis and the depth of the literary excavation that professes a common and unyieldingly thoughtful immersion in renegade poetics and politics. Although Baraka's autobiography possesses the racial

characteristics of black intellectualism—he is a gangster who spends a good deal of time mocking the establishment and the professors—it is clear that his own literary genesis comes from a common moment of revolutionizing literary form, a departure from other Black novelists and poets who maintained the characteristics of intellectual and personal separation from that which was White. Before we uncover Mailer's astounding work, I would say that the point of literary origin, plus the dimensions of traversing the modern fecundity and dramatism, possessed amazing points of literary comparison, and that poetry often meant the re-conceptualization of prose to suit actors and development against the eclecticism of perception and thought. Baraka wrote of his period of indoctrination with the Beats:

> Whitman and Williams and Pound and Apollinaire and the Surrealists were our prophets. Whitman, who broke away from England with his free verse. Williams, who carried that fight into our own century, seeing the universal in the agonizingly local. Pound, the scientist of poetry, the translator, the mover and shaker (and Fascist)! Apollinaire, a whole tradition of French anti-bourgeois openness and aesthetic grace. And the Surrealists, because they at least figured the shit had to be turned upside down! (This plus the improvised *Zeitgeist* of black music!) (*Autobiography* 159)

The text of Mailer's first post-JFK novel, *An American Dream*, structures the beatnik social and moral dilemma as a grand restatement of its literary inventions and harbingers to animate and psychosocial glory. In *An American Dream*, with some effort to reopen Henry Miller's sensual portraits of nostalgia, former Congressman Stephen Rojack's moment of moral dilemma presides over a Blakean tempest, one torn between romantic (and thus, historiographical) and earthy (primal, physical) moments of introspection. These deeply agonized terms weave together Rojack's lust, his God, his passions, his memory, and finally his dreams. The concept was peculiarly adept because Rojack is an ex-politician, a onetime soldier, and now a professor—and he sees the motivations and beauty of humanity from his authority and intellectual lens, and breathes the details of his story without the hoboed ambition of an underclass purveyor. In the act of committing murder, Rojack is a Dostoyevskian character, possessed of his own sickness but also of his dreams of aesthetics and ascesis. He pulls us nearer to him in his moment

with the personal and prescriptive agonies of death, suicide, power, and the desires of the flesh—we are led to want for his administration of the modern human story, the taste of his emotions and being. It is important to realize that Mailer is writing his first truly beatnik novel, one covering intellectual and social pretensions as the restatement of the modern American male selfhood. Through the actions of a self-determining and decorated war hero, we are led through the avenues of surrealist and modernist intellectual *pathos*, and contemplate the weight of America's formidable history and direction of class, gender, identity, and territory. Many of the passages of *An American Dream* illustrate the Blakean languor—they roll with joys and sicken with pain, while solemnizing some iconic moment of self-contemplation. Much is there to be found that directly territorializes the impact of poems taken from Baraka's collection, as if to say that the same themes and dissections of readership and one's imagination were taking root in the building of a new, formidable archetype that had cut down the rope of America's significant moral and legal pretenses to order and direct one's experience, his agency, his uncovering of truth and his constant attentions to community and social reality. What happens when poems become the groundwork for fiction? It becomes evident from *An American Dream* that fictional characters, borne of their actions, agency, and reflection, ground the viewing eye upon social and personal conflict, that dream becomes painstakingly connected with consciousness and our truly living mechanics. This development of the hero-architect draws heavily upon our perceptions of gender, class, and race incomprehension, paralleling—as would be found in Baraka's *The Dutchman*, the interaction of violence to liberate the human soul of its historic incomprehension and inhumanity, a dislocation of the human agent and his/her stream of misconceptions and missteps that have played out in loud, ribald, and comedic generations of Jim Crow.

Rojack's commentary on his strangled wife: "There are dollars which buy a million's worth of groceries, and dollars which have influence. The Caughlins had the second kind of grabbings, I had the first"(Mailer 239). The penultimate zigzagging through Deborah's life, her quarrels, her haunting power over Rojack, and finally her murder and its aftermath read in some instances like a peyote dream—there is, more firmly at least, an attempt to hold all thoughts, dreams, and senses accountable to the telling of the tale, with glimpses of subjugation following the impression's fullest realization of vertical agency in a time-sharded world. The tale of Deborah—who had

failed to carry to birth a child and thus faulted her marriage as that which destroyed her soul—also posits an alter-soul, a replica of humanness which Rojack struggles to subdue and then overcome. It is not to say that moral dilemmas are not examined, but they are masked and subdued by a generally high air of emotional certainty, and the prescriptive truth of one's own circumspections. There is neither guilt nor grief for the assassination of Deborah—with sometime girlfriend Ruta coming to take part in the easygoing festivities: "the two of us would sup on Deborah's flesh, we would eat for days: the deepest poisons in us would be released from our cells" (50). The akinness to savagery and cannibalism was not new—Baraka had penned it in several poems and the complete effacement of civilized behaviors was tantamount to expressing the *Ursprung*. Nonetheless, Mailer's densely constructed rhetoric attempts to translate the animateness of the poems, to capture in action and agency the guttural rifts of the imagination that had dislocated poetry:

> After a black night of drink and a quarrel beyond dimension, she lost the baby, it came brokenly to birth, in terror, I always thought, of the womb which was shaping it, came out and went back again to death, tearing by this miscarriage the hope of any other child for Deborah.
>
> What it left behind was a heartland of revenge. Now, cohabiting with Deborah was like sitting to dinner in an empty castle with no more for host than a butler and his curse. Yes, I knelt in fear, and my skin lived on thin wire, this side of a profound shudder. All the while she stroked my hand. (26)

Rojack's murder of Deborah is significant in its primal moment, or rather the animalism which subdues and destroys humanity, her speech, her emotions and senses, her aspirations to relationship and relationality. The thrust of this killing is more deeply modernistic than even Lennie's manhandling of Curley's wife in *Of Mice and Men*: "I could still feel murmuring in her throat, and *crack* I choked her again, and *crack* I gave her payment—never halt now—and *crack* the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts"(31). There is a tendency toward magical realism, or the juxtaposition of urbanity with fertil-

ity; when Rojack decides to recovet Fraulein Ruta, he shrugs off the emotional impact of being in Deborah's room: "I could breathe a tropical bouquet from the woven velvet flowers on the wall, I was near a swamp where butterflies and tropical birds went fanning up—and over the spoil of animals who looked for flesh—and floated on the air which rose from vegetation growing in the damp and drowning in the wet."(41) We may well type the actions of Stephen Rojack as those of psychosis, dementia, homicide, alienation, flashbacks. But what is essentially clear is that Rojack's action, or rather the complete liberty and continuing nature of those actions, are to demonstrate the liberation of the human spirit from its cultural and social responsibilities, or rather the corpus of behaviors and supplications that govern a modern man in the Christian tradition. Image and perception are but part of the poet's gleaning eye. There is also the bite of humor, the sawing of feeling, the agony of memory. Many of these cursory characteristics are necessitated by the poet's attempt to grasp human stasis and reflection, rather than the cursive accumulation of action found in a novel. Still, Rojack's central dilemma and the aspirations of the All-Soul directly replicate Beatnik poesy from the same period:

> I am I, old Father Fisheye that begat the ocean, the worm at my own ear, the serpent turning around a tree,
>
> I sit in the mind of the oak and hide in the rose, I know if Any wake up, none but my death, come to me bodies, come to me prophecies, come all foreboding, come spirits and visions,
>
> I receive all, I'll die of cancer, I enter the coffin forever, I close my eye, I disappear,
>
> I fall on myself in winter snow, I roll in a great wheel through rain, I watch fuckers in convulsion,
>
> Car screech, furies groaning their basso music, men imitating dogs, memory fading in the brain,
>
> I delight in a woman's belly, youth stretching his breasts and thighs to sex, the cock sprung inward,
>
> Gassing its seed on the lips of Yin, the beasts dance in Siam, they sing opera in Moscow,
>
> My boys yearn at dusk on stoops, I enter New York, I play my jazz on a Chicago harpsichord,

> Love that bore me I bear back to my Origin with no loss, I float over the vomiter,
>
> Thrilled with my deathlessness, thrilled with this endlessness I dice and bury, come poet shut up eat my Word, and taste my mouth in your ear. ("The End")

Another marker for the execution of revolutionary consciousness is the artifact of conversation. Baraka, for his part, writes *The Dutchman* to express something within the Black mind and heart that had been continuously and convincingly repressed—his capacity for violence, and his annihilation of all things that can be termed White. Black on White violence had prefigured previous African-American works, but the conversations and rhetoric had repeatedly stressed the Black man's powerlessness and subjugation, and the fairly depressive characteristics of these. To this end, Clay in *The Dutchman* waits through a wide range of epithets and denigrations and falsely riotous humors meant to objectify and de-intellectualize him. His broad statement about the Black man's willingness to kill, and the excuse to coexist through bebop, deconstructs the entire arrangement of racist parables and thought-elucidations meant to mask, reify, complicate a basic urge for physical and mental being. Mailer, it seems, also craves this allusion to raw, unbreakable physical power, and the casting off of emotional and intellectual pretensions meant to delimit spheres of dreaming and introspection. Of Deborah's last attack, Mailer muses: "she was strong, I had always known she was strong, but now her strength was huge. For a moment I did not know if I could hold her down, she had almost the strength to force herself up to her feet and lift me in the air, which in that position is exceptional strength even for a wrestler" (31). Upon killing her, Rojack quips: "I was weary with a most honorable fatigue, and my flesh seemed new. It had not felt so nice since I was twelve. It seemed inconceivable at this instant that anything in life could fail to please" (32). In some divinable instance, Rojack conquers his passions, and dislocates his memory in the pursuit of the *Ursprung*: he is natural, at peace with his own inner mode of being. What was most unashamedly Beat was the discarding of the rhetoric and manners which made us civilized: what was sought was the inner dynamic that made us truly human. All of this is not to say that other authors didn't acutely pursue class and social motivations of the inner being, but rather to project a *force* of White-Black socialhood that could rage out of control at any moment, a

blind willingness to shatter the entire matrix of social and elite commands that guide our actions.

Rojack's excavation of jazz in the art and personal form of Shago both orientalize and extend metaphors for de-orientalizing the artistic and cultural contributions of the Black Man to American culture. It should be said at the outset that Rojack's translation of the music of Shago is very limited, paired with no true musical theory, and beatnik-wise an abandonment of the social and intellectual knowledge and conflicts that built one of the most dynamic forms of American music. Like Sal and Dean on Folsom Street in *On the Road*, the grabs are sensible:

> His voice had developed to the point where you could not always distinguish it from a trumpet or even on virtuoso occasions from a saxophone. Once off on a ride, his song seemed able to take a step between each step of the rapid elegant dance a jazzman's fingers could pick across the keys. But of course he had become too special—no average nightclub audience could follow him. He was harsh. Some of his most experimental work sounded at first like a clash of hysterias. It was only later that one discovered his power of choice—he was like a mind racing between separate madnesses, like a car picking its route through the collision of other cars. It was harsh. (182–3)

Rojack—or rather Mailer, depending on one's perspective—takes many risks in this transcription of Black jazz. Rojack makes no effort to understand jazz's history, its considerable role in organizing the Black community, its Christian attentions, or the number of legends that popularized the form. "Avant-garde" subsumes jazz's increasing unpopularity, while "harsh" means to ironize the theoretical and academic fortitude of a complex form in increasingly "pop" times where music, lyrics, and emotions were tremendously simplified for consumption. "Hysteria" corrupts and misleads the audience into thinking that rhythm and improvisation possessed no moral message, no link with African mythology or community. But Mailer, like Kerouac in *On the Road*, has Rojack approach jazz with no language or set of signifiers of legitimate academic or social correspondence with the music. Shago is free to appear occult, psychotic, disdainful, powerful—these are spun without any attention to the legitimate makings of the art form, as Sal

and Dean do for Folsom Street. Tensions and imagery are inscribed in Shago's fight with Rojack—Shago is perceived as follows: "I had a fear of what I heard in his voice—it was like that wail from the end of the earth you hear in a baby's voice" (192). The "fight scene," as Shago is kicked out of the club for smoking marijuana, reads engagement from the standpoint of animate power as a contacting force that recognizes no attributes of social being or dynamic cultural relationship. Two men, hubris-studded and enacting their own poetics of social refinement (Shago is a "Freedom Rider"), violently engage each other in a (mis) statement of personal being:

> I took him from behind, my arms around his waist, hefted him in the air, and slammed him to the floor so hard his legs went, and we ended with Shago in a sitting position, and me behind him on my knees, my arms choking the air from his chest as I lifted him up and smashed him down, and lifted him up and smashed him down again . . . I lifted him up and stomped him down I don't know how many times, ten times, fifteen, it could have been twenty, I was out of control, violence seemed to shake itself free from him each time I smashed him back to the floor and shake itself into me, I kept beating the base of his spine on the floor, the shock going up to his head, I had never had an idea I was this strong, exhilaration in the fact of the strength fed my strength itself, and then he went limp and I let go, stepped back, he fell back, the back of his head struck the floor with the blunt dud of an apple dropping from a tree. Shago looked at me from the ground and said, "Up your ass." (192–3)

Mailer's retextualization of Black-White engagement may have considerable Beat origins. Sal writes of the "crazy" jazz gig at Folsom Street and of Dean: "he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began duelling for this" (*On the Road* 198). What may make Rojack's triumph more scintillating would be to restate the double moment of colonialism-surrealism, and beatnik poetry's attempt to capture the imagistic transcendence of ordinary reality through artistry and magnificence. True, Rojack finds Shago in a down and out bar in New York: further, he views the jazz club social scene as deteriorating. But Rojack's defeat of Shago carries with it a colonial ten-

dency to govern and subdue, and to scrap the humanizing trends in favor of animate dominance. Beatnik scholarship on Arthur Rimbaud attributes key writing tendencies to Rimbaud's work, *A Season in Hell*. In Jack Kerouac's poem "Rimbaud," Kerouac takes advantage of the capacity to strip blackness of its mythology, history, and propose a super-historical moment of transcendence. Kerouac writes broadly and with naivete the opus of discovery for men such as Rimbaud:

> Rock dust
> & black backs & hacks
> of coughers, the dream rises
> in the Frenchman's Africa
> mind,—-Invalids are always
> loved—The Red Sea
> in June, the coast clanks
> of Arabia—Havar,
> Havar, the magic trading post
> —Aden, Aden,
> South of Bedouin—
> Ogaden, Ogaden, never
> known—-(Meanwhile
> Verlaine sits in Paris
> over cognacs wondering
> what Arthur looks like
> now, & how bleak their
> eyebrows because they believed
> in earlier eyebrow beauty—
> Who cares? What kinda
> Frenchmen are these?
> Rimbaud, hit me over the head with that rock! ("Rimbaud")

The denial of Black communicative agency, in favor of a regal-like mythification of geopolitical/sensual power allowed for a concoction of "void" and "beyond" that made learning of African culture and arts appealing physically. The subsuming of history and geography under the "rock" and the distantness of France may urge us to forecast the Orient as a once-again legendary destination ripe with occult and bacchanalia friendly to our sen-

sory desires. But negatively speaking, Rojack's "power" versus Shago, and Shago's ingratiated survival of that power, mean to engage jazz and its attention to feeling and memory—qualities which would be forever lost in the massive new vehicle of popular Western music. It is as though Rojack recognizes true being; it is also true that the import of riots in 1964, which ushered in the rise of soul and R&B, is viewed depressively, as an absence of natural inscription of being. The legendary and long history of White colonization of Africa suppose a dynamism that cannot be taken apart with signifiers and analyses—for Shago as well, there is a continuing undercurrent, an unresolved date with modernity that could mean anything or nothing. Without attesting to jazz's history—a passion for Baraka and a moment of undying development even as jazz failed to stave off pop—Rojack confronts real being, a misunderstood if gaily constructed world of the social imagination.

The prophetic hand of Norman Mailer could not have been liberated more than by the 1964 conclusion of "beatnik" or by Baraka's 1964 dismissal of its importance in his own life. While the powers of the literary engine continued to materialize again and again for Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso, Olson, and others, Mailer in *An American Dream* fictionalizes the poetic content in a way true to the roots of the movement and syntactic with beatnik de-literalizations and super-intellectual moments of grandiose reconfiguration. Once again, the human organism rises and ascends the tale of its primal glory: the two men, possessed of the haunting wisdom of this moment of truth, shore up the details of a modern man who comes to terms with himself. It is with this spatio-temporal moment of clarity that *Ursprung* and *Ascesis*, as was true in Friedrich Nietzsche's writing of *Beyond Good and Evil*, once again challenge the jealously guarded treasure of the letter and its memoric synapse in the American mind.

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