

William J. Harris: Interview with Amiri Baraka

WJH: It seems that your moving to a longer line in your poetry has to do with a rejection of the white world, of "white music" if you will.

AB: I think it has to do with the poetry since the sixties being much more orally conceived rather than manuscript conceived. The poetry is much more intended to be read aloud, and since the mid-sixties that has been what has spurred it on, has shaped it.

WJH: Can you talk about this a little more? The latest poetry, some of the Marxist poetry, seems like it's really less poetry than it is a score for you to read. Your readings are incredible and I am wondering are you caring less and less about the text?

AB: It is less important to me. To me it is a score.

WJH: What does this mean? In 200 years when you aren't around, are you going to expect people to be listening to tapes of your work?

AB: Yeah, I hope.

WJH: That is really interesting because it means you are moving away from the idea of the written page.

AB: The page doesn't interest me that much—not as much as the actual spoken word. The contradiction with that is that I should be recording all the time, which I'm not for obvious reasons. I'm much more interested in the spoken word, and I think that the whole wave of the future is definitely not literary in a sense of books and is tending toward the spoken and the visual. . . . I think that page will be used by people who want to read it aloud. The question to me of a poet writing in silence for people who will read in silence and put it in a library where the whole thing is conceived in silence and lost forever is about over. And I think it didn't really influence many people. I mean if you conceive of how many people are in the world and how many people ever learned how to read.

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