

## Jay R. Berry: On "SOS"

Baraka pays careful attention to rhythm, even in poems that do not employ or experiment with traditional forms. "SOS," the opening poem on *Black Art*, contains short, terse, telegraphic phrases that are reminiscent of a radio transmission:

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

Content and form blend effectively in this poem. The radio transmission asks blacks to "come / on in." The final line break calls attention to the word change, thereby emphasizing the message. This word change has at least two connotations. On one level, the phrase invites readers into the book of poetry. In this sense it is a fitting opening poem. On another level, it cajoles blacks into claiming their share of the American political, social, and cultural systems on their own terms.

From "Poetic Style in Amiri Baraka's *Black Art*," in *CLA Journal*, December, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by the College Language Association.

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