

# “Snip/snap/and cut”: Ted Joans and *Dies und Das* Terri Geis

“Unglaublich, Unmöglich!” ‘Incredible, Impossible!’ exclaims the opening page of Ted Joans’s 1984 periodical *Dies und Das: Ein Magazin von Aktuellem surrealistischem Interesse* (This and That: A Magazine of Current Surrealist Interest). Setting an exuberant, defiant tone, these German words in bold typeface — likely cut out from a magazine or newspaper — reflect Joans’s residency in West Berlin through a fellowship with the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst. His location is further established by superimposing the words onto a map of the city, magically traversed by a collaged image of an aardvark (one of Joans’s surrealist messenger animals). West Berlin, which held a weighted significance for Joans, is a constant presence in *Dies und Das*; he reflects on its “Hitlerian yesteryear” and “Stalinist wall today,” suggesting that “No other major city on earth can boast such a startling stigma.” And from this city, Joans offers his “incredible, impossible” proposal: a global, anti-racist future emerging from the shadows of the not-so-distant past and divided present. As he writes in a combined English, French, and German statement on the opening page: “Cet magazine pour but de montrer new points of view and keine Faschismus und Herrenrasse” ‘This magazine aims to show new points of view and no Fascism or Master Race.’ Joans sought to change “‘this and that’ in the entire world through collective-international-action . . . We the surrealists are committed to the cause of total emancipation of humankind” (*Dies und Das*).

Joans created *Dies und Das* exactly sixty years after the launch of *La révolution surréaliste* (1924), and his efforts represented an emphatic (re)affirmation of surrealism and specifically the movement’s use of periodicals as a core creative and political act. The magazine was released as a single-issue with a strong red cover, in the dimensions of 5 ½ x 8 inches. The pages of *Dies und Das*, all in black and white, consist mainly of Joans’s writing alongside extracts and quotes from earlier surrealist texts and images — both often embedded into collages — as well as poems and artworks contributed by contemporary colleagues from around the world. Throughout these pages, Joans reflects upon and asserts the continued urgency of surrealism’s imperatives from the perspective of a Black U.S. expatriate adopting the movement as “l’arme que je choisis pour me défendre” ‘the weapon I used to defend myself’ against the “vicissitudes abjectes et [les] violences raciales que l’homme blanc des Etats-Unis m’imposait tous les jours” ‘abject vicissitudes

and racial violence which the white man in America imposed upon me every day' ("Fragments" 66; my translation). Joans followed the legacies of other Black artists and writers who affiliated with surrealism as a tool of the difficult and urgent work of anti-colonial protest and liberation, including Wifre-3do Lam, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, and Étienne Léro. Indeed, Joans conceived of *Dies und Das* as a tribute to Lam, who had died two years prior; the opening spread presents a full-page reproduction of a 1964 portrait of the Cuban artist by the German surrealist Hans Bellmer. The magazine demonstrates Joans's belief that over half a century since surrealism's inception, it was a vital force through which to undermine eurocentrism and racism.

A frenetic collage aesthetic is the main communication mode of *Dies und Das*; it is full of drawings, photographs, cut-outs from surrealist essays and newspaper articles, along with Joans's hand-written and typed annotations that regularly flow between different languages. Maps, the aesthetics of map-making, and the politicized delineation of borders are continually explored throughout. Collapsing time through photocopying, layering, and superimposing, Joans describes his process as allowing his "runaway scissors to snip/snap/and cut here/there from His/story and mostly Her/story."<sup>1</sup> Joans's words indicate his artistic practice of literally cutting, mixing, and reassembling, but also the periodical's conceptual attempts to revisit, question, and revise dialogues on the past. Dismantling history ("His/story"), he speaks of a dual effort: to confront dominant narratives — to cut at them, cut them off — and to insert other future-perspectives. Joans rejects traditional publication design layouts in favor of images and text in multiple directions or on top of each other, and he does not paginate *Dies und Das*, perhaps as part of the effort to loosen chronological time. He encourages the reader to view in any order (or direction) through chance exploration.

Joans partially grounds his work in the influence of André Breton, whose words and image appear throughout *Dies und Das*. Beyond this influence, however, is a call to further action and change, "new points of view" to dismantle old hierarchies, including those within the surrealist movement. The periodical's pages consistently question the role of Africa within the history of modernism through a re-centering of African art, and also foreground African-American culture by firmly asserting the revelations of jazz. Joans also places stronger emphasis on women artists and writers ("Her/story") than seen in earlier, Breton-directed periodicals of the 1920s to the 1940s. Joans describes *Dies und Das* as "collaged out of" the "inner necessity to service (through amalgamation) those who have been victims of benign neglect." And this amalgamation is achieved, as Joans puts it on one page, through materials "[p]hotocopied from the Surrealist Archives at Timbuktu, Mali," referring to his own collection of documents stored at his residence in Tombouctou. If, as Saidiya Hartman suggests, "the archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told

---

<sup>1</sup> Except where noted, quotations by Ted Joans are from *Dies und Das*.

about the persons catalogued, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios" (18), then *Dies und Das* significantly expands and recasts the stories of surrealism's past, flowing between Europe, West Africa, and the United States.

Joans (1928-2003) was a prolific writer and visual artist as well as a significant conduit between multiple modernist movements around the world. As Franklin Rosemont notes in *Black, Brown & Beige*, "[m]any important facets of [Joans's] work have been overlooked by commentators," including his "hefty one-shot *Dies und Das*" (317). Surrealist scholar Joanna Pawlik's 2011 essay offers important analysis on Joans, specifically his employment of "temporal anachronism and spatial discontinuity" in order to "protest the uneven spread of political and cultural agency within modernity" (222). Born to a family of riverboat workers in Cairo, Illinois, Joans was specifically impressed by surrealism's periodical-making practices from an early age; as Pawlik recounts from his autobiographical text "I, Black Surrealist":

[Joans's] "very first encounter with international surrealism" occurred when aged ten he read the surrealist periodicals and reviews, amongst them *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Documents*, which his aunt had retrieved from the rubbish bins of her white employers. He attended a school which prevented African Americans from learning a foreign language so, unable to read French, he saved up money earned from mowing lawns to buy a French dictionary and he began to translate the texts himself; "word by word, like a miner in a deep gold mine, I put the puzzle together and often found gold." (224)

Prior to *Dies und Das*, Joans had published multiple books of poetry and also contributed to surrealist publications including *La brèche: Action surréaliste*, *L'archibras*, *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion*, and a special issue on surrealism by *Radical America*.

By the time of the publication of *Dies und Das*, Joans had for many years lived abroad throughout Europe, and also in Tangier, Morocco and Tombouctou, Mali. In 1960 he met Breton in Paris; a photograph shows the two artists together at Breton's apartment in front of his *mur* (his famous studio wall now in the Centre Pompidou). Joans's collage-painting-assemblage pieces from this time demonstrate his surrealist aesthetics, connecting to the *poème-objet* works of Breton and those of his partner Elisa Breton. An artwork by Joans from 1963, *The White Hair Revolver is Still Loaded!* includes a painted portrait of Breton alongside objects including a key, a toothbrush, and a set of teeth. The work also features a handwritten note (from which the title is taken) and multiple painted images of the African rhinoceros, which along with the aardvark Joans considered a surrealist animal (and one facing extinction due to human cruelty — Joans was a long-time advocate of animal rights). The pages of *Dies und Das* often demonstrate similar juxtapositions of words and found images/objects, but in a two-dimensional, and thus more easily circulated, format. One collage in the magazine features a

photograph of Breton in profile placed next to a profile of a rhinoceros, upon which is mounted an image of Breton as a child (fig. 1). All three are superimposed over a map of West Berlin, and the number/date “1713” forms a halo around young Breton’s head. Breton was fascinated by this number, which he felt resembled his initials; in his text “Du poème-objet” (About the object-poem) he examined significant historical events from this year. (The text is partially reproduced on the subsequent page of *Dies und Das*).



Figure 1: Ted Joans’s collage of André Breton over the map of West Berlin in *Dies und Das* (1984). Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia.

Joans also shared this interest in arithmosophy; in a letter to Breton he notes that he was born the same year that Breton’s *Nadja*, Louis Aragon’s *Traité du style*,

and René Crevel's *L'esprit contre la raison* were published (1928) ("Fragments" 66); he often signed poems with "1714" in tribute to Breton; and in *Dies und Das* he reflects that Louis Armstrong was born the year Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901). Elsewhere in the magazine, he inverts dates to reinvent key surrealist statements (1938: "neither your war nor your peace" becomes 1983: "neither your peace nor your war"). The busy, layered aesthetic of *Dies und Das* provides the feeling that the "this and that" of its pages are saturated with such meanings through numbers, words, and symbols, akin to Octavio Paz's description of Breton's *poème-objet*: "Dicen adivinanzas, enigmas. De pronto esos enigmas se entrebren y dejan escapar, como la crisálida a la mariposa, revelaciones instantáneas" "They whisper riddles and enigmas. Suddenly, these enigmas open up and, like a chrysalis releasing a butterfly, they let out sudden revelations" ("Poemas mudos" 48).

While Breton provided inspiration for *Dies und Das*, the influence and imagery of Lam equally permeates its pages. Joans opens the magazine with a sixteen-page tribute to the artist, featuring an illustrated timeline of his life, drawings by Lam (including one inscribed to Joans), excerpts of essays and poems on Lam's work by Joans, Breton, Aimé Césaire, Alain Joubert, Benjamin Péret, and Jean Schuster, and a 1972 poem by Lam himself entitled "Light!" Together, the materials create a cohesive overview of Lam's career. The tribute is also achieved through Joans's collage aesthetic; his self-described "runaway scissors" allude to Lam's well-known imagery within *The Jungle* (1943), which includes a figure wielding a pair of scissors, often interpreted as a maroon (runaway enslaved person). Of this imagery, Lam later stated, "I used the scissors as a symbol of a necessary cut against foreign imposition in Cuba, against all colonization" (qtd. in Mahabir 17). Joans takes up this strategy of the "cut," and his scissors allow him to construct a new reality, such as when he presents an image of himself standing in an opulent room, holding up a larger, superimposed photograph of Lam's face; at the bottom of the same page Joans hand-writes in large, bold letters, "Lam Lives!" The spatial and size distortions made possible through collage serve as Joans's means of underscoring his allegiances and amplifying his tributes to those he sees as central to his "snip/snap" mission.

Through these collage-interactions in *Dies und Das* with Lam, Breton, and others, Joans emphasizes the continued relevance of surrealism, and also offers insights on the ways it might evolve, often employing anatomical metaphors to assert an embodied commitment. He reflects on the need to protect against the movement's "ossification" (soft tissue becoming calcified and hardened), and states, "[w]e are not shadows of yesteryear's surrealists, although we have been nourished by 'them and those,' and their 'this and that' can be found engrained in the very marrow of our bones." Joans continually annotates the pages of *Dies und Das* with short notes of explanation and contextualization, and presents himself as a defender against the embattled position of the movement in the 1980s, positioning the magazine as "[e]in Organ, respektlos gegenüber jener bekannten

internationalen Intelligentsia, die kichern und gähnen, wenn das Wort Surrealismus positiv erwähnt wird" 'an Organ, disrespectful to the well-known international Intelligentsia who giggle and yawn when the Word Surrealism is mentioned positively.'

Yet while Joans praises past surrealist actions, specifically the movement's lengthy anti-colonial involvement, he also asserts that it can only progress through a frank evaluation of past shortcomings. Referencing the 1929 surrealist map of the world, Joans offers a new version that places border outlines of the United States, Japan, India, Europe, and New Zealand within the outlines of a map of Africa, demonstrating the continent's vast scale. And he references the publication site of the original surrealist map — the Belgian periodical *Variétés* — in order to draw conclusions on inherent colonial biases that exist within anti-colonial projects:

The Surrealists (mostly of Belgium) published a world map that was anti-African due to their educated-to-respect-Leopold the raper, pillager and murderer of the Congo. This map is to update the true surrealist point of view of Africa and to demonstrate the immensity of the continent.

Joans claims his right to redefine "true" surrealism, and he uses his new map twice within *Dies und Das* (it also appears on one of his tribute pages to Lam). As Pawlik has pointed out, "[i]n Joans' formulations Africa paradoxically provides both the prehistory and the future of surrealism," and she cites his assertion that "Africa is a surrealist continent, thus the most marvelous" (231). In a 2002 essay, Joans recounted his travels on the borderlands of North and West Africa, framing a remote part of the Sahara through surrealist terms of biomorphic visions, the marvelous, and the treachery of nature:

we crossed the vast ocean of rocky sand land called the Tanezrouft, which begins in Mali and dominates almost all of southern Algeria. This part of Africa is for me, the most marvelous, especially when the huge lofty dunes shimmer in the distance. They suggest golden breasts, and scandalous attractive women's buttocks veiled by the ever-present sheets of sifting sands, and they too, can be dangerous. Stay your distance, this area can swallow you up! (95)

Joans continues his reclamation of physical and theoretical territories in *Dies und Das* with a collage featuring an historic illustration of the 1884 Berlin Conference. Organized by Otto von Bismarck, the meeting gathered European powers to negotiate regulation of colonialism in Africa and subsequently dismantle African autonomy. A group of European men congregates in front of a large map of Africa, and under this image Joans writes — in immaculate cursive in both English and German — "The Mother-Fuckers." Map creators of the past are indicted, whether they are the leaders of European countries carving new physical boundaries for trade or European surrealists creating imaginary new territorial dimensions.



Joans also uses the pages of *Dies und Das* to insert different bodies into historically restricted or dominated spaces. On one page, he reclaims West Berlin by covering its map with the words and image of the Haitian surrealist poet Clément Magloire-Saint-Aude (fig. 2). He prefaces a page on surrealist Étienne Léro by suggesting that the Martinican writer died in a Paris house previously occupied by the nineteenth-century French inventor-poet Charles Cros, a person of much interest to the surrealists who invented a sound recording device called the Paleophone (voice of the past). Joans collages another page with a clipping from an English newspaper that describes his own proposal that the largest lake in Africa, Lake Victoria, should be re-named Lake Louis Armstrong, alongside a stern image of “Her Majesty the Queen.” And perhaps most imaginatively and whimsically, Joans suggests that the Schwebebahn (suspension railway) in Wuppertal, Germany should be “spread all over Europe and across to Morocco then down the western coast of Afrika,” bringing porous borders and new interconnections:

At Senegal it should turn inland towards Mali and upwards along the Niger River to Timbuktu. Upon arriving at Tumbuctoo the passengers would instantly disembark, mount camels (or donkeys) and proceed to the world’s most marvelous museum of contemporary action.

Joans’s allusion to a “marvelous museum” references the Dogon and their performance of masks in *dama* ceremonies, which he asserts as a relevant and “contemporary action” as opposed to relegating the group to timelessness, or a static past.

This dizzying process of re-mapping, re-inventing, and re-instating amounts to, as Joans puts it on one collaged page, a “Surrealist Intrusion” on a broader public space and public discourse. Joans borrows these words and typeface directly from the catalogue for the 1960 exhibition, “Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters’ Domain.” Organized by Breton in collaboration with Marcel Duchamp, this was the last official International Surrealist Exhibition (and as was surely significant within Joans’s arithmosophic practice, since it was the year in which Joans first met Breton). Joans’s intended sense of “intrusion” is thus also within surrealism itself, an intrusion which reimagines its boundaries and participants. To amplify this second point, Joans collages four postal stamps beneath the words “Surrealist Intrusion”: an Austrian stamp of Sigmund Freud, two U.S. stamps of the composer/pianist Scott Joplin, and a French stamp of Charles Cros. Under each, he adds the “Black Heritage” design that originally would have only been on the Joplin stamp. Blackness becomes surrealism’s true force, as Joans asserts when he updates Breton’s concept of the “Grands Transparents” ‘Great Invisibles’ from his 1942 “Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto.” Joans exclaims: “We have the power and that power’s color is black. Black absorbs all other colors. It is truly the Great Invisible.”



Figure 2: Ted Joans's collage of the poetry of Magloire Saint-Aude and a map of West Berlin in *Dies und Das* (1984). Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia.



Joans utilized these strategies of insertion and layering within his collages to underscore the racialized aspects of previous omissions. Through another collage technique that he invented, Outography, Joans practiced the opposite strategy of excising crucial details (usually faces) from appropriated images to undercut preconceived notions of societal norms and hierarchies. An Outograph in *Dies und Das* features a nineteenth-century photograph of two women in pearls having tea in a German café, and Joans cuts out their faces and large hats, creating creepy, distorted silhouettes that resemble monsters. Interestingly, the image is placed on a page with Joans's tribute to German surrealist Unica Zürn who, as Joans likely knew, was a "Berliner" whose well-to-do, absent father had served as a cavalry officer in Africa. A later Outograph from 1993 uses a postcard reproduction of a 1913 image by the German photographer August Sander; Joans cuts out the heads of five musicians posing with their string and brass instruments in the German countryside, dressed in their best suits and ties. He then superimposes the face of a Black man (to-date unidentified) onto the right-hand figure of the bass player (fig. 3). This deletion, alteration, and transformation enacted on the photograph operates both as a literal defacement and as a suggestion of alternative pasts and futures. The work also complicates early twentieth-century narratives around physiognomy that often centered on Sander's popular photo-book, *Face of Our Time* (1929) and questions of modernity, urbanity, class, and race. As Wolfgang Brückle has suggested, Sander's book was part of "a broad impulse to visually archive the German people in the light of the belief, widely shared by intellectuals and writers across the political spectrum, that the social and cultural conditions of the time could be read in people's faces." *Dies und Das* also includes a page collaged with old textbook drawings of European heads that have captions such as "Ein normaler Typus des Mannes" 'A normal type of man,' and diagrammatic words covering the faces such as "Gesundheit" 'Health,' "Verbesserung" 'Improvement,' and "Schönheit" 'Beauty.' On the opposite page, Joans juxtaposes a drawing of a head by Afro-Colombian artist Heriberto Cogollo that is based on an African mask, undermining European ideals of "normal" facial features.

If territorial reconfigurations, deletions, and intrusions by those previously excluded play an important role in *Dies und Das*, this is further amplified by Joans's regular use of reproductions of African sculptures. A Kafigeledjo (Senufo oracle figure) overlays Joans's pages on Magloire-Saint-Aude; an Akua Ba (Asante female fertility figure) is collaged next to a page of the timeline on Lam; and a Nimba (Baga fertility goddess) appears on multiple pages, in one instance superimposed over the head of another textbook image of a "typical" German body. Alongside the use of these images, Joans addresses appropriation within European modernism, and specifically surrealism, at times amounting to what he describes as a "cultural genocide":



Figure 3: Ted Joans's *Outograph* (1993) using a postcard of a photograph by the German photographer August Sander (1913). Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia.

Creations from the Third World, especially Africa, have often inspired surrealist ideas, and the men and women who were inspired by such black art (Oceania included) often forgot them just as quickly — or, at best, they unconsciously assimilated them, and as a result, they sincerely believed themselves as being the original!

Joans had long been engaged in debates around the cultural deployment of African sculpture in Europe. Speaking at the 1969 Algiers Pan-African Arts Festival, he condemned the theft and “imprisonment” of African art by institutions such as the Paris Musée de l’Homme, an explicit critique of Michel Leiris and his infamous theft of a Boli statue from the Bamana in Mali (Fabre 320).<sup>2</sup> And Joans’s exhibition at the Galerie Maya in Paris in the preceding year (1968) offered a nuanced and playful critique of art as commodity, hierarchies of museum displays, the “Other” within ethnography, and the performance of the sacred. As Michel Fabre recounts, Joans presented his “‘Afro-American fetishes,’ to be traded, rather than sold, for ‘Euro-tribal creations’” and he “‘read’ the fetishes, which were mostly collages of bones, hair, cowries, and linen” (319-20). The list of his

---

<sup>2</sup> Editors’ note: For more on Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme* and his ethnographic writing in the context of the Dakar-Djibouti mission from 1931-1933, see Andrea Gremels’s article in this special issue.

displayed artworks included specific items they would be exchanged for: a piece entitled *Jazz est noir* would be traded for an electric battery phonograph, *Soleil noir* could be exchanged for a copy of Breton's *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, while the artwork 1713 was listed at the price of 1713 francs. A visitor could also have a work entitled *Oreille et orteil: Jam!* for a copy of Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme*, or a piece called *Timbuctoo rush hour* for "One mask of the Congo."

In this exhibition and throughout the pages of *Dies und Das*, Joans used some of the core practices of surrealism (juxtaposition, display, manifesto-style critique) to complicate the connections between surrealism and African art, while also noting the complex relation between both for artists of the African Diaspora (including himself, Magloire-Saint-Aude, and Lam). He attempted to reassert the visibility of African art and culture instead of draining their specific contexts, while simultaneously refusing to isolate them from other international practices. In this denouncement of Eurocentric art hierarchies, African sculptures take their place alongside all other iconic works of art; as Joans puts it in a multilingual statement in *Dies und Das*:

Nous sommes absolument against yesteryear's surrealist attitude towards African traditional objets. Wir sind all children of that primeval continent – which also includes you! We accept Nimba as André Breton did alongside Venus de Milo and La Gioconda avec Duchamp's tango mustache.

Joans refutes racial supremacy or even the concept of different races ("all children" of Africa and that "includes you!"), while simultaneously recognizing difference within encounters (the goddess Venus de Milo alongside the goddess Nimba). On the same page as the above statement, he creates a collage with two Nimba sculptures and a quote from Breton: "The hour has come to promote a new myth, one that will carry man forward a stage further towards his ultimate destination. This undertaking is specifically that of surrealism. It is its great rendezvous with History. Surrealism is that which shall be!" Joans ties the "new myth" to African art, suggesting that any "rendezvous with History" must entail a deep reckoning by Europe of its roots in the African continent, and the role of African culture in the development of European modernity and modernism.

Alongside African art, for Joans another crucial part of the new myth was jazz. In the liner notes of his *Jazz Poems* cassette tape, he offers an unequivocal connection of this musical genre to surrealism: "Jazz is the most democratic art form on the face of earth, it's a surreal music, a surreality" (*Jazz Poems*). In a later published narrative, he frames the music of Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk (both of whom he knew personally) within terms of a visceral impact that moves beyond the rational mind, as an "instantaneous 'sound' pressure upon my aural intellect" (Joans, "Jadis, si je me souviens" 91). Joans also emphasized jazz as "surreal music" that is a "germinating force" in an interview during the 1977 Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos,

Nigeria (reprinted in Chimurenga). It is significant that Joans offered space for surrealism at this monumental Pan-African event, specifically describing jazz musicians in Bretonian terms as “communicating vessels” (Chimurenga 312). As Mary Ann Caws has explored, within Breton’s 1934 text *Communicating Vessels*:

there lies the principal image of the dream as the enabling “capillary tissue” between the exterior world of facts and the interior world of emotions . . . . The central image of communicating vessels is taken from a scientific experiment of the same name, where a gas passes from one side to the other: the passing back and forth between these two modes is shown to be the basis of surrealist thought, of surreality itself. (91)

Joans implicitly makes a connection between the improvisational performance of the jazz musician and the dream, both conduits that are never static, always evolving.

Joans channeled the surreality of jazz within his own visual production, as a description of his early years in 1950s New York makes evident: “I religiously painted jazzaction paintings and abstract surreal of musicians. Also I had access to surrealist magazines (*View* and *VVV*), rare documents, and newly translated books about surrealism” (“Jadis, si je me souviens” 93). And Joans recounts his own response to Parker’s untimely death in 1955 in terms of both musical improvisation and surrealist automatism: “When I heard that Bird had gone on to his ancestors, I put a stack of his 78rpm recordings on my Philco as I shed inner and outer tears. While listening to his *Dial* and *Savoy* discs as I did, a series of frenzied automatic drawings just grew” (94). Joans frames himself as communicating vessel, too, capable of passing visions back and forth through his encounters with jazz and its impact on his subconscious. With this, he harnesses a practice that Brent Hayes Edwards describes as pseudomorphosis; Hayes Edwards suggests that this system of “working one medium in the shape of or in the shadow of another — is the paradigm of innovation in black art” (19).

The pages of *Dies und Das* are permeated with jazz, with Joans acknowledging the work of Belgian writer Robert Goffin by reproducing his 1946 essay “Jazz et surrealism” and describing him as “the first to recognize that reflection on the other side of the mirror of surrealism was jazz.” The back cover of *Dies und Das* also foregrounds jazz surreality; Joans alters a photograph of Rene Magritte, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Max Ernst by collaging hand-written signs into their hands with the phrase “Bird Lives” (in the original image from 1966, they each hold a catalogue for a William Copley retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam) (fig. 4). “Bird Lives” refers to the statement that Joans began to graffiti around New York after Parker’s death; as he would later recount:

We took subways in four different directions and along the route we wrote with religious fervor, two large words BIRD LIVES! It was against the New York City Law to deface any public property by pasting or marking. Violators would be fined \$50 dollars or persecuted. We took our

chances for him, our blessed musical genius Bird . . . I still scrawl Bird Lives on the Bird Dates of August 29th and March 12th wherever I am on earth (“Jadis, si je me souviens” 94).

Joans places a large image of Parker below that of the four surrealists, along with the words “Jazz is our religion,” and through this, inserts his own voice, his own collage/graffiti, and his own experience of jazz, onto the surrealist movement. It is surely not a coincidence that Joans chose a photograph of Magritte, Duchamp, Ray, and Ernst in 1960s Amsterdam; a key moment in his own artistic trajectory occurred in the city when he performed his poem “Jazz is my Religion,” as was filmed by Louis van Gasteren and subsequently featured in his 1964 documentary *Jazz and Poetry*. And the repeated statement “Bird Lives!” — or as Joans reframes it within the pages of *Dies und Das*, “Lam Lives!” — is not only a tribute to the ongoing impact of the musician or artist, but an urging by Joans to all of us: “Live like a Bird solo, which is an audio cyclical surreality” (“Bird and the Beats” 15).

Following the long-standing practice within surrealist periodicals of including a survey, *Dies und Das* also presents a multi-page spread of responses to Joans’s “Jazz Inquiry.” The section opens with a collage featuring bold letters that exclaim, “Jazz et Surrealisme, Une Possible Alliance” alongside images of Breton and Parker. Joans also collages two quotes to emphasize the basis of this alliance as one of liberation; a quote from Breton, “[a]ussi bien que dans la coulée d’une phrase, que dans le vent mystérieux d’un jazz, accorde-moi de reconnaître tes moyens dans les prochaines Révolutions” ‘[b]e it in the flow of a phrase or in the mysterious wind of a jazz tune, allow me to recognize your resources in the Revolutions to come’ (“Introduction au discours” 280; “Introduction to the Discourse” 144), and a quote from Thelonious Monk: “Jazz and freedom go hand-in-hand. That is explains it. There isn’t any more to add to it.” The inquiry’s questions include: “When was your first encounter with jazz?,” “How do you feel about jazz now?,” and the (highly international) published respondents included Jean-Louis Bédouin, Jorge Camacho, Georges Gronier, Maurice Henry, Konrad Klapheck, Louis Lehmann, Chris Starr, and John W. Welson. Michel Leiris chose to send his article published in *Jazz Magazine* in same year, while Roberto Matta’s response perhaps most closely connected with Joans’s own views: “jazz is a word of revolt, pleasure, and justice” (*Dies und Das*).

Joans’s strongest expression within *Dies und Das* on jazz and this connection to “revolt, pleasure, and justice” is a collage based upon the album cover art for Thelonious Monk’s 1968 album, *Underground*. In the elaborate scene of the original album image, Monk is presented as a French Resistance fighter with covert (underground) headquarters in a hay barn. Monk stares defiantly at the viewer from his piano, a semi-automatic rifle slung across his shoulder, while in the corner, a man in a Nazi uniform sits bound to a chair. Strategic maps, grenades, and pistols surround Monk, and his hands hover over the piano keys, about to strike, with sticks of dynamite and a detonator near his feet and the piano pedals.





Figure 4: Back cover of *Dies und Das* (1984). Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia.

Joans inserts hand-written notes over the image, including — in allusion to the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* — “Thelonious Monk is surrealist in his music,” and at the bottom he also adds a photograph by Bob Parent documenting Monk performing in 1953 at the Open Door in Greenwich Village with Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, and Roy Haynes. The engagement with international, anti-racist resistance — political and cultural — can also be seen in the events that Joans was organizing in 1950s Greenwich Village, including a costume ball dedicated to surrealism, Dada, and the Mau Mau (the contemporaneous nationalist movement

in Kenya advocating violent opposition to the British). Photographs by Weegee show that Parker was in attendance at this event, dressed as a Mau Mau. Joans's work in collage and also through such events thus layer and weave multiple references and associations to express jazz surreality, which is framed as the strongest weapon to deploy. Joans was dedicated to this view over many decades; for example in the same year that Monk released *Underground*, Joans's essay "Black Flower" appeared in the surrealist publication *L'archibras*; the piece has been described by Robin D.G. Kelley as "a surrealist manifesto that envisioned a movement of black people in the U.S. bringing down American imperialism from within with the weapon of poetic imagery, 'black flowers' sprouting all over the land" (350).

Another liberatory goal that Joans foregrounds within *Dies und Das* is that of recognition for women artists affiliated with surrealism ("Her/story"). This reckoning with both historical and contemporary contributions was before its time, especially considering Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* was not published until a year after *Dies und Das* (1985), and Joans's close colleague Penelope Rosemont's rigorously inclusive *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* appeared almost fifteen years later. The pages of Joans's magazine include contributions by writers such as Jayne Cortez, Joyce Mansour, Nancy Joyce Peters, and Rosemont, along with the visual artists Aube Breton, Elisa Breton, Ithell Colquhoun, Giovanna, Marion Kalter, Meret Oppenheim, Mimi Parent, Betye Saar, Dorothea Tanning, Marie Wilson, and Unica Zürn. Joans consistently writes insightful, poetic introductions and descriptions to accompany reproductions of artworks by the women artists: Oppenheim participates in "the dissemination of uncouth objects," while Parent's artworks "grow as tall as their beauty is convulsive," and Tanning is "one of the black lights that shines consistently across the yonders." Much like his emphasis on surrealism as an inherently anti-racist tool, Joans frames the movement as preceding but also deepening feminism and the questioning of traditional gender roles. His later unpublished review of a monograph on Marie Wilson makes this clear; he describes her as a "femme invisible" 'invisible woman' and this lack of recognition is because "unlike her sister surrealists" she is "saddled with a family." According to Joans, Wilson is not a "pop-flash-wham-bam" feminist, but instead "like all surrealists — liberated before feminism became a political-correct de rigueur" ("Marie Wilson").

The visual production of the women artists that Joans highlights in *Dies und Das* is varied, but with a slight emphasis on collage, assemblage, and surrealist objects. His inclusion of Betye Saar is significant, reflecting Joans and Saar's shared interest and inspiration in the assemblage boxes of Joseph Cornell. Like Joans, Saar deployed the influence of Cornell's aesthetic strategies to vehemently confront and undermine racist visual culture, most specifically through her series on Aunt Jemima. The magazine includes a reproduction of a self-portrait photomontage by Saar, plus two of her mixed-media collages, and an assemblage box from 1982

entitled *The Invisible Man* (fig. 5). The latter work features the faceless, silhouetted form of a man in front of a box with wooden bars. Although in an interview Saar described the piece as inspired by a poem published in a Los Angeles newspaper and part of an autobiographical series (Wilson, "Down to the Crossroads" 115), it may have also been of interest to Joans due to its similarity in title to Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*. In the opening words of the prologue of Ellison's text, the Harlem protagonist reflects on what it is to be invisible due to race and duly reduced to stereotypes instead of allowed the full complexities of character:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids — and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination — indeed, everything and anything except me. (3)

Joans consistently sought to undermine erasures of Black identity through strategic collage insertions. Questions of visibility and invisibility recur consistently through the pages of *Dies und Das*.

Of the women affiliated with surrealism that appear in the periodical, Joans appears to have been especially vehement in his efforts to recognize the work of Elisa Breton, aware of her overshadowing by her partner. As Penelope Rosemont writes in *Surrealist Women*: "[a]lthough [Elisa Breton] is well-known as the inspirer of [André Breton's] *Arcanum 17*, her half-century of active participation in surrealism is rarely noted by critics. Multilingual and creative, a maker of enticing surrealist objects, Elisa Breton is a woman of vibrant imagination . . ." (124). Rosemont is quick to note that she bases her comments in part on the thoughts of Elisa Breton's "close friends" including Ted Joans (125). Joans reproduces five of her object-assemblages and places one of the works on the magazine's cover. The piece features an old, bejeweled ladies coin purse, on which is mounted a headless figure in nineteenth century dress. It bears a certain aesthetic confluence with Joans's Outograph works, undermining societal norms with the excision of anatomical details.

*Dies und Das* consistently sought to highlight those most influential on Joans's own work and thought, expanding surrealism's boundaries and connections. While he opens with his tribute to Lam, consistently incorporates the writing and images of Breton, and foregrounds the art of Elisa Breton, among other surrealists, the magazine concludes with a sequence dedicated to a figure outside of the surrealist movement, Malcolm X. Joans collages an image of Malcolm X alongside a photograph of the American abolitionist John Brown and a highly symbolic drawing by Roberto Matta in which figures attempt to cross a gaping abyss.



Figure 5: Reproduction of a self-portrait photomontage by Betye Saar in *Dies und Das* (1984). Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia.

Joans also includes a series of quotations by Malcolm X, including the reflection “[y]ou can’t separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom.” Joans does not attempt to absorb Malcolm X into surrealism, but instead places the movement within a widening context of liberatory possibilities that emerge from a combination of writing and action; as Gérard Durozoi has suggested, “[w]riting, for Joans, is contingent on the intensity of the experience that inspires it” (676). And this experience subsequently returns to the physical trace and power of the written mark, as is especially seen in an earlier project of Joans that involved Malcolm X, which he called the *Black Power Postcard*.

In this work, Joans presents a photograph of himself on his first journey to Tombouctou, walking with a large pack on his back from the boat landing at Kabara. On top of this image, over the course of many years, Joans asked ten Black

activists, artists, and musicians to sign their names, starting with Malcom X in Paris in 1964. If “Outography” is a playful pun on the concept of the autograph, here Joans reverses the excision to imprint and expand his journey with the inscriptions of Albert Ayler, James Baldwin, Stokely Carmichael, Aimé Césaire, Ornette Coleman, Leroi Jones, Max Roach, Archie Shepp, and Cecil Taylor. Through this process and its resulting collaborative artwork, Joans becomes an agent of “relais” ‘relay,’ to use the term of Édouard Glissant, which he describes a process of Relation that contrasts with totality/totalitarianism. In this process, none are fully assimilated, none become static, but instead all are changed “over and over again” (172).

Returning to *Dies und Das*, it can be argued that this relayed mode of relation was Joans’s intention, combining historical and contemporary documents, surrealist sources, and sources of Black radical thought with the goal of changing and advancing all. And so, what was the result of the magazine in furthering the possibilities of freedom? Joans asserted that it was the first surrealist magazine created in Germany, and he hoped to have a local impact in the country and across borders, writing, “[w]e, fortunately, are ‘this and that’ in West Berlin, and hope to toss copies over the Stalinist wall for those who seek illumination.” The U.S. poet Robert Creeley, also in residence in West Berlin on a fellowship through the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, sent a report to the *Washington Post* that offers one glimpse into Joans’s regular surrealist activities and possible impact. Creeley visited an art gallery where Joans “was having a *finissage* of his surrealist and historical artifacts — including a great film of himself in Tombouctou, which the Germans loved, with fine readings by Richard Anders, a poet we should know far better, the younger Ernst Bauerschau, and Ted himself.” The local, national, or international reaction specifically to *Dies und Das* is unclear and requires further investigation. What is clear, however, is that Joans’s consistent, pressing questions of erasure and revision came to have a profound impact in their relay to contemporary artists in the U.S. including David Hammons, as can be seen in the 2019 film project *David Hammons: Exquisite Corpse: Ted Joans*, which presents footage created by Hammons in 2001 of a lengthy exchange with Joans.

Throughout the pages of *Dies und Das*, Joans simultaneously offers an historical overview of surrealism, expands upon its practices, and inserts himself into both its past and present, widening its scope. Joans’s aesthetics of collage and its deployment as a political tool of decolonization and anti-racism are profound contributions to the surrealist practice of periodical production. These practices were also an intrinsic aspect of Joans’s identity; he described a later memoir as “The Collaged Autobiography of Ted Joans.” His work in this medium very much follows Penelope Rosemont’s more recent reflection that “[w]e take the degenerate commodities of society and reassemble them as images of dreams — as the spirit of the future. Surrealist collages embody this subversive spirit” (qtd. in Sakolsky 16). Engaging the surrealist call for a new myth, Joans proposes a counter-



historiography in which borders are permeable and interconnections exist that do not erase individuals. In *Dies und Das* and elsewhere, Joans sought to create, as he put it, an “amalgamation,” a different system of exchange and interchange.

## Works Cited

- Breton, André. “Introduction au discours à ce peu de réalité.” *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, edited by Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne Alain Hubert, and José Pierre, Gallimard, 1992, pp. 264-80.
- . “Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality.” Translated by Richard Sieburth and Jennifer Gordon, *October*, no. 69, summer 1994, pp. 133-44.
- Brückle, Wolfgang. “Face-Off in Weimar Culture: The Physiognomic Paradigm, Competing Portrait Anthologies, and August Sander’s *Face of Our Time*.” *Tate Papers*, no. 19, spring 2013.
- Caws, Mary Ann. “Linkings and Reflections: André Breton and His Communicating Vessels.” *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 17, 1988, pp. 91-100.
- Chimurenga. “Ted Joans in interview with Theo Vincent.” *Festac '77: 2<sup>nd</sup> World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture*, Chimurenga / Afterall Books, 2019, pp. 312-13.
- Creeley, Robert. “Letter from Berlin.” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1983, Book World p. 15.
- Durozoi, Gérard. *History of the Surrealist Movement*. Translated by Alison Anderson, U of Chicago P, 2002.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination*. Harvard UP, 2017.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Random House, 1952.
- Fabre, Michel. *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*. U of Illinois P, 1993.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, U of Michigan P, 1997.
- Hammons, David. *David Hammons: Exquisite Corpse: Ted Joans*. Film project curated by Manthia Diawara and Terri Geis, produced by Maumaus, Lisbon, Portugal, 2019.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008.
- Joans, Ted. “Bird and the Beats.” *Coda*, 1981, pp. 14-15.
- . “Black Flower.” *L’archibras*, March 1968, pp. 10-11.
- . *Dies und Das*. West Berlin, Germany, 1984. Self-published.
- . “Fragments de lettres.” *La brèche: Action surréaliste*, no. 5, 5 October 1963, pp. 66-67.
- . “Jadis, si je me souviens bien (Once if I remember well).” *Black Renaissance noir*, vol. 4, no. 2/3, June 2002, pp. 91-95.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jazz Poems*. S Press Tonbandverlag, 1980. S tape #72, recorded at Kuckucksnest Schwelm, 1979.
- . "Marie Wilson: Femme Invisible." Unpublished review of *Daedalic Isomorphs*, 2000, Ted Joans Archive.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. "Monks Dance." *Philosophy On Stage 1: Lecture-Performances*, Passagen, 2007. DVD recording of a lecture-performance held 10 November 2005 at the Ovalhalle, Museumsquartier, Vienna.
- Mahabir, Joy A.I. *Miraculous Weapons: Revolutionary Ideology in Caribbean Culture*. Peter Lang 2003.
- Pawlik, Joanna. "Ted Joans' Surrealist History Lesson." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1-2, 2011, pp. 221-39.
- Paz, Octavio. "Poemas mudos y objetos parlantes." *Convergencias*, Seix Barral, 1991, pp. 39-48.
- Rosemont, Franklin, and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds. *Black, Brown & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*. U of Texas P, 2009.
- Rosemont, Penelope. *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. U of Texas P, 1998.
- Sakolsky, Ron. "Learning How to Fly." *The Oystercatcher*, no. 15, May 2018, p. 16.
- Wilson, Judith. "Down to the Crossroads: The Art of Alison Saar." *Callaloo*, vol. 14, no. 1, winter 1991, pp. 107-23.

Copyright © 2023 Terri Geis