

RETHINKING "AESTHETICS": NOTES TOWARDS A DECIPHERING PRACTICE

The effectiveness of repressed people in the communications struggle, either as senders or receivers through systems influenced by this hierarchy (the "image hierarchy" and "ideological contours of representation" of what Michel Foucault calls "power/knowledge"), depends on their realization of the obsolescence of the contest over the nature of truth beside the contest over the control of truth, and the irrelevance of "beauty" beside the power to choose and name beauty.

From the beginning, the question of aesthetics is always a non-dialogue between those who subscribe to the conditioned world order and those who stand to gain from a reconstructed forum.

Clyde Taylor¹

A Black neighborhood is a "high-risk" area because it is Black and because the bulk of the population is trapped there . . . A high risk area is expensive because . . . those who batter on it—salesmen and landlords and lawyers, for example—must turn their profits with ruthless speed, for the territory occupied by the Blacks, or the non-White poor, swiftly becomes a kind of devastation.

This means that the citizens of the ghetto have absolutely

no way of imposing their will on the city, still less on the State.
No one is compelled to hear the needs of a captive population.

James Baldwin²

But as sure as the sun will shine
I'm gonna get my share, what's mine
But the harder they come
The harder they fall
One and all!

Ivan's Title song from *The Harder They Come*

"Fight the Power"

[Public Enemy's theme song in *Do The Right Thing*]

Introduction and Overview

I HAVE DIVIDED THE ESSAY INTO two parts. Part One gives a summary of the major concepts related to the rethinking of "Aesthetics," as well as to the major proposal which comes out of the rethinking. This proposal is that we replace the present practice of film criticism as a "deutero-canonical" extension of literary criticism³ and move, instead, towards a new (and post-deconstructionist) practice of decipherment. Unlike film criticism, which *must constrain* the contestatory signifying practices and video-type aesthetics of rhythm of the new cultural forms of films such as *The Harder They Come* (1972) and *Do The Right Thing* (1989)—both of which embody a dually *Underclass* "high-risk area" and Black popular point of view—a deciphering practice is able to "uncover" the working of these counter-practices and forms part of an ongoing Nietzschean transvaluation of values and, therefore, of aesthetics, an emerging praxis,

therefore, of a second intellectual mutation as far-reaching as the first intellectual mutation of humanism which made possible the realization of the natural sciences.

Part II proposes that such a deciphering practice is itself linked to an ongoing cultural revolution of an emergent global and popular Imaginary, for which the securing of the well-being of the concrete individual human subject is the referent telos, against our present hegemonic Imaginary, for which the securing of the well-being of the middle class *mode* of the subject is the telos. It further proposes that, in the same way as the practice of literary criticism had emerged, in its first Renaissance "civic humanist" form, as a central part of the "battle of the cultural Imaginary" (or of "tastes") by means of which the "counter-exertion" of European humanism had initiated the first stage of the struggle to attain to the autonomy of human cognition with respect to physical and organic reality, a deciphering practice is inextricably linked to a parallel goal. The goal this time is that of realizing, at long last, the autonomy of human cognition with respect to the reality of the social universes of which we are always already discursively instituted speaking/knowing/feeling subjects, and, therefore, with respect to the processes which govern our modes of being/behaving, in the context of the increasing hegemony of cinematography's and audio-visual technology's "combination of the iconic and linguistic sign." Given the "visual and oneiric power" of the film's image to shape and control our human perception and, therefore, our behavioral responses; we can no longer afford what Clyde Taylor calls our "innocence" with respect to the phenomenon of the aesthetic.

It proposes that in the same way, as in the wake of the first intellectual mutation, Descartes provided the "ground" that would make the physical world mathematizable and, therefore, alterable in accordance with our human purposes, the rethinking of aesthetics provides the "ground" that can make "decipherable" the systems of meaning (or signalling systems), by which those always culture-specific "purposes" have been

hitherto instituted by our cultural Imaginaries (outside the conscious awareness of their bearer-subjects) and, thereby, make those “purposes,” now, consciously and consensually alterable.

A deciphering practice is therefore part of the attempt to move beyond our present “human sciences” to that of a new science of human “forms of life” and their correlated modes of the aesthetic: to move beyond what Adorno defined in the wake of Auschwitz as that “evil” which still haunts human existence as the “world’s own unfreedom.”

PART I — To Rethink Aesthetics: To Fight the Power

My rethinking of the phenomenon of aesthetics is carried out in the wake of two essays by Clyde Taylor, “We Don’t Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics” and “Black Cinema in the Post-Aesthetic Era.”⁴ In the first essay, Taylor proposes that scholars of Black cinema should aim at “the development of post-aesthetic creative practices and interpretations.” To do so, they should attempt to construct a new model of critical practice based on the organization of knowledge around the given text. Such a model should be used to free the text from the present “specious autonomy” that separates “cultural production” from “social and material production” and to open it up to “intercommunion with other texts” as well as to the “significations of every day life.”

Such a model would, however, call for scholars first to free themselves from their addiction to the “opiate of aestheticism,” if it were to serve the purpose of bringing to Black cinema a perception of its cultural practices as a “crucial site of the contest out of which the human is being rewritten.” Taylor then proposes a provisional post-aesthetic critical practice which could provide “a platform for the assemblage of reconstructive knowledge” during the interregnum before the invention of more “powerful and humane modes of explanation.”

The point of my ongoing rethinking of aesthetics is to propose a practice of decipherment as a progression on, and

extension of, Taylor's "post-aesthetic critical practice" within the context of an imperatively needed "rewriting" of the human. Such an approach, I shall argue, necessarily negates not only the "specious autonomy" of cultural production but also, even more centrally, the represented autonomously determinant roles of social and material production. Because our present conceptual system of aesthetics and the models of analysis of literary and film criticism are themselves based on the premise of the "specious autonomy" of "cultural production" (as indeed of "social and material production"), a deciphering approach must necessarily move beyond the limits of even the most radical forms of literary criticism and theory—that of deconstruction as well as that of the "critical theory" frontier that David Bordwell recently parodied as SLAB theory, i.e., film criticism based on the scriptural theories of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes.⁵

The summary which follows is intended to provide the major hypotheses and new conceptual terminology on which the proposal for a deciphering turn is based. These hypotheses and new conceptual terms arise from my attempt to answer the following questions: *What does aesthetics do?* What is its function in human life? What, specifically, is its function in our present "form of life"? What correlation does it bear with the "social effectivities" of our present order, including that into which the real-life citizens and "captive populations" of the U.S. inner cities and the Third World shantytown archipelagoes—like the hero, Ivan, in *The Harder They Come* and the Raheems and others of *Do The Right Thing*—are locked? What correlation therefore is there with the non-linear structuring dynamics of our present global order, as well of its nation-state subunits?

What Does Aesthetics Do? Summary Towards an Answer

"Human Life" is *not*, as it is believed to be in our present system of knowledge, that of a natural organism which exists in a relation of pure continuity with organic modes of life.

Rather, human "forms of life" are a third level of existence, which institutes itself in a dual relation of continuity and discontinuity with that of organic life. It is, therefore, hybridly organic and meta-organic (i.e., discursive-symbolic).

While all organic modes of life are genetically "speciated"⁶ and regulated in their behaviors, the aggregating and co-speciating behaviors of human "forms of life" are instead induced and regulated by the orders of discourse instituting of each culture. Human life cannot, therefore, *pre-exist*, as it is now believed to do, the phenomenon of culture. Rather, it comes into being simultaneously with it.

Consequently, if all purely organic species are bonded and co-speciated on the basis of their degrees of altruism-inducing genetic kin-relatedness (AGKR), then all human population groups are bonded and co-aggregated on the basis of their discursively instituted degrees of altruism-inducing symbolic kin-relatedness (ASKR).

The transcultural phenomenon of *aesthetic* is, therefore, I propose, the expression, at the level of human forms of life, of the AGKR that operates at the level of purely organic forms of life. As such a phenomenon, therefore, it is the *discursively and meta-organically* regulated expression of what Robert Wright defines as the "recurring logic behind organic coherence" of all life, "from the borderline case of the slime mold upwards,"⁷ and, within the context of the evolution of cooperative behaviors, from that between cells to that between peoples, with both forms of cohesion being based on differing forms of communications whether chemical or, in our case, discursive-semantic.

Because it is a function of the securing of the modes of social cohesion based on the inducing of culture-specific cooperative behaviors on the part of its human subjects, the phenomenon of Aesthetics and its discursive-semantic practice or rhetorical strategies, by means of whose meaning-signals such inter-altruistic behaviors are stably induced, must be governed by rules, at the level of human "forms of life," that are

*analogous to the rules which govern the securing of "cooperative coherence" at the level of organic life, rules which must all function, therefore, according to the semantic closure principle (SCP) which alone ensures such coherence.*⁸

It is the rules of this governing principle, I further propose, which also govern the locking in, at the level of empirical reality, of Baldwin's "captive population" into the "high-risk areas" of the *First World's* (the "developed world's") inner cities, the locking in of those of the shantytown/favela poverty archipelagoes⁹ of the "underdeveloped world" and, at the level of correlated fictional reality, the "locking" in of the Ivans and the Raheems into the no-win situation of shantytowns of Kingston and the decaying brownstones of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

To Redefine Aesthetic 1 and Aesthetic 2: The Role of Signifying Practices and Semiotic Strings

The recent point made by Gladstone Yearwood about the constancy of signifying practices of mainstream Hollywood paradigm, as one in which Black characters are always represented in a subordinate position to dominant white characters,¹⁰ can therefore be seen as one that is predetermined by the rules of the semantic closure principle (SCP) which govern the instituting of our present culture-specific mode of the aesthetic or ASKR.

Consequently, Yearwood's further proposal, that we take all such signifying practices as *the* object of knowledge of our critical inquiry into the genre of film, if linked to Thomas Seboek's concept of "semiotic strings" of discourse whose meaning signals can directly induce physiological responses in the human body, thereby regulating behaviors, can provide the basis for a deciphering practice which seeks to identify the rules which govern their production *as* such practices and, therefore, the rules which govern the processes instituting of our present culture-specific mode of ASKR within a general theory of the rules of functioning of the processes instituting of

human "forms of life."¹¹

I have therefore used the terms Aesthetic 1 and Aesthetic 2 to draw a distinction between our present culture-specific definition of aesthetics and the new transcultural and, hopefully, scientific usage that the process of rethinking will propose; the phenomenon, therefore, of whose *class* our present mode of aesthetics is a member.¹² So that if Aesthetic 1 must necessarily function within the parameters of a specific imperative which I define below, our present mode of aesthetics and the signifying practices which institute its psycho-affective field must necessarily function within a parallel yet culture-specific imperative.

The imperative of Aesthetic 1 is to secure the social cohesion of the specific human order of which it is a function. It aims to produce the "unitary system of meanings" able to induce the altruistic psycho-affective field whose cohering mechanisms serve to integrate each specific mode of ultrasociality or "form of life," doing this as stably as do the genetically induced modes of kin-related altruism (AGKR) at the level of purely organic life.

As a result, the rules which govern the production of all culture-specific, altruism-inducing, and cohering systems of meanings *must* function both rule-governedly and in ways that have hitherto transcended the "normal" consciousness of each order's individual subjects.

The constancy of signifying practices such as those of Yearwood's Hollywood paradigm derives, therefore, from the fact that they are, as practices instituting the aesthetics of our present ASKR, rule-governedly generated in ways that transcend not only the consciousness of the normal scriptwriter but also that of the mainstream cinematic critic whose model of analysis is that of "literary criticism" extrapolated to the genre of cinema, whose disciplinary model, therefore, is itself transformatively generated from the same "paradigm of values and authority" which govern the instituting of our present mode of the aesthetic, i.e., Aesthetic 2.

On Paradigms of Value and Authority and Aesthetic 2: Danielli's Internal Reward System (IRS) and the Overriding of the Genetic Telos

The concept of "paradigm of value and authority" was used by the historian, J. G. A. Pocock, to differentiate the term "paradigm," as deployed in the "acts of communication" effected by the "public languages" of the disciplines whose object of knowledge is our societal mode of reality, from the term "paradigm," as used in the "separate languages" of the natural sciences whose objects of knowledge are those of physical (and organic) reality. Pocock's "paradigm of value and authority," I propose here, gives expression to what Ernesto Grassi calls the governing code by means of which human "forms of life" are instituted and their specific ensemble of behaviors regulated.¹³ And, because this code is everywhere instituted about the representation of symbolic "life" (projected as *culture*) and "death" (projected as *raw nature*), it both governs the processes by means of which each human mode of the subject is socialized as such a subject and defines the semantic closure principle that integrates each order as a living system.

Humans, as Peter Winch points out, never live merely animate but always symbolic modes of "life."¹⁴ So that Grassi's governing code can be seen as embodied and expressed everywhere in the mode of what Frantz Fanon defined as the always sociogenic and never purely ontogenic subject.¹⁵ And, because the mode of sociogeny (of the subject) then pre-determines the mode of the ASKR and semantic closure principle aggregative of each human order, the sociogenic principle instituting of such mode of being can therefore be seen to function at the level of human "forms of life," as the analogue of the genomic principle which governs the species-specific behaviors of all organic forms of life.

In the same way as each such genomic principle specifies and governs the way in which each member of a species *can* and *do know* their world with reference to the securing of the

well-being and stable replication of its genome, so also, the sociogenic principle instituting of each order's mode of the subject, of being, presets the rules by means of which each such culture-specific mode of the subject *must* know (the episteme) and feel about (the psycho-aesthetics) its Self, Other, and social world.

Pocock's seminal differentiation between the "separate language" of the natural sciences and the "public language" of our societal knowledge, therefore, indicates that the disciplinary discourses of the latter are transformatively generated from the specific "paradigms of value and authority" which encode the sociogenic principle instituting of each mode of the subject. In effect, therefore, "Paradigms," in the sense used by the "public languages" of our disciplinary discourses (whose object of knowledge is their societal reality), are generated from the code of "culture" to "nature" or sociogenic principle which performatively enacts the "comprehension of being" of our present "form of life."¹⁶ And, given that each such "form of life" is instituted, as such, by both the imaginative and the disciplinary discourses generated from the "tropic matrix"¹⁷ of a specific governing code of symbolic "life" and "death" and its related criterion of "good" (life) and of "evil" (death), our present disciplinary practice of literary and film criticism is itself necessarily engaged in generating the "unitary system of meanings" or semantic closure principle (SPC) by means of which the psycho-affective field instituting of our present aesthetics (Aesthetic 2) is dynamically brought into being and stably replicated.

The systems of signification of literary and cinematic criticism must therefore necessarily function as a central part of what the biologist James F. Danielli calls, after Marx, the "opium of the people" order of discourse. Since it is on their basis alone, he further proposes, that the social cohesion of human orders can be secured. Writing in 1980, Danielli noted the importance of recent discoveries as regards the endogenous opiate receptors (endorphins) in the brain which, as

another researcher, Candace Pert, later suggested, function to regulate the behaviors of organic species by triggering opiate-rewards whenever a member of the species displays the behaviors designed to ensure its own well-being as well as the stable perpetuation of its genome.¹⁸ Using insights from these discoveries, Danielli put forward a central hypothesis with respect to all human "orders of discourse," including those of our present "public language" modes of knowledge.

The hypothesis is that the function of all orders of discourse is to recode the IRS or behavior-regulating internal reward system of the brain, that they do this by "conditioning" each culture-specific internal reward system in symbolically coded terms that can dynamically induce the mode of psycho-affective feelings by which the social cohesion of each order is then ensured. Each order of discourse must, therefore, function, in a literal sense, as the Marxian "opium of the people," whose "truth" is to be defined by the exactitude with which the value-notations that their signifying practices place on the representation of symbolic "life" (which then serves as the icon of Sameness or of fake kin-relatedness) are positively marked ones that are then able to activate the internal reward system (IRS), thereby triggering its opiate-induced euphoria coefficient.

It is the correlation of each order of discourse (the semantic level) with the IRS (i.e., the biochemical reward and punishment level) which constitutes what Danielli defines as the "social program," by means of which the genetically programmed imperative of "group selfishness" (which is experienced at the purely organic level of life in terms of the degrees of genetic kin-relatedness) is, in the case of the human, overridden and recoded in the new terms of a symbolically defined mode of "artificial" kin-relatedness and of "group selfishness."¹⁹ I shall propose here that the "social program" of each human "form of life" is clearly the same phenomenon as that of Aesthetic 1. "Social program" here designates the central mechanism by means of which each culture-specific ensemble of collective cohering behaviors are "conditioned" and induced,

each order thereby integrated and stably replicated as a living system. However, because the "unitary system of meaning" or "semantic game" which conditions the psycho-affective fields of each mode of aesthetics must provide "truths," which, whilst "true" for those who are subjects of the culture-specific "form of life," are non-true for those who are not, I have adapted the term "Cultural Imaginary" in place of Danielli's "social program" to define the systemic dynamics of the phenomenon of Aesthetic 1.

I have taken the term from Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of the *Imaginary*. Castoriadis uses the term to refer to collective values that provide for unitary meaning and that are, however, logically unprovable.²⁰ Because each Imaginary is necessarily culture-specific, with its "regime of truth" definable by the efficacy with which the signifying practices of its order of discourse serve to generate the positively/negatively marked "life"/"death" meanings, (Seboek's "semiotic strings") by means of which the IRS of each order is "conditioned" and recoded, the term, *Cultural Imaginary*, enables the phenomenon of aesthetics to be grasped in both its transcultural form, Aesthetic I, and in the form specific to our present order, Aesthetics 2.

Universalizing the Particular of Aesthetic 2, Recoding the IRS in Terms of "Taste": "Locking" in the "Captive Population"

In his seminal book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*,²¹ Pierre Bourdieu identifies the binary opposition ("taste of reflection"/"taste of sense") specific to our present aesthetics as one whose terms are also correlated, in its value-hierarchy, with the dominance of the middle class over the lower class at the level of the socio-political structure of our present order. Bourdieu's correlation of the discourse of the aesthetic with the social relation of dominance and subordination at the socio-political level of *class* is also replicated at the global socio-cultural level of *race*. At that level, the "taste of reflection" ("pure taste")/"taste of sense" ("impure taste")

opposition and its socio-economic hierarchy, based on class difference, is correlated with the socio-economic value hierarchy between the western and non-western peoples and, since the rise of Japan after the Second World War, in the context of a consumer-driven economy, between, more generally, the peoples of the "developed" and those of the "underdeveloped" worlds.

If, as Bourdieu notes, the discourses of philosophical aesthetics take as their "sole datum" the lived experience of a *homo aestheticus* who is none other than the middle-class mode of the subject represented as "the universal subject of aesthetic experience," they also represent the lived experience of the western European and now, more generally, the "developed" world's middle classes, as the experience of the generic human subject of aesthetic experience. For, by its enabling of the socio-cultural categories of both *class* and *race* to be comprehended, as Bourdieu points out, in the case of class, "in the form of highly sublimated categories, such as the oppositions between beauty and charm, pleasure and enjoyment of culture and civilization," the discourse of Aesthetic 2 is then able to project *the taste* of the middle classes of the "developed" worlds—and therefore its culture-specific mode of aesthetic gratification and "preference" and, by extrapolation, its existential experiencing of our present socio-global universe—as the general equivalent of human "taste" and, therefore, its world and class-specific existential experience as the general equivalent of *all* human existence.

As Bourdieu points out, the "ideological mechanism" used by Kant in his philosophical aesthetics serves to represent the "taste" of the middle classes as a "taste" whose highly evolved nature had been "selected" by the evolutionary processes of natural selection. As such, it is further representable as the hierarchically higher "taste" of those humans who are sufficiently genetically evolved so as to be "occupied with thoughts as well as with their senses" and who are, therefore, able to give expression to the "taste of reflection." This is to be con-

trasted to the taste of the non-middle classes as the expression of the evolutionarily "backward" taste of "men wholly absorbed by their senses." Once in place, the "semantics of many steps"²² generated from this binary opposition and its tropic matrix then enables the bearers of this "evolved" taste to be represented as the ostensibly a-culturally determined criterion of human "life value," whose behavioral model and existential experience, also evolutionarily selected, should be optimally imitated. Consequently, the way in which, for example, Hilton, the music industry entrepreneur in *The Harder They Come*, and Sal, the pizzeria owner, as well as the Korean produce retailer in *Do The Right Thing* experience the world existentially and psycho-affectively, in their roles as the embodiment of the Ideal mode of the middle-class subject whose behaviors are optimal because regulated by the prescriptive Free Trade telos of "bettering their condition,"²³ is therefore both normalized and universalized by means of the "ideological mechanism" of our present discourse of aesthetics. It is by means of these processes of normalization and universalization that the Hilton/Sal/Korean group is enabled to embody the optimal behavioral model in relation to whose specific criterion the ensemble of global collective behaviors, which bring our present global order into being, are dynamically induced and regulated. From the perspective of the Black and jobless Ivans and Raheems, the narrational procedures and signifying practices of *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing* forcefully call into question the "life-activity" and behavioral model embodied in the Hilton/Sal/Korean group of characters.

In a recent book, Lawrence Levine traces the first phase of the institution of this ideological mechanism at the level of "race," and the processes by which the terms *highbrow* and *lowbrow* were put forward as terms which marked the distinction between *evolved, cultivated, and pure taste*, on the one hand, and *backward impure taste*, on the other. Totemized in the opposition between Indo-European peoples and non-European "natives," these terms, derived from the pseudo-science of

phrenology, were now used to separate the aesthetically *crude* (lowbrow) from the aesthetically *refined* (highbrow) and, therefore, to represent the "taste" of the middle class mode of the subject as being as genetically determined as was the brow of the "highbrow."²⁴ The pseudo-science of phrenology had itself been founded on the belief that differential degrees of intelligence—with the culture specific intelligence of the middle-class mode of the subject being represented as generic human intelligence²⁵—had been allotted in varying degrees to each "ethnic" and "racial" population group, and that, therefore, these differential degrees could be assessed by measuring the typical cranial shapes and sizes of such groups.

I want to propose here that what is being represented and absolutized by *means* of the *highbrow/lowbrow* totemic figures is the idea or "speculative thought"²⁶ that the status hierarchies both of the global order and of its national units are as genetically ordered and predetermined as had, ostensibly, been also the hierarchy between the "*taste of reflection*" of the middle class and the "*taste of the sense*" of the lower classes. In effect, these illustrated representations are part of what Levi-Strauss defines as a totemic system, or system of symbolic representations, on whose basis the "speculative thought" of our present global order is as instituted as was that of the traditional orders analyzed (or rather deciphered) by Lévi-Strauss.²⁷

From the Genesis Narrative of Origin to That of Evolution, From the Leper to the "Captive Population" of the Jobless: On the Paradox of "Criticism"

The proposal here is that these processes of positive/negative marking which enact/inscribe the code of "life" and "death" are always initiated by the *narratives of origin* from which all such codes and, therefore, their "paradigms of value and authority" are brought to "birth." French anthropologist Lucien Scubla's analysis of a traditional myth of origin, as an example of this narratively instituted process, supports this hypothesis.²⁸ For

in this myth, after a woman has committed a crime, is punished, and dies, her husband then picks the leaves of a tobacco plant which grows on the spot where she has died and her blood was shed.²⁹ The husband then cures the leaves of the plant. By smoking it with his fellow male peers, he becomes, with them, the collective procreator of a new symbolic "birth" whose totem or hyper-sign is the *positively marked* tobacco smoke that rises upwards (i.e., *culture*). The *menstrual blood* of the woman, on the other hand, is negatively marked as the sign of "raw nature" spilling downwards to the earth, the marker of symbolic "death." Here, the myth functions as an order-instituting "narrative of origin" which enacts the "code of life" (*tobacco smoke*) and "death" (*menstrual blood*) on whose basis the mode of the traditional "lineage" subject was "written."

Because this "writing" is only effected by the founding myth's systemic attaching of positively marked opiate-triggering meanings to the iconic emblems of "life," and of negatively marked ones to that of "death," the mythic system of representations is clearly a function of the recoding of Danielli's IRS, since it is by means of this discursive recoding that the individual subject's libidinal desire to realize "being" is "soldered" to the order's culture-specific criterion of being. At the same time, this criterion bonds the subject to his or her symbolically defined "kin" by serving to induce the specific mode of altruism integrative of the order and, therefore, of its mode of cooperative social cohesion.

Anthony T. de Nicholas points out that humans have never been any one thing or the other since we have no "particular nature" to tie us down "metaphysically." Rather, he insists, we *can* become *human only* because of our ability to turn "theory into flesh" and to regulate ourselves by discourses "whose codings in our 'nervous system' regulate our responses and 'sentiments.'"³⁰ However, we can become and remain as specific modes of the *human* only to the extent that these *codings* continue to "tie" us down, metaphysically, to a *specific* criterion of being and representation of the human, to Grassi/Winch's

governing code of symbolic "life" and "death."

The further hypothesis here, therefore, is that, for the tying down or "soldering" conditioning process to be stably effected, the "life/death" terms of the "codings" *must be* replicated at *all* levels of the social texts of the order, if the *coherence* of the conditioning processes of positive (opiate-triggering) and negative meanings are to be maintained. As a result, wherever the subordinated status of a group category (such as the extreme case of Baldwin's "captive population" in their "high-risk area" from whose rank both films' Underclass protagonists will come) is stably replicated at the level of the socio-economic text, this subordination and the social effectivities that go with it are an imperative function of the enacting of the sociogenic principle of code of "life" and "death" of the specific order, and, therefore, a function of the "cultural Imaginary" by means of which the socially cohering behaviors of the order's subjects are induced and motivated, a function, therefore, of the process of "symbolic birth" by means of which both the mode of the subject and its related mode of ASKR are dynamically brought into being.

We can therefore make the following hypotheses with respect to the question, *what does Aesthetics do?* Firstly, each mode of the aesthetic is isomorphic with a specific mode of human being or "form of life." Secondly, both the distributional ratios and the "socio-political" role allocations of each order, while functioning, in the terms of our present order, at proximate levels as the "economic" and the "socio-political," are *ultimately* a rule-governed function of the phenomenon of the Aesthetic 1. Thirdly, they are functions of the narratively instituted cultural Imaginary (Danielli's "social" program) by means of which each order's altruism-inducing and aggregative "unitary system" of positively (opiate-triggering) and negatively (opiate-blocking) marked meanings are as coherently replicated at the level of empirical social reality, as they are at the levels of (a) the founding narrative of origin, (b) the social text, (c) the disciplinary discourses of Pocock's "public language"

systems of knowledge, including that of criticism, and (d) the level of the imaginative discourses and mode of artistic production. Fourthly, each of these levels must function correlatedly with the others, if the order's specific code of "life" and "death" or sociogenic principle is to be regularly brought into being.

Finally, it is only by means of these rule-governed positive/negative correlations at all of these levels that the "conditioning" processes, by which humans are "socialized" as specific modes of the subject and, therefore, as always already altruistically aggregated and symbolically kin-related individuals, can be effected. Processes that are, therefore, those of symbolic speciation or of intra-group bonding which function at the level of human forms of life in a manner that is as discursively rule-governed as are the genetically programmed modes of speciation or of inter-altruistic "kin relatedness" specific to the level of purely organic life.

[In this section of her essay, Sylvia Wynter summarizes the ways in which the correlations between the four levels *a*, *b*, *c*, *d* are effected.—Ed.]

In her book, *Power of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection*,³¹ Julia Kristeva makes a seminal point with respect to the functioning of the psycho-affective phenomenon of abjection (or of Lacanian Lack-of-being), in all human societies. This state, which is one of anxiety and is literally experienced as *nausea*, the desire to retch, to expel oneself, is induced by the inscription of a prohibited sign-complex, i.e., the abject. Although common to all orders, all the earlier forms of the abject would come to be subsumed, by the world religion of Judeo-Christianity, under the topos of mankind's enslavement to original sin within the logic of the Christian variant of the Biblical Genesis or narrative of origin. Like all the earlier forms of the abject, however, I then argue, the new topos served the central systemic function of impelling the individual subject of feudal Christian Europe to attach its genetic instinctual desire to realize being to the *specific* criteria defining of the ideal self of the feudal Christian

mode of the subject, and, therefore, of a subject who is always already socialized to be conspecific, at the psycho-affective level, with its fellow feudal Christian subjects. I further generalize another seminal point made by Kristeva in order to put forward the major formulation of this section of the essay. Kristeva had pointed out that the scholastic order of knowledge (as the "public language mode of knowledge" of feudal Christian Europe, to use Pocock's terminology) had been elaborated on the pre-analytic premise of the topos of mankind's enslavement to original sin as the now universalized sign-complex of the abject (or Lack-of-being). On the basis of this, I propose that *all* culture-specific modes of "public language" knowledge, including our present one, are necessarily based on the pre-analytic premise of the inscription of the abject and its sign-complex, whether that of Scubla's negatively marked "menstrual blood" or that of original sin. Consequently, in every human order, each such sign-complex of the abject is everywhere empirically embodied in an interned and excluded group category whose role as the pariah figure(s) of the order is indispensable to the verifying of the "regime of truth" orienting of the shared perceptions, and, therefore, of the collective behaviors by means of which each order is brought into being and stably replicated *as such an order*.

I base this generalization on two interrelated points, one made by Jacques Le Goff in his book, *The Medieval Imagination*³², the other by the ethnologist, Marcel Griaule. In the medieval order, as Le Goff demonstrates, the exclusion and ostracism of the pariah figure of the leper, and of its interned and "captive population" (as, in effect, the embodiment of Kristeva's *abject*) had been legitimated by the "learned discourse" of the scholastic order of knowledge. This discourse had represented leprosy as proof that the leper's parents had breached, with their sexual incontinence and "wicked and lustful desires," the rules of the Church with respect to licit sexual intercourse. Their progeny's leprosy was, therefore, the direct effect of divine or supernatural punishment for the

parents' incontinence, as was the leper's prohibited exclusion and ostracized status outside civil society.

As the empirical embodiment of the sign-complex of the abject, the "captive population" of the excluded lepers not only serve to induce and trigger in the individual subject the desire to behave in ways appropriate to a "redeemed-from-original-sin" feudal Christian subject, but also to induce all social categories of the feudal order, including that of the super-exploited peasantry, to accept the roles assigned to them in the social hierarchy. That is, as roles that were as ostensibly supernaturally pre-ordained as was that of the excluded figure of the leper itself within the logic of the "learned discourse" of the order's "public language" mode of knowledge. The existence of that "captive population" and of its pariah figure, the leper, was therefore the empirical verification of the pre-analytic premise on whose basis the scholarly discourse of the feudal episteme was rigorously elaborated and made to count as true.

In order to put forward the following historical progression, I then make use of Marcel Griaule's insight that all forms of western societies (up to and including our present globally hegemonic one) are still regulated, despite changes in their differing modes of production, by the "ultimate reference point" of the Judeo-Christian symbolic system.³³

Firstly, that with the cultural and intellectual revolution of civic humanism and the "general upheaval of the Renaissance" the pre-analytic topos of mankind's enslavement to original sin was transmuted into that of its represented enslavement to sensory, irrational nature within the logic of the new monarchical political regime and its later variant, the landed gentry. The figure of the leper was, therefore, replaced by the interned and excluded figure of the *mad*, while the place of the "learned discourse" on leprosy was taken by that of the discourse on insanity. At the same time, the "internment" of the indigenous peoples of the New World in a semi-serf relation and of peoples of African descent as slaves on the New World plantation system was also legitimated by the discourse on their Caliban-

type irrationality, a discourse which, because it was generated also from the "ground" of the post-feudal "public language" order of knowledge and its classical episteme, elaborated itself within the same terms as the discourse on insanity on whose basis the *mad* had also been interned. Taken together, therefore, all these three "captive populations" were now the empirical embodiment of the pre-analytic premise on whose basis the disciplinary discourses of the classical episteme of the pre-industrial order were elaborated, the condition of its "truth."

Secondly, that with the shift to the industrial order, the intellectual revolution of liberal humanism, together with the rise to hegemony of the new bourgeois mode of the subject and its correlated nation-state mode of symbolic kin-relatedness, the Judeo-Christian topos of enslavement was again reinscribed and transumed. In this shift, the new figure of the *poor and jobless* now displaced the earlier pariah figures. Baldwin's "captive population" of the inner city ghettos (the world of *Do the Right Thing*) and of the Third World's slums and shantytowns (the world of *The Harder They Come*) now served as the embodiment of liberal humanism's inscription of the abject in new and purely secular terms. These terms were dual. On the one hand, the abject was now inscribed as that of mankind's enslavement to a possibly *evolutionary* regressive and genetically dys-selected mode of human nature (as empirically expressed in peoples of Black African descent and, to a lesser extent, in *all* non-white peoples) and, on the other hand, as that of its potential enslavement to the "natural scarcity" of external nature, and, therefore, to the threat of the insufficiency of the earth's resources, as verified by the empirical condition of the new pariah figures of the *poor and jobless*. Consequently, in the place of the "learned discourse" on leprosy and insanity of the earlier two orders, the "learned discourse" of our present order rule-governedly functions to represent *poverty* and *joblessness* as having been caused, *not*, as they are, by the institutional mechanisms of the order, including the behavior-orienting "discourses" of its episteme, but by the *evolutionarily* dys-

selected genetic incapacity of their bearers, that is, of the "captive population" of the *poor* and *jobless*. Reciprocally, this "learned discourse," like the overall range of the disciplinary discourses of the episteme from which it is generated, also depends on the stable reproduction, in empirical reality, of Baldwin's "captive population" for the "verification" of its "truth," and, therefore, of the "truth" of the overall cultural Imaginary in whose logic it functions, just as that of the scholastic disciplinary discourses had depended for their "truth" on the stable reproduction of the excluded and ostracized "captive population" of the lepers.

In the context of the above, the contradictory paradox in which our present disciplinary practice of film criticism necessarily finds itself when approaching films like *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing*, whose protagonists are now the systemic pariah figures of the Ivans and the Raheems and their respective "captive populations," is clear. As professional academicians and, therefore, as the "normal critics" or observer-knower-subjects of our order who are, like those of the feudal order, accomplices in an "epistemic contract"³⁴ whose function is to provide the "unitary system of meaning" on whose basis the order is aggregated (with the "captive population" in each case marking a frontier of the inside/outside of the aggregated order), we find ourselves with the imperative of "breaking" this contract when confronted with narrative structures (like those found in *The Harder They Come* and *Do the Right Thing*) whose performative acts of counter-meaning, encoded both in their signifying practices as well as in their Black popular musical forms, can be properly evaluated *only* in the context of the challenge that they make to the cultural Imaginary instituting of our present order.

We can now answer the question "what does aesthetics do?" by defining its phenomenon, as instituted by each cultural Imaginary, as the imperative enactment of each governing code of subject/object, of symbolic "life" and "death," and, therefore, of the non-genetic and symbolic modes of psycho-affective

altruism aggregating of all human orders up to and including that of our own present nation-state. Consequently, because it is clearly the very condition of existence of all human "forms of life," and of the role-allocating and "cohering principles" aggregative of their modes of conspecific ultra-sociality, the category of the aesthetic is the determinant—in place of the "human nature" of liberal humanism, of the "mode of production" of Marxism, and of the patriarchy of feminism—of the ensemble of collective behaviors by means of which each human order effects its autopoeisis as a living, self-organizing (i.e. cybernetic) system.

However, if this is what aesthetics does, then the paradox of all "criticism" is sited here. For given that, as Bourdieu reveals, the *taste* of reflection is systemically conditioned, as *such a taste*, by the discourse of aesthetics itself and, even more directly, by the "ethico-aesthetic" practices³⁵ of literary and film criticism themselves, correlated with those of all our disciplinary discourses, then these practices are necessarily a central function of the conditioning of the psycho-affective field of normative sentiments by which we are collectively *induced* to behave in specific *ways* able to bring our present global order and its role allocated hierarchies into being—including that of the "ostracized" and interned high-risk area of the global jobless and lumpen archipelagoes, and their locked in and "captive populations" as the now primary embodied bearers of the antonymic sign-complex of the abject.

Because the plot line of both films is based on the attempt of the two pariah-turned-hero protagonists to break out of the "captive" role imposed upon them (in a now consumer-driven economy, in which the *taste of reflection/taste of sense* opposition is increasingly recoded as that of *brand name* elite consumer taste versus mass taste), and, therefore, to, in the words of Ivan, "get my share/what's mine," whether through the legitimate route of the music industry or through the savage and contraband route of the gunman-cum-drug dealer to which Ivan inevitably turns,³⁶ it is precisely the normative sentiments of

our present mode of the cultural Imaginary *against which* their signifying practices are aggressively directed.

As the applied practice of our present mode of the aesthetic, the disciplinary model of film criticism, must, like literary criticism, and in spite of its genial breakthroughs, such as the concept of spectatorship, nevertheless, serve to ensure the stable functioning of the conditioning processes by which the IRS (Internal Reward System) is recorded in the terms of our present code of "life" and "death." So that in spite of its most radical approaches, its disciplinary paradigm *must* necessarily, in the last instance, function to contain, defuse, and neutralize the counter-signifying practice of *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing*, within the dynamics of an ongoing "battle of taste" between our present hegemonic cultural Imaginary and that of a still emergent global popular Imaginary whose most insistent challenge is carried by the new video-like Black popular musical forms³⁷ and their counter-poetics of rhythm.

Against our present practice of criticism even in its most deconstructive and "rhetorically" demystifying forms, this paper, therefore, proposes a turn towards a deciphering practice based on a new postulate of causality in place of the "human nature" causality postulate of our present cultural Imaginary, in place, also, of its counter-versions,³⁸ i.e., the "mode of production" causality of Marxism, and the "patriarchy" postulate of causality of feminism. This new postulate is that of the correlated discursive-cum-biochemical causality of our narratively instituted "cultural Imaginaries", their modes of the subject, and "forms" or "ways" of life. It is these "Imaginaries," and the modes of altruistic symbolic kin-relatedness (ASKR) they induce, that necessarily set the parameters of possibilities both for the stable replication of the pre-assigned "places" of the group-categories of our order (while allowing the odd individual subject who breaks out of its place to attain to middle-class status and to the maximum of freedom) and for the fictional projection of these group-categories and their role-allocated places at the level of representation,³⁹

in terms which normatively legitimate the process of re-allocating hierarchies.

A deciphering practice, therefore, sets out to take the image/sound signifying practices of film (and television) as the objects of a new mode of inquiry, one that will and can, in the words of Heinz Pagels, erase the "traditional barriers between the natural sciences and the humanities" in order to make our "narratively constructed worlds" and their behavior-regulating "orders of feeling and beliefs," in other words, our cultural Imaginaries, "subject to scientific description in a new way."⁴⁰ Such a practice will reveal their rules of functioning rather than merely replicate and perpetuate these rules.

"We will not be," sang Bob Marley from the "captive" high risk area of the Kingston shantytown that is the setting of *The Harder They Come*, "what they want us to be."

We've been treading
On the winepress
Much too long
Rebel, rebel . . .⁴¹

PART II — After Criticism, Beyond the Winepress: Towards a Deciphering Turn

Because of the central role they play in our purely secularly instituted systems, the interpretative strategies of all literary critical practice, including the most radical, must necessarily be governed by the "rules of the game", i.e., by the sociogenic principle of "code" that is determining of our present mode of being and "form of life." In this context, the powerful challenge of the Black Aesthetic movement of the 1960s to the normative practice of literary criticism's applied aesthetics, even if aborted,⁴² would trigger, within the mainstream itself, new questions which erupted from a growing awareness of this realm of "unfreedom" that haunted critical practice, even if this awareness was translated into terms which enabled it to be "domesticated" in order to "save" the discipline.

In his 1980 study, *Criticism in the Wilderness: A Study of Literature Today*,⁴³ Geoffrey Hartmann discusses the crucial question raised by philosophical criticism with respect to the rules which must govern discourse if it is to be intelligible to its readers and hearers. Hartmann points out that the real issue is "not whether we are for, or against the rules" which define the "bounds of intelligibility," given that "we all must live by some rules," but rather the question as to how we are to understand the "rules of language" as the rules of a game "that is partially unknown and that seems to allow the most unusual moves without jeopardizing its formal or intelligible status." He defends the "separate status of literary criticism" as a "garden in the wilderness," able to both accept and deal with the partial unknowability of the rules of the game during the act of interpretation.⁴⁴ For Derrida, more radically, on the other hand, there are no preset rules of the game. Rather, both the textual objects and their interpretations are components of *écriture* or *writing* which function to "set off in the reader an unconstrained or 'creative' play of unlimited significations." Because of their shared assumptions, since both the interpreter of Hartmann and the reader of Derrida are free to autonomously give themselves over to modes of interpretation or to the free play of unlimited significations, both critic-theorists fail to see that, whether as reader or as interpreter, the subject is always already instituted as a specific mode of the always sociogenic subject for whom the rules of the game, whether those determining of all possible interpretations or of the unlimited play of significations that can be set off, are necessarily always already preset and made rigorously *decidable* by the governing sociogenic principle which institutes the reader/interpreter as such a reading/interpreting mode of the subject.

Consequently, the radical approaches of Hartmann and Derrida continue to provide the allegorical exegesis which "saves" the governing "culture to nature" code instituting both of the middle-class mode of the subject, as well as of the post-religious variant of the Judaeo-Christian "cultural Imaginary"

that is integrative of our present global order and its hierarchies. As a result, if, as Hartmann points out, "literature is to the modern mind as the Bible was to medieval thought," literary criticism must also necessarily function as a kind of "allegorical exegesis" which, like that which Arnold deconstructed, must function to "save" its premise of the genetic pre-giveness of "man", together with its governing code of "life" to "death," "culture to nature," Greek to Bantu, highbrow to lowbrow, the pure taste of reflection to the impure taste of the sense. Literary criticism must do this despite the "disabling impact of the experience of concrete reality"⁴⁵ such as the price paid for the replication of our present form of life and of its processes of symbolic birth by the "throwaway lives" of the Ivans in the "high-risk" ghetto and shantytown archipelagoes of the global system and now, increasingly, by the rapidly deteriorating planetary environment.

What is true of the deconstructionists is no less true of the post-1960s attempts of Marxist and feminist criticism to counter traditional liberal literary criticism with their respective "ideologies of Otherness." If these have only succeeded in adding the variant figures of proletarian "man" and of "woman" to that of liberalism's "figure of man," the recent attempt by Henry Louis Gates to counter traditional literary theory and its canon by the instituting of the figure of an African American man complete with its own indigenous literary theory and canon⁴⁶ has lead instead, as Taylor warned in the parallel case of the Black Aesthetic movement (whose original dazzling eruption was aborted by its being stalled in an ethno-aesthetics), to an ethno-literary criticism and to the reinforcing, therefore, of our present cultural Imaginary, together with its still pervasive realm of unfreedom.

Because they are generated from the matrix form of literary criticism, all variants of film criticism function also according to the same "rules of the game" and their heteronomously determined end, i.e., the dynamic bringing into being and stable replication of our present "form of life" and its discursive

formation. So that, if Yearwood's observation about the consistent regularity of the hierarchy between white (men and women) and Black (men and women) reveal these practices as belonging to the same archives of communicative acts at the level of lowbrow culture, as the constancy and regularity between the "taste of reflection" and the "taste of the sense" that is brought into play by the very discriminating practice of literary and, by extension, film criticism, at the level of highbrow culture, then both systems of signifying practices can be recognized as being governed by the pre-analytic code of "culture to nature" instituting of our present comprehension of being and its mode of ultra-sociality. Consequently, even where the founding opposition between the *taste of reflection* and the *taste of the sense* is translated by Marxist/feminist deconstructionist and "African American critics"⁴⁷ into the correlated oppositions of *critical theory and scientific truth* versus *false consciousness*, or *gender-conscious* versus *phallogcentrically non-conscious*, or *rhetorically aware deconstructionist practices* versus *rhetorically unaware practices*, or *close reading practices aware of the Black "tradition"* versus *sociological approaches to Black literature or cinema*,⁴⁸ together with the cluster of binary oppositions arising from the variants of Bordwell's SLAB theory, the same "rules of the game" are kept in play. This reveals that *it is the disciplinary practice of criticism itself*, not *what* is said or the approach taken, that functions to "save" the premise of our present cultural Imaginary, the premise of its "genetic system of justice" in whose context the bid for self-affirmation on the part of Ivan, as of Raheem, must necessarily fail or turn to "contraband and savage ways."

As the literary critic Frank Kermode recently pointed out, film has come to be accommodated in the interpretative system of literary criticism only under the category of "a certain literature" that "the Germans call *Kleinletrateur* or trivial literature."⁴⁹ It has therefore been so accommodated only in a sort of "deutero-canonical" sense. Therefore, film criticism has, in general, been necessarily marginalized within the logic of

literary criticism proper, even if the occasional "classic" film is allowed to be sacralized as "high art."

Because the praxis of criticism (in its later liberal-humanist form), as part of the book-print culture, is so central to the instituting of the "figure of man" and its related middle class mode of the subject (and to the latter's self-representation as a genetically determined rather than discursively instituted mode of being), the mere "deutero-canonical role" accorded to film as a technology whose medium can potentially break down the barrier between the *highbrow/lowbrow*, *pure taste/impure taste* hierarchies instituting of our present "set of perceptual orientations," has been part of a strategy of containment designed to neutralize the challenge of the new technology's non-middle class inclusiveness.

The deutero-canonicity accorded to the genre, therefore, functions, on the one hand, to contain any theoretical approach to film within the terms of the book/print paradigm of literary criticism and the archive of communicative acts to which it belongs and to resolve, on the other hand, a central contradiction between the intended class-exclusive and academic reader of film criticism and the intended popular audience normally imposed on the genre of film, both by its inclusive audiovisual medium and by the "democratic universalism" of its consumer market logic which calls for the greatest possible number of ticket purchases.⁵⁰

The specific danger here, for the "Third World" intelligentsia, is that of falling into a trap parallel to the ethno-aesthetic trap of the Black Aesthetic theorists, as well as the ethno-literary trap into which Gates and his school have fallen. This trap lies in the temptation which confronts the Third World theorist when, in order to attempt to bridge the gap between the class and culture-inclusiveness of academic film criticism and the intended popular audience of Third World filmmakers, she or he should attempt to claim and identify an "ethnic" and cultural-indigenous tradition inherent to these film texts and to repress, thereby, all awareness of the dialectical nature and

socio-culturally "countering" aspects of the signifying practices of the films themselves.⁵¹

Against our present mainstream practices of literary and film criticism, therefore, the turn towards a deciphering practice is posited in a dialectical relation both to these practices and to ethnocriticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the "deconstructive turn" in criticism, as itself the summation of Bordwell's SLAB theories of radical criticism.

In his analysis of literary criticism's turn to deconstruction, Christopher Norris argues that "deconstruction bids fair to overthrow the age old prejudice which elevates philosophical truth and reason at the expense of literary feigning."⁵² Because, however, a deciphering turn bases itself on the premise that human modes of being are institutable only by means of systems-of-representations and, therefore, of "feigning," it sees the "age old prejudice" as itself a part of the "feigning" specific to the cultural field of western Europe. It therefore defines the binary opposition, *philosophy/truth reason versus fiction/literary feigning*, as a meta-truth or governing code from whose pre-analytic matrix, as a founding "paradigm of value and authority," the discourses of "philosophic truth and reason" are *then* rule-governedly and transformatively generated. So that while for a deciphering turn the issue becomes one of revealing the rules of functioning of this process of transformative generation, for the deconstructionists the issue remains tied to a still culture-bound and moralistic imperative—that of using the techniques of rhetorical demystification developed by literary "critics" to reveal the "makedness" or "writing" of "philosophic truth and reason."

Rather than seeking to "rhetorically demystify" (How could one stop at philosophy without also "rhetorically demystifying" the practice of *literary criticism* and its process of rhetorical automystification also?), a deciphering turn seeks to decipher *what* the process of rhetorical mystification *does*. It seeks to identify not what texts and their signifying practices can be interpreted to *mean* but what they can be deciphered to *do*,

and it also seeks to evaluate the "illocutionary force" and procedures with which they do what they do.

Unlike a critical practice which must seek for the "meanings" of the text in the text alone (as if one should seek for "meaning" of DNA in the DNA code, rather than in the *effects* of its instructions), a deciphering practice will seek to function correlatedly at four levels. The first level investigates the "signifying practices" of the text itself. The second level investigates the specific social environment or cultural dimension specific to the film text as a performative complex of meanings or "symbol-matter information system"⁵³ which is structured by the terms of the behavior-regulating code that brings it into being as such an environment/dimension. The third level brings the results of the first two levels together in order to correlate those constancies and regularities which replicate each other at the level of the film text, as well as that of the socio-environmental effectivities of its social text, for example, the constancy and regularity of the signifying practices noted by Yearwood at the level of the Hollywood text and the parallel regularity and constancy, noted by researchers in multiple fields, of the differential ratio-proportionality of the distribution of the order's "goods" and "bads," as between the white and Black population groups, as between middle class and non-middle class, working class and jobless, male and female, developed and "underdeveloped" worlds, at both the national and the global levels of the order.

At this third level then, all correlations between the dominant/subordinate, positively/negatively marked roles with respect to the signifying practices of representation and those with respect to the social text's empirically verified distributional ratios of power, wealth, privilege, and social strata, in effect of the "goods" and "bads" of the order, will provide the data from which to deduce *what* the signifying practices, at the level of representation and their performative acts of meaning, are *intended to do*—that is, *what* collective behaviors they are intended to induce and how precisely their practices of signifi-

cation are enabled to function as, in Rorty's terms, "our present metaphysico-epistemological ways of firming up our habits."⁵⁴

The fourth level is the level on which the proposal of such a practice altogether turns. Such a practice is intended to provide a "separate language" able to deal with how, as humans, we can know the social reality of which we are both agents and always already socio-culturally constituted subjects. This level will, therefore, call for our collaboration—as decipherers of our discursively instituted systems of meaning, or as rhetoricians in the wider sense used by Paolo Valesio⁵⁵—with neuroscientists, on the basis of Danielli's proposed correlated functioning of the orders of discourse of human orders and their rule-governed "production of meaning" with the functioning of the behavior-regulating opiate reward and punishment system of the brain. At this level, the hypothesis, to be tested here, is that there is a rule-governed correlation of the orthodox signifying practices of any order with the status-ordering distributional processes of the "goods" and "bads," as well as of the role allocations of its status hierarchies. It is only by means of such a correlation that each order's "social production of meanings" can function to "condition," and, therefore, to "write" (in terms of the specific code of *symbolic life and death*) the *biochemical* "reward/punishment" (opiate) system by means of whose "instructions" our behaviors as *human*, rather than as purely "natural organisms," are "programmed," motivated, and oriented and by means of which we ourselves are "written" as specific modes of the human.

The further hypothesis here is that it is precisely against our present orthodox "writing" of the bio-chemical "reward/punishment" (opiate) system that the counter-signifying practices of *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing* and Black popular reggae and rap are directed; it should be testable and verifiable that these counter-signifying practices induce such a counter-writing and, therefore, such a counter-politics of "feeling" within the context of an emergent new "battle of tastes" between the western middle-class cultural Imaginary,

whose referent telos is that of the well-being of the middle-class *mode* of the subject, and that the still emergent (and still bitterly contested) global popular Imaginary whose referent telos is that of the well-being of the individual human subject and, therefore, of the species.

*We Will Not Be What They Want Us to Be: From the
Mathematizable to the Decipherable*

While referring back to formalism's general theory of aesthetics,⁵⁶ our proposed deciphering praxis will follow, in the wake of Clyde Taylor's move toward a meta-aesthetics, one able, in his words, to devise a Nietzschean type genealogy of aesthetics (i.e., of culture-specific psycho-affective sensibilities) on the model of a genealogy of morals. It further proposes that such a genealogy would necessarily take us into the parameters of a new science of human modes of being, their "narratively instituted worlds" (Pagels) and "opiate" orders of discourse (Danielli), able to put an end to the division between the paradigms of the "separate languages" of the natural sciences and those of the "public languages" of our present disciplinary discourses and their archive of communicative acts and unitary systems of meaning by which we have been hitherto instituted as heteronomously governed and, therefore, non-self knowing, subjects.

Here the new horizons opened by the film text's visual medium and its narrationally foregrounded signifying practices directly impact on the new question posed implicitly by Fanon as to how the human subject is itself instituted as specific modes of the sociogenic subject by the signifying practices of each culture's order of discourse. In this context, the question raised by David Bordwell as to how films in their "formal and stylistic operations" are able to "solicit story-constructing and story-comprehending activities from spectators" would now be approached in the wider context of our investigation into the dually discursive-cum-biochemical processes by means of

which each mode of the human self "writes" itself. So that Bordwell's projected goal-directed spectator could now be grasped as an always goal-directed spectator on the basis of his/her being a culture-specific mode of the subject. As such, as one who is always already equipped with a schemata for reception that is itself generated from the governing code of "life and death" ("culture to nature") from which the "assumptions" are to be made, the "expectations to be formulated," the "hypothesis to be perfected" are always normally pre-determined, unless and until, of course, that *schemata*, together with its governing code, is directly challenged and called in question by contestatory signifying practices as, for example, with Bahktin's⁵⁷ new cultural forms at the end of the European Middle Ages or those of *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing* at the moment, the ending of the global ours.

The autonomy of human knowledge of physical and organic reality and, therefore, the "separate language" of the natural sciences was won by western thinkers and scientists only on the condition of their continued heteronomy of cognition with respect to the processes by means of which we are instituted as specific modes of being (the subject) and of ultrasociality ("forms of life") or cultures.

This heteronomy was, and is, based on the belief system of ontocentrism—that is, that the human pre-exists the complex of signifying practices and discursive systems by means of which it is instituted as such a subject or mode of being; that, therefore, in effect, the laws which govern human behaviors are the *same* as, rather than *analogous* to, those which govern physical reality (the Cartesian "definitive morality") and organic reality, (the Darwinian "definitive morality").⁵⁸

A deciphering turn necessarily calls ontocentrism into question. Not only does it insist, as the founding premise of its own practice, that the human, because always discursively instituted, is an "outcast" of nature, for whom the laws which govern nature, because only analogous, cannot provide any mode of knowledge which prescribes an *ought* to human

behaviors, but it also proposes a new "ground" on whose basis the discursively instituted rules which govern human behaviours can be known. This "ground" also bases itself on a prohibition, one which is directly linked to the counter-signifying practices of *The Harder They Come*. For in the wake of Fanon and of Carter G. Woodson and from the new "lay" or neo-humanist perspective of Black Studies,⁵⁹ it proposes that the way we "normally" feel about Self, Other, and World should not be taken as any index of the "justness" or legitimacy of the ratios of distribution of power, privilege, and role allocation which lead to the social effectivities both of the throwaway lives of the high-risk areas and the over-consumption of the suburbs.

Rather, a deciphering practice takes the existing inequalities of our order, both as the expressive enactment of the governing code of life and *death* and as the *index* of the "rhetorical mystifications" that must be at work, in order to determine *how* the order should be normatively felt about and known, if the collective behaviors that bring the structuring processes of the order into being are to be dynamically induced and stably replicated.

A deciphering practice proposes, therefore, that the *ways* in which each culture-specific *normal* subject *knows* and *feels about* its social reality (such as the way the entrepreneur Hilton in *The Harder They Come* and Sal the pizzeria owner in *Do The Right Thing* feel about their realities) should in no instance be taken as any *index* of what the empirical reality of our social universe *is*. Rather these *normal* ways of knowing and feeling (together with the signifying practices which induce these "normal ways") should be taken as the index of *how* each such world *must* normally be known and felt about, as the indispensable condition of each such world being brought into existence by the collective behaviors which all such culture-specific normal ways of knowing and feeling about the world, including our own, rule-governedly orient and regulate.

Descartes' rejection of the premise that God had made the

physical universe both for the human's sake and with human concerns in mind enabled him not only to reduce the physical world to pure materiality, thereby making it mathematizable, *but also to propose* that such a reality could now be *alterable* and producible in accordance with human purposes, "to the extent that it proves to be inconsiderate for men."⁶⁰ Equally, a deciphering practice's rejection of the ontocentric definition of the human and, therefore, of the Cartesian and Darwinian premises of any purposes given to humans by *nature*, rather than by the discursive-cum-neurochemical signalling systems by which we are instituted as a meta-organic form of life, proposes that "human purposes," like the modes of the subject, of sociogeny, of which they are the correlate, are also to be seen as alterable, to the extent that they have proved to be inconsiderate, both for the human species as a whole (witness the ongoing deterioration of the set of conditions of the planetary environment by means of which the species is alone viable) and, most directly, for the concrete individual subject of the jobless archipelagoes, for the Ivans, for the Raheems, for all the Pariahs.

"We will not be what they want us to be"

The proposal here is that, if we provisionally reduce all our present public language "discourses," epistemic and imaginative, to their function as Danielli's "opium of the people" discourses instituting of our altruistic human orders and modes of being and reduce their variety of genres and types to their function as pure behavior regulating systems of meaning or extra-genetic signalling systems that are complementary to, and regulating of, the signalling systems and IRS of the brain, then we can take the empirical behaviors and social effectivities to which they lead (including their pre-programming of the defeat of Ivan's and Raheem's bid for self-assertion in the context of our present code of "life" and "death") as the data which makes them decipherable and, therefore, as the data which gives insight into the rules which govern the signifying practices by

which we are instituted as specific modes of the subject. These modes now, because humanly knowable, are potentially, consciously, and consensually, alterable.

"We've been treading on the winepress much too long . . ."

Notes

1. Clyde Taylor, "Black Cinema in a Post-Aesthetic Era," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, Jim Pines and Paul Willeman, ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 90.
2. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1985), 35-36. Baldwin's essay was written both as a report of the trial of Wayne Williams in the Atlanta child murders case and as a reflection on its implications.
3. See Frank Kermode, *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 181.
4. See Clyde Taylor, "We Don't Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics," in *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1988), 80-85, and "Black Cinema in the Post-Aesthetic Era," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, Jim Pines and Paul Willeman, ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 90-110.
5. See the article by Scott Heller, "Once Theoretical Scholarship on Film Is Broadened to Include History of Movie Industry Practices" in *Chronicle Of Higher Education*, 21 March 1990, A-6. Heller refers to Bordwell's attack in a new book, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), as "tweaking" the film studies establishment for "mixing and matching theories without precision" in its canonical approach. Bordwell periodically defines this approach as "SLAB theory" and derives it as an acronym which refers "to the last names of the writers slavishly invoked," the linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, the Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, and the semiotician, Roland Barthes.
6. For the concept of *speciation* at the levels of organic and of human "forms of life," see Ernst Mayr, *Evolution and the Diversity of Life: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University

- Press, 1976) and Erik Ericson (who uses the term *pseudo-speciation*) *Toys and Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977). See also my own essay, "On Disenchanted Discourse: Minority Literary Criticism and Beyond" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse II*, no. 7 (Fall 1989): 207-44.
7. See Robert Wright, *Three Scientists and Their Gods: Looking for Meaning in an Age of Information* (New York: Times Books, 1988), 196-98.
 8. The concept of a "semantic closure principle" is borrowed from the biologist Howard Partee's description of the integrative functioning of the cell. The proposal is that human orders *should* function according to analogous principles. See Howard H. Partee, "Clues from Molecular Symbol Systems" in *Signed and Spoken Language: Biological Constraints on Linguistic Forms*, U. Bellugi and M. Studdert-Kennedy, ed. (Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1980), 261-74, and "Laws and Constraints, Symbols and Languages," in *Towards a Theoretical Biology*, C.H. Waddington, ed. (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1972), 248-58. The "semantic closure principle" should therefore be the same phenomenon as that described by Castoriadis as a "unitary system of meanings" whose tenets are "logically unprovable." Castoriadis is cited in note 20 below.
 9. The inner-city ghettos are defined as *favelas* in Brazil, shantytowns in the English-speaking worlds, and by innumerable names in the Third World. The proposal here is that these all together constitute a global "archipelago" which is the analogue for the free market system of the Gulag archipelago for the command system of Marxist-Leninism. Films like *The Harder They Come* and *Do The Right Thing* are, therefore, for the main part, counter-perspectives from these "archipelagoes" as was the *zek* perspective of Solshenitzin and others.
 10. See Gladstone L. Yearwood, ed., *Black Cinema Aesthetics: Issues in Independent Black Filmmaking* (Athens, Ohio: Center for Afro-American Studies, Ohio University, 1982).
 11. Wittgenstein's concepts of "forms of life" and their "language games" that are therefore necessarily "impervious to philosophical attack" are central to my "rethinking of aesthetics" and therefore of human modes of being. For a recent essay which deals with some of the contemporary implications of these terms, see Samuel C. Wheeler's "Wittgenstein as Conservative

- Deconstructor," *New Literary History* 19 (Winter 1988).
12. While our present discourse on aesthetics presents itself as *a-cultural*, and, therefore, universal, the argument uses Bertrand Russell's concept of *classes* (such as machinery) and their *members* (such as cranes, tractors, cars, etc.) to redefine our present mode of the aesthetic as a culture-specific *member* of a transcultural *class*.
 13. See J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 6; and Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric and Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980).

The proposal here is that each code or *criterion* of being sets the "standard" of what would be called "fit" behaviors at the level of organic life, i.e., those optimal behaviors which best ensure the stable replication of the genome and its genomic principle.
 14. Peter Winch, "Understanding A Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1964): 307-24.
 15. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 10-14.
 16. For the Heideggerian concept of the "comprehension of being" instituting of a specific mode of being which then forecloses on any questioning with respect to being itself, see Otto Poggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. D. Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1987), 194.
 17. For the concept of tropic matrices, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).
 18. See the seminal essay by James F. Danielli, "Altruism and the Internal Reward System of the Opium of the People," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures: Studies in Human Sociobiology* 3 (April 1980): 87-94. See also Jeff Goldberg, *Anatomy of A Scientific Discovery* (Toronto, New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 163-74.
 19. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
 20. See Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Socio-Historical Domain," in *Disorder and Order: Proceedings of the Stanford International Symposium*, Paisley Livingston, ed. (14-18

- September 1981, *Stanford Literature Studies* 1. *Anima Libri*): 146-61.
21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1984).
 22. See Maria Corti, *An Introduction to Literary Semiotics*, trans. Margareta Bogat and Allen Mandelbaum.
 23. Adam Smith's middle-class goal of "bettering one's condition" was the behavior-regulating telos related to the rise of the bourgeoisie to cultural hegemony within the context of the industrial revolution and the free trade legislation which made both possible. It was based on the premise of the human as being a pure natural organism. See Robert L. Heilbroner, *Behind the Veil of Economics: Essays in the Worldly Philosophy* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), 37.
 24. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
 25. See Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, (1933; reprint, New York: A.M.S. Press, 1977).
 26. See Lévi-Strauss's deciphering analysis of the phenomenon of totemism in his seminal essay, *Totemism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), where he relates traditional totemic systems to the "speculative thought" of their orders.
 27. See Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976) for a fuller development of this analogy.
 28. See Lucien Scubla, "Contribution à la Theorie du Sacrifice," in *René Girard et le Probleme du Mal*, Michel Deguy and Jean Mariet Dupuy, ed. (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1982).
 29. See the range of work of René Girard where he proposes that all human orders are born out of the spilt blood of sacrificial violence.
 30. See Antonio T. de Nicholas, "Notes on the Biology of Religion," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 3 (April 1980): 219-26.
 31. See Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
 32. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
 33. Cited by V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philoso-*

- phy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988).
34. I have adapted this idea from Manthia Diawara's concept of "aesthetic contract" in which the normative spectator-subject is an accomplice. See his essay, "Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in *Territories*," *Public Culture* 3 (Fall 1990): 33-47.
 35. See Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 688-95.
 36. Recent accounts of hardened Jamaican drug dealers or *posses* operating in New York show the prescience of the 1972 film with respect to the "savage and contraband route" which the Ivans will take, in order to attain the new top consumer ideal of the human.
 37. See Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: E. P. Dutton 1988), 122-24, where he argues that if Melvin Van Peebles's 1970 *Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song* recognized the Black audience's desire for rebellious Black heroes, the rebellion, whatever the blaxploitation nature of the films themselves, was carried by their use of funk-jazz and other forms of Black popular music which fuelled this rebellious thrust creating "moments of music-video-like fascination."
 38. I owe this concept to Lemuel Johnson. See his essay, "'A-beng': (Re)Calling the Body In(to) Question," in *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, ed. (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990), 111-42.
 39. Neither "reality" nor literature would therefore be a reflection of each other. Both would be generated from the "ground" of their culture-specific imaginaries and their governing code or socio-genic principle.
 40. Heinz Pagels, *The Dreams of Reason: The Computer and the Rise of the Sciences of Complexity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).
 41. See Malika Lee Whitney and Dermot Hussey, *Bob Marley: Reggae King of the World* (Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston Publishers, 1989).
 42. See Miryam Da Costa's introduction to her collection of essays, *Blacks in Hispanic Literature: Critical Essays* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977), 6-7.
 43. Geoffrey Hartmann, *Criticism in the Wilderness: A Study of Literature Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

44. *Ibid.*, 246-49.
45. *Ibid.*, 237
46. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

For the concept of Gates's approach as an "ideology of Otherness," see V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988).
47. The term "African-American" itself points to the ongoing adoption by Black scholars of the immigrant white-ethnic paradigm. Both "ethnicism" and "feminism" have almost entirely displaced the dynamic and contestatory "Black" socio-cultural thrust of the 1960s.

Also, Anthony Appiah uses the term "europhone" (in his essay, "Topologies of Nativism," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 [Fall 1988]) to refer to the fact that all members of the global intelligentsia, including the most anti-Western and "Afrocentric" have been educated within the categories of the West's "regime of truth" or episteme—so that even the most rigorous "Afrocentricities," as V. Y. Mudimbe also argues, are themselves generated from the "conceptual systems" and "models of analysis" of our present essentially western-European "epistemological order."
48. See Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 90ff for a critique of this anti-sociological and "purely literary" approach.
49. Frank Kermode, *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
50. See Craig Bromberg, "Forum" in *Omni* 12, no. 9: 12-14, for his posing of the ambivalent paradox—it "homogenizes desire"—of this market-consumer universalism.
51. The idea is borrowed from Marx. The systemic perspective (i.e. cultural-historical perspective of the Black Underclass) calls in question the "form of life itself," while the "ethnic" perspective seeks a valorized incorporation into the order itself.
52. Christopher Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), 172.
53. I have adapted this concept from Howard Partee's article, "Cell Physiology: An Evolution-any Approach to the Symbol-Matter

- Information Problem," in *Cognition and Brain Theory* 5 (1982): 325-41.
54. See Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, Rajchman John and Cornel West, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 15.
 55. Paolo Valesio, *Nova Antiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).
 56. Their focus on the *makedness* of literary works provides the "ground" for the concept of the "makedness" through discourse of our modes of "being."
 57. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).
 58. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of The Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press 1983), 209.
 59. Neo-humanist in that it *denaturalizes* the human. The parallel between the laity in their relation to the clergy (*as flesh and nature to Spirit and Culture*) and Black scholars as a new "lay" intelligentsia is based on the fact that Blacks are equally to whites within our present cultural model as *nature* (non-evolved) to *culture* (evolved). A Black Studies perspective is therefore like that of the laity in Medieval Europe a *liminal* perspective in Legesse's sense. (See his *GADA: Three Approaches to the Study of an African Society* [New York: Free Press, 1973].) If the first laity de-supernaturalized the human being, and historicized the feudal order's eternal truth, the second laity are compelled to denaturalize being and to culturalize "Objective Truth."
 60. See Blumenberg, 209.