

ETHNO, OR SOCIOPOETICS?

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This talk, although based on certain initial assumptions, has also developed as a response to certain ideas thrown out in the course of this conference. But time, in the Western sense of the Western world in which we live, is short – and now that I write up the talk as a paper, space is limited. I shall therefore develop the *context* of my argument as a set of bald propositions, anchored by specific references in the notes of the written paper.

The main argument of my talk hinges on the assertion that *Ethnopoetics* can only have validity if it is explored in a context of *sociopoetics* where the *socio* firmly places the *ethnos* in its concrete historical particularity. Already in this conference, George Quasha has seen the need to give us in his paper – “The Age of the Open Secret” – a definition of the term *Ethnopoetics*. He tells us:

“At root ‘Ethnopoetics’ has to do with the essentially ‘local’ incidence of ‘poesis’ or acts of ‘making’. The word *Ethno* derives from Indo-European *seu* which the American Heritage dictionary lists as ‘people’, ‘our people’, we ‘ourselves’, ‘of our kind’ – and it lives on in the word ‘self’ and in the reflexive pronouns of French and Spanish. So Ethnopoetics is rooted in ‘self-poetics’, ‘our kind’ of poetics, which by an inevitable extension of *poesis* becomes that activity which has gradually become conscious of itself since the Romantics – Self-making. What does ‘ethno’ do? That question translates as: What does any local band of people living together do in their poetry? Answer: They say themselves. They say who they are. They speak their name in what they do. (How many names of peoples mean simply, the People?) They heal themselves and keep themselves whole. They know who they are.”¹

But who are “we”? We who are gathered here can be labelled as people who come from the First World, people who come from the Third World. Although these terms have been much abused, they serve an *operative* function; they serve to define a *relation* – a *relation* between a *We* and an *Other*. This takes us to the second, dialectical meaning of *ethno*, the meaning which is most pervasive, since it is a meaning based on a concrete reality.

In a recent article in *Commentary*, titled “The Plural Establishment”, the writer points out that: “The very history of ‘ethnic’ should be cautionary. New Testament *hoi ethnikai* and Septuagint and New Testament *ta ethnai* render Hebrew (*ha-*) *goyim* as Gentiles, pagans.”² He goes on to quote Paul writing to the Christians in Rome that he would like to have a successful mission among them as he had had *en tois loipois ethnaisin...* “among the rest of the Gentiles...”³

The point here is that the term *ethnos* refers to an OTHER – the Gentiles as distinct from a “we”, in this case, the Jews. The further point here is that Paul, in turning to the *ethnos*, is breaking out of the confines called, Christianity, which was to dislodge both monotheistic Judaism and polytheistic Roman paganism, and to institute itself as the central *ethnos* against which the rest of the world would be, in religious terms, THE OTHER. The point of my paper will be to develop a parallel here – to argue that the validity of this conference will depend on the extent to which we *make* the term *Ethnopoetics* come to concretely mean an activity – in a different time, a different place, and in different terms – similar to Paul’s as far as the revolutionary breaking out of an orthodoxy is concerned. We will have the later, negative aspect

of Christianity to remind us that the replacement of one orthodoxy by another is not the point. And we will also have the positive side, the stress on Christianity as a universal religion as distinct from the particular “we” of Judaism, to remind us that that is what we too are about. It is here that I agree with Quasha’s point that: “It (Ethnopoetics) stands for an event in our readiness to think about certain problems not necessarily called up by literary history or Western Cultural history as we are used to viewing it.”

IN FACT IT IS HERE THAT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A CENTRAL POINT. The exclusion of these “certain problems” from Western literary history and Western cultural history *is not* an accident. Rather it is central to what I shall develop as the thesis of Western secular *ethnocentrism* in which the *West* became the *we* to the *ethnos* of all other peoples, who all became THE OTHER. How did this come about?

Pre-sixteenth century Europe defined itself essentially as Christian. It therefore took over the We/Other of Judaism, carrying on the meaning of *ethnos* used in the New Testament, where the *goyim* of Hebrew was translated as Gentile, but converting itself from the Other – Gentile converted to Christian – to the *we*, and therefore increasingly using the term *ethnos* for the Other: the Heathen, the non-Christian.

So, for example, in the seventeenth century, speaking of pagan religions, a writer comments: “The Ethnics do still repute all great trees to be divine.”⁵ Earlier in the same century another writer speaks of “a kind of mule, that’s half Ethnic, and half a Christian.”⁶

In ‘the eighteenth century, the meaning of the pagan non-Christian classical world persisted and a writer can speak of “fabulous ethnicity” with its “feigned Venus” and its “idolatries.”⁷

In the nineteenth century the opposition Christian/heathen takes on a division between universal “truth” and sectarian heresy. One writer comments: “Heresies are at best *ethnic*; truth is essentially *catholic*.”⁸ Carlyle, also writing in the nineteenth century, saw *truth* as the status quo, and wrote dismissively of “a mind... occupied... with mere Ethnicism, radicalism, and revolutionary tumult.”⁹

Ethnic, then, had come to take on connotations of meaning that we shall develop in this paper – connotations of *heresy* as opposed to *orthodoxy*, *revolution* as opposed to the *status quo*. It is my contention that if *Ethnopoetics* is to exist as that “act of magic” of which Quasha speaks, then it can only do so in the context of its essential contemporary historical connotation – i.e., as the focal point of our *poetical/political* assumption of *Otherness*, an assumption at once heretical and revolutionary which alone can negate the *we/they* dichotomy, and restore to *ethnos* its original integral meaning: of *we*.¹⁰ If Ethnopoetics is our *self-making* – as Quasha argues, then it is, imperatively, first of all, a negating of the present *dominant self*, structured by the contemporary social forces, a *self*, a *we* that exists only through the negation of an *Other*. What do we mean by this? Let us establish our context.

The really fundamental split between the *we* and the OTHER, between Western and non-Western cultures, began in the sixteenth century when the world-market economy was first established, and a world economic system, global in reach, became a reality. A recent book by Immanuel Wallerstein explores this development. He writes:

“In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, there came into existence what we may call a European world-economy. It was not an Empire, yet it was as spacious as the grand Empire and shared some features with it. But *it was different and new*. It was a kind of social system the world had not really known before and which is the distinctive feature of the

modern world system. It is an economic but not a political entity, unlike empires, city states, and the emerging 'nation-states'. It is a world system not because it encompasses the world, but because it is larger than any juridically defined political unit. And it is a 'world-economy' because the basic linkage between the parts of the system is economic, although that was reinforced to some extent by cultural links and eventually, as we shall see, by political arrangements and even confederal structures. 'An Empire by contrast is a political unit.'¹¹

Western civilization, as we experience it today, is the *expression* of that new social system: an economic world system. I suggest that what took place then – i.e., in the sixteenth century – was a MUTATION rather than a simple evolutionary process; a discontinuity that called for a detotalization and a retotalization of, to borrow Nathaniel Tarn's terms, the *European-Western "heraldic vision."*

I suggest also that the X factor of this *mutation* was the discovery of the New World; that is, the discovery of vast areas of land which in becoming the *frontier* of what was then still primarily a *Christian* civilization, transformed that group of people and of states into what we today call the *West, i.e.*, that group of states and people that Immanuel Wallerstein defines as the *core-states*. The West became the *We*, and the people of the *Periphery-states* became the OTHER. But the point is that neither the *We* nor the *Other* now existed as autonomous entities.

Both *We* and *Other* were now bound in a *concrete* relation, a hierarchical global relation. It was in the context of this relation that the *Christian* civilization of the West was metamorphosed into *Western* civilization and all other entities into the Non-West. It is this distinction that it loosely called today First/Third World. Immanuel Wallerstein shows that concreteness of this relation in its initial state. He writes:

"What was it about the social structure of the sixteenth century world economy that accounts for a social transformation of a different kind, one that could scarcely be called homeostasis?... It must be that the world economy was organized differently from earlier empires, and in such a way that there existed social pressures of a different kind... We have already outlined what we consider to be the pressures of Europe to expand. Expansion involves its own imperative. The ability to expand successfully is a function both of the ability to maintain relative social solidarity at home (in turn a function of the mechanisms of the distribution of reward) and the arrangements that can be made to use *cheap labour far away* (it being all the more important that it be cheap the further it is away, because of transport costs)."¹²

The *cheap labour far away* was to become the concrete OTHER of the West, the ultimate polarity in a series of hierarchical polarities. Wallerstein explains:

"Expansion also involves unequal development and therefore differential rewards, and unequal development in a multilayered format of layers within layers, each one polarised in terms of a bimodal distribution of rewards. Thus concretely in the sixteenth century, there was *the differential of the core of the European world economy versus its peripheral areas*, within the European core between states, within states between regions and strata, within regions between city and country, and ultimately, within more local units.

The solidarity of the system was based ultimately on this unequal development, since *the multilayered complexity provided the possibility of multilayered identification...*"¹³

This multilayered identification would take, in the global system, both the form of *class* and the form of *race*. In the form of *class* the basic struggle would be internal – which class should define and determine the distribution of reward inside the unit; in the form of *race* – even *within* the confines of a unit (cf. the Blacks/Indians inside the USA) – the struggle was imperatively *global*; i.e., these groups would have to challenge the imposed rights of a few units – the West – to monopolize the lion's share of the world/the earth's natural resources in land and labour. Wallerstein explores this global structure:

“Such a system of multi-layers of social status and social reward is roughly correlated with a complex system of distribution of productive tasks; crudely, those who breed manpower sustain those who grow food who sustain those who grow other raw materials who sustain those involved in industrial production, and of course, as industrialism progresses, this hierarchy of productive services gets more complex as this late complex is ever further reified.

The world economy at this time had various kind of workers. There were slaves who worked on sugar plantations and in easy kinds of mining operation... serfs who worked on large domains where grain was cultivated and wood harvested... tenant farmers on various kinds of cash crop operations... and wage labourers in some agricultural production. There was a new class of yeomen farmers... a small layer of intermediate personnel... and a thin layer of ruling classes... both the existing nobility and the patrician bourgeoisie... the Christian clergy and the State bureaucracy.”¹⁴

The “we” of the West would be defined by this ruling class in the context of the new capitalist world system and the relation of this “we”, both internally to the ruled *classes* and externally – and internally – to the ruled *races*, were an intrinsic part of the mechanism/system of capitalism. As Wallerstein shows:

“A moment's thought will reveal that these occupational categories were not randomly distributed either geographically or ethnically within the burgeoning world economy. After some false starts, the picture rapidly evolved of a slave class of African origins located in the Western Hemisphere, a 'serf class' divided in two segments; a major one in Eastern Europe and a smaller one of American Indians in the Western Hemisphere. The peasants of Western and Southern Europe were for the most part 'tenants'. The wage workers were almost all principally from Northwest Europe. The intermediate classes were pan-European in origin (plus mestizos and mulattoes) – the ruling classes were also pan-European...”¹⁵

In the global system, *labour* itself constituted a multilayered system. As Wallerstein goes on to ask and answer:

“Why different modes of organizing labour – slavery, 'feudalism' wage labour, self-employment – at the same point in time within the world-economy? ... And why were these modes concentrated in different zones of the world-economy – slavery and 'feudalism' in

the periphery, wage labour and self-employment in the core, and as we shall see, sharecropping in the semi-periphery? Because the *modes of labour control* greatly affect the political system... and the possibilities for an indigenous bourgeoisie to thrive. *The world economy was based precisely on the assumption that there were in fact these three zones and that they did in fact have different modes of labour control. Were this not so, it would not have been possible to assure the kind of flow of the surplus which enabled the capitalist system to come into existence.*"¹⁶

It was the core zone, the zone which used wage labour and self-employment as its mode of labour control which increasingly defined the relation, definitions based on the extent to which that zone became enriched by the exploitation of its own labour, and of the even *more devalued* labour of the semi-periphery and the periphery. The core zones would be bearers of Western "civilization", the agents and the main benefactors of the world economy. But this core zone itself was now what it was, by nature of a *relation*; to what it *conceptualized* as a negation – the NON-WEST, i.e., The Other.¹⁷

The conceptualization which began with the new relation involved changes of considerable magnitude; involved detotalization of the prevalent and previous world picture; and the retotalization of another. The bold speculative departures in Western thought that were taken responded to the enormous change in *consciousness* that the discovery and impact of the New World had upon the Old. It was in Europe – i.e. the core-zone – that the world, responding to its new frontier, was first made really new.¹⁸

It was the concrete, material, essentially *economic* impact of the New World upon the Old, that would essentially transform that Old World from one civilization amongst others – the Christian, to THE ONE, the West, to which all other civilization were OTHER. What was at work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe was a total transformation of the social and economic bases of the society, and in consequence, of its *Christian* world picture – or, to borrow the term, developed by Nathaniel Tarn during the conference, the Christian "*heraldic vision*". It is in the context of this transformation of the heraldic vision that John Donne wrote: "The new philosophy calls all in doubt,/the elements of fire are quite put out."¹⁹

Here we see the detotalization picture at work. The "new philosophy" dissolves the former world picture and its very act of constituting a new one. In Descartes' *Discourse on Method* we see the retotalization picture at work. We sense his excitement when he writes:

For they have made me see that it is possible to reach a kind of knowledge which will be of the utmost use to men, and that in place of that speculative philosophy which is taught in the schools, we can achieve a practical one by means of which, by ascertaining the force and action of fire, water, the air, the heavenly bodies, and the skies, of all the physical things that surround us, as distinctly as we know the various trades of our artisans, we can apply them in the same way to all the uses for which they are fit, and thus make ourselves as it were, the lords and masters of nature.¹⁹

The *Nature* that man was to be totally the lords and possessors of could never have been merely the *Nature* of the Old World. Nature was there the repository of Christian Natural Law, the Other to Man which guaranteed humanness. The concept of Nature was now transformed by the vast presence of an *alien* frontier Nature; and this alien Nature was, for the West, totally

land, unhallowed by traditions, customs, myths. The conquistadores dreamt to grab gold, but the bait held out to the colonists from Spain, and later from all Europe, was *land*.²¹

Whilst much has been written about the way in which the *European* working class was forced off the land in Europe to be made into the landless proletariat, very little attention is paid to the fact that it was a parallel movement to the manner in which large sections of the middling and the poorer classes in Europe, became *landed* in the New World; and of how this new and dizzy social mobility would strengthen and extend the power of the bourgeoisie, until then cabined, cribbed and confined by the trammels of an aristocratic feudal Europe with power still based on birth and lineage. THAT IS TO SAY, THE FACT THAT IT WAS THE NEW WORLD WHO MADE POSSIBLE THE RISE TO TOTAL POWER OF THE WESTERN BOURGEOISIE, UNTIL THEN MERELY AN ELEMENT OF EUROPEAN LIFE, IS DISREGARDED, AS IS THE FACT THAT THE *ESSENTIAL DETERMINING FACTOR* OF THE MUCH-DEBATED WESTERN TRANSITION “FROM FEUDALISM TO CAPITALISM WAS THE DISCOVERY AND EXISTENCE OF THE VAST NEW LANDS OF THE NEW WORLD,” AND THAT IT WAS THESE LANDS THAT SERVED AS THE CATALYST FOR THAT TOTAL “commercialization of land and labour” that is the central dynamic of capitalism.

Nature in the New World became mere land, to be exploited. The *change in the relation to Nature* was a change, hitherto unknown, in its new *qualitative* phase in human experience, in the very *concept of culture*. Leopold Sedar Senghor has pointed out that *culture* is the *expression* of the relationship between Man and his natural environment. It is in effect “the result of a double effort of the integration of Man with Nature and Nature with Man.”²² That is to say, Man adapts himself to Nature, at the same time as he adapts Nature to his own exigencies. From this contradictory, dual process, springs his social and economic structure, his art, and his philosophy. This balance lay at the heart of all traditional cultures until the discovery of the New World and the concomitant expansion and mutation of Western civilization. From here on, Senghor writes, “an economic and instrumental civilization could make us believe that one part of the process, the transformation of Nature by Man, is the very essence of Culture.”

The passage I have quoted from Descartes could be called the manifesto of this new and revolutionary break in thought attitudes, and consciousness that we have termed a mutation; not so much a transition²³ as a rupture, a *discontinuity* caused by the introduction of a new factor which acted as a catalyst for change in the context of the New World and its large-scale exploitation by the West that initiated Man’s revolutionary new relation of Nature. And the new relation to Nature was a new relation to Other Men. This new relation to Nature and other men, metamorphosed Western man and his sense of *self*.

Before, European man had conceptualized himself *religiously*. On the Chain of Being he stood between the angels, on the one hand, and the animals, on the other.²⁴ The angels represent the ideal of purity to which he could aspire; the animals the non-ideal, which marked the limits of what he could not be; what he should strive against being. It was this concept which Pico della Mirandola still expressed in humanist terms, when he exulted in the fact that man alone, on the Chain of Being, had no fixed place, but could make himself what he wanted to be – as high as the angel; as low as the beast. With the post-New World mutation rupture, European man would now define himself *secularly* in relation to other men. In response to a new concrete relation, he detotalized his former world picture – i.e., one thinks of the aesthetically satisfying world picture of the still Christian Elizabethan world as developed by Tillyard, with its ordered hierarchy, in which the social order was guaranteed by the natural order which it was supposed

to parallel; with the Pope, the king, the nobles, the people imaging the stable pattern of the universe; with the earth at the centre and all planets revolving round in ordered and stately harmony.²⁵ Then he retotalized another.

For the first time in human history a small group of peoples now had at their disposal the rest of the peoples and the resources of the earth, due to an initial technological superiority which was to grow by leaps and bounds as wealth accrued from the frontier territories that the West, uniquely in human history, had suddenly acquired. It is at this conjuncture that with the shifts in the bases and areas of power and the change in relations of power, the former heraldic vision – no longer serving – disintegrated like Humpty Dumpty. And when the pieces were put back again, they formed a mutant whole.

In the new retotalization European man was transformed from Christian man to Western man; the other peoples of the earth were transformed into *negroes* and natives. The “negro” was to be a particular form of the generic “*natives*”. The European socio-cosmic vision of the world in which the social order paralleled the *natural* order was not discarded, but retained, transformed to serve the purposes now not of Christian theology, but of secular ideology.²⁶ If the Sun was now recognized as being the centre of the natural universe, the West, its countries and its people, paralleled this centre here on earth. In a form of bricolage, the elements of the old heraldic vision were not so much discarded as rearranged. Non-western man, non-western lands now provided a *periphery*, by which Western man and lands could dialectically become the *centre*. The domestication of Western lands and peoples could be more *easily* carried out in a context in which all that was non-West became the *adynation*²⁷ of all that was the West. The non-West territory became the frontier/ jungle/Nature “red in tooth and claw”. Non-Western man became the “noble savage” or the savage monster. Indeed the very definitions of the term “natural” (cf. the call during the conference for a phenomenology of the “natural”) would change in order to legitimize the insertion of Western man, paralleling the sun at the centre of the physical order, at the centre of the new – now global – world picture. In other words, the new definitions of the “natural” institutionalized Western man as the NORM OF MAN; and non-Western Man as the OTHER, the not-quite, the non-men who guaranteed the Being of the Norm by his own non-being. In creating themselves as the norm of men, the Western bourgeoisie *created* the idea of the Primitive, the idea of the savage, of the “despised heathen”, of the “*ethnos*”: they created the idea of their own negation.

The idea of the savage black, writes Césaire, was a European invention. Roy Harvey Pearce points out that in the U.S.A. the settlers created the idea of the *savages* as the further limit of what they could not allow themselves to be, what they should not be. The “savage” was not a fact but a negative concept of Western man; he existed as a sign.²⁷ As western man “pacified” New World nature, eliminated the “savage,” penned them up in reservations, he did the same with whole areas of his Being. Indeed it would be difficult to explain the extraordinary nature of his ferocity if we did not see that it was, first of all, a ferocity also wrought, in psychic terms, upon himself. Western man – as defined by the bourgeoisie – restrained those areas of Being whose *mode of knowing* could sustain the narrative conceptualization (the heraldic vision) of his new world picture, but eliminated, penned up on reservations – those areas of *cognition* which were, by their mode of knowing, *heretical* to the conceptualized orthodoxy that was required. THE MODE OF COGNITION THAT WAS PENNED UP WAS A MODE WHICH WESTERN MAN (ALL OF US, SINCE IT IS NO LONGER A RACIAL BUT A

CULTURAL TERM) REMAINS AWARE OF ONLY THROUGH POETRY – AND POETRY AS THE GENERIC TERM FOR ART.³⁰

HENCE IT, WOULD SEEM TO ME TO BE THE POINT OF THIS CONFERENCE: THE EXPLORATION OF THIS *ALTERNATIVE MODE OF COGNITION* IDEOLOGICALLY SUPPRESSED IN OURSELVES, YET STILL A LIVING FORCE AMIDST LARGE MAJORITIES OF THE THIRD WORLD PEOPLES. IN THIS COMMON EXPLORATION THERE CAN THEN BE NO CONCEPT OF A LIBERAL MISSION TO SAVE “PRIMITIVE POETICS” FOR “PRIMITIVE PEOPLES.” THE SALVAGING OF OURSELVES, THE RECLAMATION OF VAST AREAS OF OUR BEING, IS DIALECTICALLY RELATED TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE CONDITIONS WHICH BLOCK THE FREE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN POTENTIALITIES OF THE MAJORITY PEOPLES OF THE THIRD WORLD.

For the expansion of the Western self, the auto-creation in the sixteenth century was only made possible by the damming up of the potentiality of non-Western man, by the negation of *his* Being. Once the idea of the Christian medieval ethnos of the West had broken down, it was replaced by another universal, the secular ideology of the bourgeoisie, the concept of HUMANISM. This was the new conceptualization of the new *ethnos* of Western man, as compared to his former Christian *ethnicity*. It would be part of the ideology of humanism that whilst it saw itself as a universal, it was universal only in the context of a WESTERN-DOMINATED WORLD. To quote Orwell, and to paraphrase: ALL MEN WERE EQUAL BUT WESTERN MAN WAS MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.

The new *ethnos* of the West was created by the bourgeoisie, as a secular *ethnos*, based on their need to attack the privilege of birth bound by biological limits, based on the blood of the monarcho-feudal aristocracy. Humanism became the secular theology/ideology of the bourgeoisie's *universal* of universal freedom. But the dialectical achievement of the concept of universal freedom was limited by its necessary negation – the fact that universal freedom was defined by a class in the interests of a class – of the Western bourgeoisie who also created the modern concept and reality of the West. If internally the European working classes were the OTHER to the Western Bourgeoisie, externally, the non-West masses were the Other to a temporarily allied bourgeoisie-working class Western man.

That is, the presence of the OTHER made possible the existence of an internal WE which bound all classes of the Western world in a *temporary* relation. But it is a WE that is no longer, as was the Christian WE, autonomous. The Western self existed, and could only exist as defined and posited, with the non-self of the non-Western world. The WE of the West could only be defined by the Negation that the OTHER constituted.

The Mayan prophetic book, *The Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, brings out this dialectic with pathos and precision. In former times, before Columbus and the discovery, life was lived as a near Utopia at least in memory. Then,

There was wisdom in them. There was no sin. There was a sacred sense of devotion in them. Then, there was not disease, no pain in the bones, no fever, no small pox, no burning in the chest, no pains in the stomach, no withering away. Then they walked with their bodies straight. But when the foreigner came, all changed. They taught fear and came and withered the flowers. So their flower should live, they hurt and sucked our flowers – to castrate the sun, that is what the foreigners came to do.³¹

But it is important to realize that this reinvention of the Western self was determined by a *concrete* relation. What is usually referred to as Western “racism”, in which this *racism* is taken as an absolute and mystified, is the term used both to define and to avoid a concrete class relation between the West and the rest of the world. *Racism* was the FORM through which, in the context of the world market economy, the class structure as relationship between core and periphery peoples expressed itself. Indeed *racism* was the indispensable ideology of the forms or modes of labour control that were imperative to the capitalist exploitation of the periphery peoples.

In the context of this statement, what I shall label the *Sepulveda syndrome* takes on a central significance. Gines de Sepulveda was a sixteenth century Spanish theologian who argued that the Spaniards had a right to enslave the Indians because the latter were culturally inferior:

Now compare those gifts of prudence, sharpness of wit, magnanimity, temperance, humanity and religion (of the Spaniards) with those of those little men (homuncili) in whom you will hardly find a trace of humanity. They have no culture, no system of writing (nor do they) preserve monuments of their history; they have the vaguest obscure memory of facts recorded in certain pictures, they lack written laws and have barbarous institutions and customs.³²

The quotation is paradigmatic of the posture of European civilization as it defined itself in a relation of negation to oral-precapitalist cultures. Above all it shows the *instrumental* use of European culture as a weapon of domination. European culture was posited as a gold standard of value, its “possession” acting as a definition of manhood, of humanity. As I wrote before:

Culture and humanity resided in writing. Without writing there was a void. The oral culture of the indigenous civilization was a non-culture, was barbarous. By a process of repetition, “humanity” came to be synonymous with being European; with the “possession” of European culture. To be non-European was to be non-human. The myth of the cultural void of the non-West – The Other – was to be central to the ideology which the West would use in its rise to world domination.³³

In a world in which there were, in the Western world view, two kinds of men – men and the little men (homunculi), culture and non-culture, the former Chain of Being of the West underwent a new retotalization. Where Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola’s man had stood between the angels above and animals below, striving to reach the one, striving to avoid lapsing into the latter, a new arrangement, *secularly*, put Western man in the place of the angels, whilst below him is non-Western man – not quite man, not quite animal – able to attain the status of manhood only if he *imitated* as closely as he could the gold standard of manhood, the normative model of man, Western man. In an abstraction which alienated him also from the reality of himself, Western man was translated from a *fact* into a signifier, signifying the NORMATIVE MODEL OF MAN. It is this abstraction that lives and moves at the core of the ideology/conceptualization of *humanism*.

It is our intention in this paper to suggest that the black experience in the New World has been paradigmatic of the non-Western experience of the native peoples; and that the black experience constituted an existence which daily criticized the abstract consciousness of humanism; that the popular oral culture, which the black created in response to an initial

negation of this humanness, constitutes, as culture, the *heresy of humanism*; and that is why black popular culture – spirituals, blues, jazz, reggae, Afro-Cuban music – and its manifold variants have constituted an underground cultural experience as subversive of the status quo Western culture as was Christianity in the catacombs of the Roman Empire. For it was in this culture that the blacks reinvented themselves as a WE that needed no OTHER to constitute their Being; that laid down the cultural parameters of a concretely universal *ethnos*.

How did this happen? In the Sepulveda definition we see that Western man alone has the *property* of manhood, of humanness. What was the purpose of this conceptualization? What was this a conceptualization for?

To answer this question, we must look at the context in which Sepulveda made his definition. As I wrote before:

...what I shall label as the Sepulveda syndrome – the mythology of the inferiority of the non-white, and specifically and more totally of the black, the devaluation of his humanity, the elaborate construction of a world view in which Africa became the negation of all humanity – the heart of darkness – serves, as it had served in the New World with the Indians, a specific *material* purpose. The full implications of the Sepulveda statement became clear when we realize that he had been hired by the Spanish colonists of Santo Domingo to defend what they claimed to be their rights *as Spaniards* to the unfettered utilization of the labour power of the Indians, through the perpetuation and continuance of the *encomienda* system, a particular form of relations of production by which Indians were assigned as a labour force to individual Spanish colonists, their labour power being exchanged for the doubtful value of the allegedly Christianizing influence on them of the Christian colonists who commanded their labour. The rip-off came in the unequal exchange.

Sepulveda defended the *rights* of the colonists against Las Casas, who pointed out the dehumanization of the Indians that the *encomienda* system entailed, and the evil of this system in the light of Christian doctrine.

It was in the context of this ideal doctrine – all men had souls and were sons of God – that Sepulveda brought forward the thesis that some men were more equal than others. The signs of the more-than-equal were their possession of a “culture”; of the less-than-equal, their lack of “culture”. With no other race on earth as with the black would this “cultureless thesis” be more elaborately constructed, more vulgarized, more commonly accepted. The European slave trade out of Africa, in the context of nascent Western humanism, and the plantation system in the New World in the light of a nascent bourgeois rationality, made imperative the construction of such a powerful *ideology*. The stereotype of the black as Sambo, the nigger minstrel, was a cornerstone in this architecture of defamation.

T.W. Adorno has shown the imperative necessity for men to fabricate ideologies like this:

The system in which the sovereign mind imagined itself transfigured, has its primal history in the pre-mental, the animal life of the species. Predators get hungry, but pouncing on their prey is often difficult and dangerous; additional impulses may be needed for the beast to dare it. There impulses and the unpleasantness of hunger fuse into rage at the victim, a rage whose expression in turn serves the end of frightening and paralysing the victim. In the advance to humanity this is rationalized by projection. The “rational animal” with an appetite for his opponent is already fortunate enough to have a superego and must find a

reason. The more completely his actions follow the law of self-preservation, the less can he admit the primacy of that law to himself and others; if he did, his laboriously attained status of a *zoon politikon* would lose all credibility.

The animal to be devoured must be evil. Idealism... gives unconscious sway to the ideology that the not-I, *l'autrui* and finally all that reminds us of nature is inferior, so the unity of self-preserving thought may devour it without misgivings. This justifies the principle of the thought as much as it increases the appetite. The system is the belly turned mind and rage is the mark of each and every idealism.³⁴

The Not-I of the Western idealist philosophy of humanism with its concomitant, the later rights of man, was, most ultimately, the non-white sub-man assimilated to Nature, and the most ultimately non-white was the black. The systematic devaluation of the black as human went hand in hand with the systematic exploitation of his labour power.

The non-white labour that was to be exploited has to be perceived as evil. In the context of idealistic humanism, their less than human status had to be rationally justified. In the context of emergent capitalism, the naked form of slavery under which the labour power of the plantation slave or the *encomienda* Indian was exploited, the Sepulveda syndrome – like the later more scientific Darwinian-derived theories – served a specific purpose – i.e., it rationalized emergent capitalism's need for relatively more devalued labour power.

The cultural racism implicit in the Sepulveda syndrome cannot be described as an autonomous response of the superstructure, a psychological response inherently embedded in the European psyche. Rather, this cultural racism constituted a central part of the complex ideological apparatus by which *Western capitalism* would fulfil its imperative of extracting surplus value from non-white labour. Cultural racism is therefore organic to – and not anomalous to – Western capitalism, and *ipso facto* to Western civilization.

In other words, the perception of the Indian, black, native as inherently inferior plays a central role in the actual concrete determination of the value of “inferior” men, and of their “inferior” labour power. The devaluation of their cultures, which implies the devaluation of their humanity, far from being a merely *cultural* (i.e., superstructural) phenomenon, was rooted in a material base, in the economic infrastructure. It was the “belly” which saw the black as Sambo/brute beast; and the “natives” as homunculi and lesser breeds.

We note then that the negation of the “humanity”/manhood of the Indian was the justification by Sepulveda of the devaluation of the price of his labour power, but that this devaluation was dialectically implied with the over-valuation of Western man's. The spread of the world market system would increasingly correlate the “Value of Being” of the “self”, with the relative market value of each man's labour power. Out of this came the axiom that Western man had a right to the over-valuation of Being, whilst primitive man was condemned to devaluation.

We note too that the new world picture, the heraldic vision, far from being innocent, is more than self interested – in other words, it is ideological. Indeed, it is imperatively ideological since it must *conceal-oversee* the truth of a relation. For *humanism as* concept becomes operative now, not because Angels/ Animals are the Other but because of the existence of those defined and forced to accept their definition as SUBHUMAN.

In the emergent world economic system, a Market system which increasingly made of a man's labour, a man's *being*, a commodity, humanism functioned as the *creative ideology* of the Western bourgeoisie. To forget or to oversee the brilliant achievements of this caste/class, spurred on by this ideology in its creative ascendant phase, is to oversee the complexity of the task before us.

To refuse to see its dialectical opposite, the extent to which this ideology demanded as its obverse side the degradation of all non-Western peoples – the elimination, negation, freezing of all other cultures seen as heretical to the totalitarian Western orthodoxy, is to take an ideological position which makes impossible the aim of this conference as postulated by Quasha – that of self-making. To reinvent the concrete self it is necessary to first *recognize* abstraction of the self which, imposed on us, we have inherited.

To oversee the above dialectic is to oversee the extent to which the concept of *humanism*, which was the postulated ideal of the economic process which reduced the labour power of man to a commodity and his Being to a Market value, had to remain an *abstraction*, an ideology, a creed, helping the faithful to accept that they were still men despite a system which increasingly reduced them to ciphers. In this context the real concrete self was increasingly alienated from the postulated *ideal* self. It would seem to me that the purpose of the conference is not so much to recover the “primal state”, to recover the “Natural” – for even these terms are ideological – but rather to begin to validate, to define and to work for the concretely human that is posited, negated in the abstract web of humanist ideology, and to do this in the context of the concrete relations of productions which made this ideology both necessary, and possible.

It is because poetry is the inventor/guarantor of the concretely human, i.e., of the “natural”, that this conference takes on its significance. For underlying many of the activities of the past few days, has been the pervasive feeling that we have come here on a quest for the “primitive”, yet if we discard the dross that has accreted to such a quest over the centuries, we still find that the quest of the primitive is a metonymy (a misnomer) for the quest of *human being* now reified into a commodity.

Western man is the first human being in the history of the world to totally inhabit a commodity-culture. Humanism has ended in its negation. Men have become the objects they have created. Western man creates his Being as a thing. The “natural” chain of Being has been replaced by a market, a historical-Chain of Being.³⁵

Because of this the difference between Western and non-Western cultures is not the difference between civilized and primitive. That is an ideological reading. *The difference is that between the first commodity-culture in the history of human existence and all other cultures. A mutation has occurred.*

All other cultures, including the pre-16th century Western one, existed as the agent and product of the process by which man invented himself as *human*.

Commodity-culture, on the other hand, is the agent and product of the process by which objects invent man as another object labelled *human*. Man’s power to name objects is turned against him. Objects name him. Freedom is a Cadillac.³⁶

Poetry is the agent and product by which man names the world, and calling it into being invents his *human* as opposed to his “natural” being.

For to *name* the world is to *conceptualize* the world; and to conceptualize the world is an expression of an active relation. A poem is itself *and* sign of man’s creative relation to his world; in humanizing this world through the conceptual/naming process (neither comes before the other like the chicken and the egg) he invents and reinvents himself as human.

In a world named by objects, poetry dies except insofar as it laments its own loss, reconciled to obsolescence. And after, what? The quest for the primitive is once again a misnomer; the quest for the primitive that we have come here for today *is a quest for the continuing possibility of poetry itself*. The continued possibility of poetry is itself the continued possibility of humanness. To quote Heidegger, in reply to Holderlin’s “...what are poets for in a destitute time?”

It is a necessary part of the poet's nature that, before he can be truly a poet in such an age, the time's destitution must have made the whole being and vocation of the poet a poetic question for him. Hence poets in a destitute time must especially gather in poetry, the nature of poetry. Where that happens we may assume poets to exist who are on the way to the destiny of the world's age.³⁷

The poet names the world. When it is destitute he names its destitution. But poetry itself becomes destitute except that its naming is an accusation. And to accuse one must first understand the why of destitution. I suggest that the destitution – psychic destitution unique to our times – began in the 16th century with the initial relation between the Western self and its Other. I take the Robinson Crusoe-Friday relation in a paradigm of that relation. Here we see the *naming* process at work, the social naming of relation between the powerful and the powerless. By calling the Indian *Friday* Crusoe negates his former name, the meaning of his former culture, its architecture of significance. With the past, the cultural world of Friday wiped out, he is reduced to his role as Crusoe's servant. The relation changes, metamorphoses Friday. But we must note that it also changes, metamorphoses Crusoe.³⁸

Before he had the power to name things, now he has the power to *name other men*. This power, new to Columbus, is pyrrhic. Once called into existence it will play out its total possibilities. For it is an OBJECT, Crusoe's gun, which gives him this power *to name other men*. The object has inserted itself. Friday, seeing the ease with which the gun has wiped out his at once, fellow/and enemy Indians, assimilates the gun as Object to a Natural force, and therefore to a God. He prays to the Gun, pleading that it does not harm him. Crusoe is now the agent of the power of the gun, and as such is master.

It is not Crusoe but the gun that sustains Friday's definition as servant: Crusoe's definition as master. The gun makes Crusoe as MAN, since he owns it, and Friday a Native, since he is without it. Men are masters; natives are servants. The gun, the object, assigns roles and definitions in the heraldic vision.

In his excellent study *The Prison House Of Language* Fredric Jameson discusses the problem of naming. He writes:

Saussure's definition of the sign runs as follows: The linguistic *sign* unifies, not a thing and a name, but a concept and an acoustic image, 'latter terms being then replaced by a new set, the signified and the signifiant,' the signified and the signifier. The point is made further that the sign is wholly arbitrary, that its meaning rests entirely on social contentions and acceptance and that it has no 'natural' fitness in and of itself."³⁹

Here we see that the social convention accepted by both Friday and Crusoe, of the latter's power to name, is *historical*, not natural, and is based on the power of the gun.⁴⁰ For the power that Crusoe has to name Friday is part of the power that he has to force him into the role of servant. Without the gun there would have been two men. With the gun, there is a master on the one hand, servant on the other.

Jameson shows that after Saussurian linguistics what became clear was that "what distinguishes human beings is no longer that relatively specialized skill or endowment which is the power to speak, but rather the more *general power to create signs*."⁴¹ The general power to

create signs becomes Crusoe's power and his alone, just as in our contemporary society it is the production process that increasingly creates signs, and not the societal processes as a whole.

It is poetry, the poem, that continues, with increasing difficulty, the general human power to create signs. For the poem constitutes each time that it happens – since a poem is an “event” rather than an object – a field force which reinterprets and reinvents anew the meaning of the sign – that is, the poem creates anew the sign. Each poem reinvents the nature of the sign as *not* arbitrary, but depends on the “openness” of the sign to be able to reinvent it. The market reality produced by the production process reifies the sign into a finite category. It is through its imperative to dereify the market-created signs that poetry finds itself poetically/politically on the opposite side of the barricades, the rebel side of the battle lines.

To name, to create a sign, is to conceptualize, to draw into a universe of meaning. Friday, for example, was drawn into Crusoe's universe of meaning and dispossessed from his. To Crusoe he signifies the day on which he was met: a time and date measurement. The imposed name suits the imposed role of servant.

Friday as a sign is arbitrary in Friday's original universe, meaningful in Crusoe's. The gun, the object, is central to this decision, this differentiation of meaning and non-meaning.

On the other hand, Friday recognizes that the gun is the real power, that Crusoe is the mediator. But Crusoe cannot ideologically afford to recognize this. His assumption is that his victory over the Indians is due to his God who has created him as superior *ethnos* to the Other – as a chosen people. He is the Norm. He is MAN. The Indian is the savage. When converted to civilization, he is almost a Man, a servant. Crusoe's mastery over the Other is, as Crusoe sees it, *inherent* in his Being; in his truly uniquely human essence.

The myth of Crusoe is central to what we shall call the Western myth – the Myth of its own Immaculate Conception. The myth is discussed under the neutral-seeming rubric of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. What is at issue there is to prove that the West became a capitalist developed civilization because of its inherent virtue and foresight, its wise – virgin – prudence.⁴² Always overlooked is the true explanation of its rise to world power, the X factor of its relation to the New World Other; of its exploitation of Friday's labour, and Friday's lands; of his dispossession of Friday from human being.

The oversight of the Friday relation allows for a smooth evolution from Western feudalism to Western capitalism, with the Western subject-feudal lords, bourgeoisie, proletariat, always centrally subject. To conceal a relation the label FIRST/THIRD WORLD with its sleight of hand then becomes the political/ ideological parallel to civilized/primitive. Implicitly, a conference named *ethnopoetics* is at once assumed to constitute the binary opposition *Poetics* (Western/ real/true poetics) – ETHNOPOETICS – The Other Poetics.⁴³

In attempting to negate the ideological meaning that is inherent in such a name in despite of our conscious intentions, we must first recognize that these binary oppositions of a Western-dominated structure, expressed in a Western-dominated language, are ideological; i.e., that they mystify and hide the fact that the First World is only First to the extent that the Third World is Third and vice versa; that the ideological meaning of Ethnopoetics and the real meaning that we try to give it, can only be defined in the overall context of the relation between First/Third World – i.e., in its sociopoetic context.

It is in this context alone that we can see that the so-called “primitive” is only “primitive” to the extent that the capitalist Law of Unequal Development called for the stagnation of all other cultures, for the blocking of their dynamic. It is in this context that we note that the magnificent tribal poetry of the American Indians – the poetry of an oral culture, and as such open to change,

to reinvention – by and large remains fixed, codified. This fixed quality testifies to the fact that this culture and its bearers have been penned up, coralled on *reservations* while their ecology, the world of their cultural imagination, was drained away. This tribal poetry is the past poetry of a people who have been metamorphosed from an autonomous *ethnos* into a *RESERVATION NATIVE*, part of a binary opposition constituted by NATIVE/ WESTERN MAN.

That “folklife” which we study as “primitive”, beautiful as it is, remains “natural” only because it has been unnaturally (historically) frozen in its development. The real cultural changes that take place only take place in those areas where, as with the nineteenth century Ghost-Dance and the Peyote cult of the American Indians, elements of the culture formed a matrix, drew in stranger elements and used this new entity as part of their rebellion against this blocking of their existence, of its creative dynamic; created a new cultural form as an accusation against cultural destitution, and as the dynamic of revolt.

So, if we turn to the powerful past tribal poetry of the American Indian to study it, appropriate it, outside of this perspective, this conference would only sustain and extend that ideology which, in order to be, it is committed to fight against. If we approach it from this perspective, we release the potential transformative effect of this conference by approaching the *CULTURES OF THE OTHER* in order to construct an alternative process of making ourselves human; and to free the Western concept of humanism from its tribal aspect of We and the Other, transforming its abstract universal premise into the concretely human global, the concretely WE.

Notes

1. Quoted from an earlier draft of Quasha’s “The Age of the Open Secret.” The final version appears in the second and third paragraphs of the paper, p. 65. (Eds.)
2. In *Commentary*, December 1974, Vol. 58, No. 6, p. 72.
3. Ibid.
4. Quasha, as above. (Eds.)
5. All examples are taken from the *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 901. This particular example is from 1644 (Evelyn).
6. Op. cit. p. 901, 1625 (Ben Jonson).
7. Op. cit. p. 901, 1772 (Nugent).
8. Op. cit. p. 901, 1875 (Lightfoot).
9. Op. cit. p. 901, 1851 (Carlyle).
10. In an interesting article, Fernandez Retamar of Cuba argues that revolutionary Latin Americans must assume the identity of Caliban as against the identity of Prospero or Ariel. *Massachusetts Review*, Winter-Spring, 1974, pp. 7-72.
11. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), p. 15.
12. Op. cit. p. 85.
13. Op. cit. p. 86.
14. Op. cit. p. 86.
15. Op. cit. p. 87.
16. Op. cit. p. 87.
17. A recent book by Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite* (New York: Random House, 1975), explores this relation in its concrete results.

18. In his book *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 8, J. H. Elliot has called attention to the extensive nature of this impact, which until now has been ideologically minimized, when not altogether evaded: “ ‘It is a striking fact’ wrote the Parisian lawyer, Etienne Pasquier, in the early 1560s, ‘that our classical authors had no knowledge of all this America, which we call New Lands.’ With these words he caught something of the importance of America for the Europe of his day. Here was a totally new phenomenon, quite outside the range of Europe’s accumulated experience and in its normal expectation. Europeans knew something, however vaguely and inaccurately, about Africa and Asia. But about America and its inhabitants they knew nothing... The very fact of America’s existence, and of its gradual revelation as an entity in its own right, rather than as an extension of Asia, *constituted a challenge to a whole body of traditional assumptions, beliefs and attitudes.*” Elliot goes on to quote contemporary sixteenth century comments on “the magnitude and significance of the events which were unfolding before their eyes.” Among the comments that he quotes are those of Luis Vives who writes “truly, the globe has been opened up to the human race...” (p. 9) and of Gomara’s that, “The greatest event since the creation of the world (excluding the incarnation and death of Him who created it) is the discovery of the Indies.” (p. 10).
19. See John Donne, *John Donne: The Anniversaries*, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 73.
20. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Arthur Wollaston (London: Penguin Classics, 1960), p. 84.
21. In 1513, two decades after the discovery, King Ferdinand of Spain drew up a law which would be central to the colonization of the new frontier: “It is our will that houses, lots, lands, caballerias and peonies be or may be distributed to all those who go to colonize new lands according to the will of the Governor...” This law was put into effect soon after. As two contemporary writers explain it: “The landowner ship pattern began early after the arrival of the Spanish. Lands were distributed among the infantry in lots called *peonies*, and among the cavalry, *caballerias*, so that they could support themselves. Those in higher positions in the governing force of colonial society received *encomiendas* as well. The latter constituted a certain number of indigenous villages, whose inhabitants could be taxed and who could also be used as a work force in the town and in the fields. Their village lands were not taken from them as such, but they were required to pay such exorbitant taxes, and to render so much labour, that they slowly lost possession of their lands, and soon became actual slaves.” (Thomas and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala – Another Vietnam?* [N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1971], p. 32).
22. Leopold Sedar Senghor, *Negritude et humanisme* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1964), p. 121.
23. Western cultural nationalism, the ideology of Western economic dominance has always insisted on what we shall term, the *Immaculate Conception of the West*. Within this context scholastic disputes about the “transition” in Europe from feudalism to capitalism, have all had as their point of departure the underlying implication that it was some “unique” Holy Ghost of the West that set in motion the immense processes of transformation that we refer to as a *mutation*. The *oversight* of the X factor has been ideologically deliberate. Emmanuel Wallerstein comes nearest to my position when in a complex argument he points out: “There was only one historical moment when men successfully transformed a redistributive world-system (in this case based upon a feudal mode of production) into a capitalist world economy. This was in Europe (*defined as including Iberian America* [italics mine]) between 1450 and 1640. There were no doubt other attempts throughout history. One might perhaps classify the

developments in the Mediterranean basin between 1150 and 1300 as such an attempt. And there were others in other regions of the world. *But for various reasons all the prior attempts failed.*" It is not so much why they failed as why the other succeeded. Wallerstein goes on to say: "...The moment cannot be located in a day, a month, a year, even a decade. It involved, as we say, a 'transition.' But transitions contain 'points of no return' where qualitative shifts occur. If one wanted to date this for the modern world-system, one could suggest that 1557 is the symbolic date, the point of no return in the wake of this transition which went on for two centuries."

24. See E.M. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 84.
25. Tillyard, op. cit. p. 82, quotes a passage from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (I, iii, 85-86), which makes this point: "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,/ Observe degree, priority, and place."
26. Hence the biologization of the negro; i.e., not his historical social fact of being a *slave*, but his biological fact of being black was used as the factor which destined him to the lower rank on the scale of *being* below Man (white).
27. Ernst Robert Curtius, in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* discusses this topos in which the world is turned upside down.
28. Retamar in the essay already cited points out that the noble savage and the savage monster were: "simply options in the ideological arsenal of a vigorous, emerging bourgeoisie. The notion of an Edenic creature comprehends, in more contemporary terms, a working hypothesis for the bourgeois left, and as such offers an ideal model of the perfect society free from the constrictions of that feudal world against which the bourgeoisie was in fact struggling... As for the vision of the cannibal, it corresponds... to the right wing of that same bourgeoisie. It belongs to the ideological arsenal of politicians of action, those who perform the dirty work, in whose fruits, the charming dreamers of Utopia will equally share." (p. 13).
29. Cf. Roy H. Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).
30. Cf. Heidegger's essay "Poetically Man Dwells," in *Poetry Language and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 218. "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."
31. See G.R. Coulthard, *Dos Casos de Literatura No – Enajenada en la epoca colonial: Los Libros de Chilam Balam y Guaman Poma de Ayala*. (Merida, Yucatan: University of Yucatan, 1972), p. 11.
32. # 2, 32 quoted by G.R. Coulthard in *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, April 1968: *Parallelisms and Diversities Between Negritude and Indigenismo*. (Rio Piedras: University of Puerto Rico, 1968), p. 32.
33. This cultural imperialism was therefore central to the whole process.
34. T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectic*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) p. 22-23.
35. The being of modern man is more and more defined and graded according to his consumption patterns. Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 33-39.

On peut penser que les objets, de par leur présence matérielle ont d'abord pour fonction de durer, d'inscrire le statut social "en dur." Ceci était vrai de la société traditionnelle, où le décor héréditaire témoignait de l'accomplissement social et à la limite de l'éternité sociale d'une situation acquise... Cette fonction d'inertie des objets, résultant en un statut durable, parfois

héréditaire, est aujourd'hui combattue par celle d'avoir à signifier le changement social. A mesure qu'on s'élève dans l'échelle sociale, les objets se multiplient, se diversifient, se renouvellent. Très vite d'ailleurs, leur circulation accélérée sous le signe de la mode en vient à signifier, à donner à voir une mobilité sociale qui n'existe pas réellement. C'est déjà le sens de certains mécanismes de substitution; on change de voiture faute de pouvoir changer d'appartement. Il est plus clair encore que le renouvellement accéléré des objets compense souvent une aspiration déçue à un progrès social et culturel.

36. For U.S. Blacks, blocked in so many ways from full participation in the society, the Cadillac became a substitute for freedom. They changed their car as a mechanism of substitution for being unable to change their human status.
37. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
38. Rarely have the effects of colonialism on the coloniser been studied. Yet the consequences must have been and still must be enormous.
39. F. Jameson, *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 30.
40. Cf. the technological power too (i.e., spells, charms) that Prospero is able to exercise over Caliban.
41. Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
42. Cf. Marx who speaks of the bourgeoisie's conviction that it owes *its* accumulation of capital to its own thrift and prudence:

Thus primitive accumulation plays in political economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple and hereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past. In times long gone there were two sort of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread from the sweat of his brow, but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential; Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work. Such insipid childishness is everyday preached to us in defence of property. (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter XXVI [London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930] pp. 713-714).

It is the same kind of insipid childishness that we get in the comment by the reviewer of Wallerstein's book in the *New York Review of Books*, April 1975:

Many economic historians will go on thinking that the real origins of capitalism were internal to Western Europe itself; and many students of underdevelopment will persist in doubting whether the vagaries of Latin American development, can all be attributed to Western exploitation (p. 28).

The original virtue of the West is the cause of its own Immaculate Conception; the original sin of Latin America is the cause of its immaculate underdevelopment!

43. Indeed, the use of the concept of binary opposition in thought can itself be ideological as Wilden points out in *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London:

Tavistock Publications, 1972). In the Surrealist-related movements of Afro-Cubanism, Harlem Renaissance, the then *problems* of Western culture created an adynation of the Other – the primitive – i.e., the black, the Indian, as concept to go in search of. Alejo Carpentier who had been involved in that exercise recanted in his novel *The Lost Steps*, (*Los Pasos Perdidos*, Mexico: Compania Geneval de Ediciones, 1967) arguing that artists of his generation had gone in the search for the primitive, not realizing that the artifacts, etc. of other cultures never had a primitive function for their creators, but were part of an ordered, articulated whole. It was the Crusoe/ Friday thing all over again, and remains a real danger for a conference and movement like this. Caribbean Negritude on the other hand, with Price Mars, whose research into Voodoo and Haitian folk culture attempted to come to terms with the different rationale – as Levi-Strauss would later comprehensively do – of the Other culture in all its complexity; and the levels of irony of Césaire’s famous poem *Return to My Native Land* – a finally *political* poem – come from the fact that in creating the concept of Negritude, he was contesting an implicit Western assumption of *Blanchitude*, (the term is Jacques Leenhardt’s) that created characteristics of its own negation in the *Negro*; so that Negritude took as much issue with this implicit concept of the *negro* as it did with the assumptions of *blanchitude*. The term itself with its abstract *-tude* took cognizance of the existence of the *black as abstract sign* rather than as *hombre de carne y hueso*.

It is here that the real danger – and the real promise of this conference – can lie. Ethnopoetics seen simply as the poetics of the Other, i.e. that which is Not the West, is transformed into the noble savage concept of *noble savage/ corrupt civilization* binary opposition which is itself part of the set which includes as its reversal civilized man/uncivilized not-quite man. Ethnopoetics placed in its social and historical context then constitutes a contradiction. To the poetics of the dominant strata – the West – it opposes the potentially creative poetics of a non-divided society of the future, a poetics developed by the most negated of those who suffer from the Western-imposed division *men/natives*. That is to say, a “binary opposition” which is not intrinsic to human thought (Leach) but which represents a real material split between the West and the rest of us, can only be overcome by concrete political action, to negate division. Wilden shows the cultural function of binary opposition, the way in which this is reduced to a biological explanation, and concludes “No matter what Leach intends, what he says is that all human thought, all human relationship, and all human experience are founded, in the last analysis, on opposition – which is precisely what the social ideology of the survival of the fittest also say.” (p. 424). Wilden’s book is of great importance to the thesis we are exploring. Beginning from Derrida’s attack on the ideological use of binary opposition, Wilden develops Derrida’s concept of the inextricable link between writing and *oral* speech, cf. p. 398: “Thus it is possible for Derrida to insist that writing, in the widest sense of the trace, the-gram, or the-graph, is the logical prerequisite for speech.” He then goes on: “In the cool civilization (he uses this term to avoid the ideological use of the term “primitive” or “archaic”) without writing as such, the past of the society – its memory, its set of instructions, its sacred text, is literally embodied in every domicile, in every person or group marked by a kinship term or by a taboo, in every person or group who exemplifies a ritual or who recalls a myth.” One begins to understand here the function of the dance, the drum, in the black oral tradition. In religious ceremonies in the Caribbean each particular god is codified by his own rhythm which summons him to the ceremony. Rhythm, music, in the black oral tradition in the New World, embodies and will embody the writing of that society. But this “writing” is concrete, not abstract. It is learnt *only through* living. Wilden writes: “Except in so far as the group plan of the village and/or various cultural objects and implements provide a minimal objective

memory for the survival of the organization of the society from generation to generation, the significant distinctions in such a society have to be maintained, reconstructed, represented, and in essence *RE-INVENTED IN THE VERY FLESH OF EACH GENERATION*. Every living member of the system is both a message in the code and a message which maintains the code, a message which retains and remembers a part of the code.” (p. 407). This is very relevant to my later development of the counter-poetics of the Blues and Jazz. Blues and Jazz reinvent in the context of the system of Black music, and are a form of communication, communicating areas of information/feeling suppressed in the larger society.

That is to say, that we do not posit the black oral tradition (or Ethnopoetics) as the negation of what is, of the Western *literate* tradition, Western poetics. That is what was done in the primitivist movements of the twenties. The *Other* was still seen as existing only to the extent that it revitalized Western Culture. The rationalism of the West was binarily opposed by Bergsonian intuition; and the non-West peoples were fitted on to the procrustean bed of negation. Hence Senghor’s fatuous Reason is European; intuition *negro!*

Hence the Jazz Age and the vogue of the Negro. Learning our lesson, we must be careful that we do not make a later version of the same mistakes where we seek in *oral* poetics for binary opposite qualities to *revitalize* Western poetics. Rather than binary opposition what we seek in other poetics are the areas which Western poetics by its imperative of conceptualizing itself in a concrete historical situation of dominance over all others, *bad to eliminate*. Cf. T. W. Adorno, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9:

The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are *non-conceptuality*, *individuality*, and *particularity* – things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant, and which Hegel labelled *lazy existenz*. Philosophy’s theme would consist of the qualities it downgrades as contingent, as a *quantité négligeable*. A matter of urgency to the concept would be what it fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept.

Bergson and Husserl, carriers of philosophical modernism, both have innervated this idea but withdrawn from it to traditional metaphysics. Bergson, in a tour de force, created another type of cognition for non-conceptuality’s sake... The hater of the rigid general concept established a cult of irrational immediacy, of sovereign freedom in the midst of unfreedom. He drafted his two cognitive modes in as dualistic an opposition to that of the Cartesian and Kantian doctrines as he thought had ever been; the casual mechanical mode, as pragmatic knowledge, was no more affected by the intuitive one than the bourgeois establishment was by the relaxed *unself-consciousness* of those who owe their privileges to that establishment... The celebrated intuitions themselves seem rather abstract in Bergson’s philosophy... Every cognition, including Bergson’s own, needs the rationality he scorns, and needs it precisely at the moment of concretion. It should be the purpose of this conference to *recover* from Other cultures the mode of rationality which does not eliminate *intuition*, but dialectically contains it. Levi Strauss’ *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), has been epoch-making in this regard. It was only by the most developed use of Western scientific procedure he argues that the West could grasp the mode in which “savage” thought thought itself. Cf. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 9:

He (Bergson) did not mind that the thing he groped for, if it is not to remain a mirage, is visible solely with the equipment of cognition, by reflection upon its own means, and that it grows arbitrary in a procedure unrelated, from the start, to that of cognition.