A FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
EDITED BY BENAMOU & ROTHENBERG
ALCHERINGA/BOSTON UNIVERSITY 1976
ethno poetics

a first international symposium

edited by Michel Benamou & Jerome Rothenberg

alcheringa/Boston University

1976
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Foreword

The contacts between poets and scholars which this publication records took place at the Center for 20th Century Studies of the University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee on April 10, 11, and 12, 1975. Jerome Rothenberg was in residence at the Center during that year, and it seemed a good idea to invite like-minded poet-scholars from a wide horizon to come together here. It was to be the first “academic” gathering in ethnopoetics (tentative definition: “the intersection between poetry and anthropology in our time” — N. Tarn), a hybrid field first named by Rothenberg in the pages of George Quasha’s Stony Brook magazine in 1968 and carried forward by Rothenberg and Tedlock when they founded Alcheringa in 1970. To this end we invited seven participants to address themselves to the question, “What is ethnopoetics?” and something beyond that number to handle specifics in the form of “workshops” and “performances.”

Most of that material has been salvaged and expanded, and a selection emphasizing theory is presented here with the kind permission of the authors. In preparation for what we hoped to be a more full “proceedings,” we also transcribed the tapes of the key discussions which followed the larger and smaller addresses, but reasons of space have prevented us from publishing these. In addition we have been unable to include the following talks and papers: Albert Cook, The Relation of Myth to Artful Language; Richard and Nora Dauenhauer, The Ubiquitous Footnote: Ethnopoetics and Tlingit Song Translation; Stanley Diamond, “The Poet as Primitive” (oral presentation only); Charles Doria, The Orphic Sacred Stories and Its Relation to Ancient Religion and Mystery Cult; Nicolas Kanellos, New York Puerto Rican Poetry: Performance, Participation, Relevance; Maximilian Laroche, Pouvoir du Noir of Roland Giguiere, or Poetry as Ideological Critique (translated by Nancy Egan); Alejandro Murguia, Roots and Themes of Chicano Literature; Pauline Oliveros, Crow 2 (talk and electronic performance); Roy Harvey Pearce, Ethnopoetics and the Curriculum (oral presentation only); Sherley Williams, The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry.” It is our hope to bring all of these together in a larger, still projected work.

For now the papers we have selected will speak for ethnopoetics. What is missing, of course, from any printed version is the energy and atmosphere of the occasion itself, in particular the four nights of performances organized with the help of Jerome Rothenberg and the support of the School of Fine Arts under Dean Robert Corrigan. Among the events that lent real luster to the symposium were readings by Tarn, Rothenberg, Henderson, Waldman, and Snyder; the drums of the Potawatomi Singers; the Neo-Rican humor and poetics of Victor Hernandez Cruz; Cree stories performed by Howard Norman; Acoma coyote narratives by Simon Ortiz; Apache rites by Inez Talamanes; Tlingit works by Nora and Richard Dauenhauer; David Antin’s improvised “talk-poem”; Charlie Morrow’s animal and healing pieces; and the constant interplay and dialogue among those gathered here.

It is almost impossible to do justice to all who helped us in the preparations, but I wish to express special thanks to my colleagues, particularly Rodolfo Cortina and Sidney Greenfield for their guidance in Hispanic literature and anthropology; to Anthony Graham-White for his suggestions about performers and performance; to my collaborators at the Center, Douglas Cameron who juggled the many workshops as well as preparing a bibliography, Nancy Egan Cameron and Carol Tenessen for help with the translations, Jane Butler who was program coordinator, Diane Rothenberg who supervised the transcription and editing of the discussions, and Deborah Morse as copy editor for the anthology itself. I am also deeply grateful to Boston University and Alcheringa, as publishers, and to the dedication of Paul Kahn, who managed the actual transition into print. And, finally, I want to extend thanks to the Deans of the College of Letters and Science and of the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee, who have faithfully supported the Center and its endeavors.

After the 1975 ethnopoetics events here, the question is no longer to ask what the dominant disciplines can do for the understanding of the dominated cultures of ethnopoetics, but to ask what the combined disciplines and practices of ethnopoetics can do for the understanding of our own self-colonized culture. It is my hope that this first collection, the partial proceedings of the April 1975 Symposium, contributes in some measure to that cultural self-understanding.

Michel Benamou
Center for 20th Century Studies
University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee
I have quoted that before, but it bears repeating, as a sketch, a mapping, of a ground, a field I think he'd say, we all can share or enter into.

The term that distinguishes our part of that total effort, that common, intense yearning, desire, for something else, that symposium of the whole, is ethnos. All such terms are relative, & ethnos wasn't always what we would now take it to be, not an expression of what we are as groups in isolation, centering, orbiting around ourselves, but an expression instead of otherness, a sign that points from what we are or may become to what we aren't, haven't thought ourselves to be, may fear or scorn (as in that older "hierarchy of higher forms"), or in the present instance, freed from the myth of our divine election, is what we long for, need, toward the completion of our being human. At that earlier time then, ethnos meant nation, people, group, or race, not as this nation ("us") but as those nations ("them" or "others"). It was the Greek equivalent for gentiles, goyim, pagan, heathen—that last work (not ethnos itself but a word mistaken for it) meaning people of the heath, the countryside, the wilderness, the unclaimed land, the ones in nature, natural, the lower foreign orders set apart from us, apart from cities, blocks to human progress, ancients, primitives, the fathers or the mothers we must kill, the poets (Plato said) whom we must drive out of our cities, out of our bodies & minds in point of fact, those who scorn the new god, the abstraction, unity, the unconflicted single truth we worship. Ethnopoetics is not a new construction, then, but the reminder of an older truth or linkage: that poetry itself is this, the very language of the ethnoi, in the equation Plato makes. As poets we are them.

Poetics is the second key term here, the clincher, which makes of this a far different meeting than it would be with the other term alone. Poetics. Poetry, the process of. To take that as a process of cognition, of creation in that sense: knowing, coming into knowing where we are. To say, articulate, our sense of being in the world, however changeful, dangerous, & slippery. It has been said so many times by poets &
other reasonable (I would stress the reasonable) people, who have struggled to make, create, an instrument of language, discourse, art, to map the changes, to facilitate them, live in the hope of transformation, of a deepened, heightened, sense of who we are & where: where we have come from, where we're going. We aren't the first poets to ask the questions. They were asked before, as in the Seneca story which began:

A man who was a crow was traveling. He didn't know where he had come from or which way he was going. As he moved along he kept on thinking: "How did I come to be alive? Where did I come from? Where am I going?"

He asked that, you see, but already he had become, he was, a crow. Are there those today who can transform, can change, that easily, who participate in multiple identities, whose ethnopoetics is a biopoetics also? There is a mystery in that, a process to be uncovered & learned, not as "our identification in a hierarchy of higher forms" but (Duncan again) in our "identification with the universe."

In that process, of which the ethnopoetics forms a part, we break with the immediate, inherited past & find resources for our search, our meeting with the future, in something vastly older: the "nature-related cultures," as Snyder calls them, with their roots back to the Paleolithic & the Dream-time. If that was an intention of the new poetry all along, it is no wonder that the unmediated image, resonant with an older unity, beckoned to the Surrealists, say, in dream & myth. No wonder either that one like Ezra Pound, engaged in a process not all that different, wrote: "The undeniable tradition of metamorphoses teaches us that things do not remain always the same. They become other things by swift & unanalyzable process. It was only when men began to mistrust the myths & to tell nasty lies about the Gods for a moral purpose that these matters became hopelessly confused."

It is this questioning, questionning, of forms that brings us to the possibility of an ethnopoetics: a poetry of sources, of a fundamental human nature. If the present search began, say, with the Romantics, it was only that they called, recalled, our attention to a late European version of a crisis felt already in the first civilizations, the first organized states—not only in the West but everywhere (Africa, Asia, the ancient Americas, & so on) that those conditions have arisen. It's that crisis, that split in the mind, the spirit, between nature & culture, wilderness & city, that turned up in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, where the city was, already had become, the place where "man dies oppressed at heart / man perishes with despair in his heart / looks over the wall & sees / dead bodies floating on the river" — so turns back to wilderness, at once old home & new forbidden kingdom.

Division in nature. Division in species. Division in self. The process continued, made of the poet himself an outsider—he who had once been seer, guide. At worst he would become a lackey of the state, become what Plato had demanded of us for admission to the Ideal City. But more often an outsider: part of an underground with others, though still tuned, hopefully, to the possibilities of process, even survival, as a game of changing vantages, perspectives on the real. So the poet, the artist, is into our own time the one who is "perpetually recovering his primitivism," as Stanley Diamond describes him: his ability to see, to think concretely, to sustain contradictions. Transformative. Ambiguous. "The chameleon poet," as Keats named him, who recalls us to the vision of the shaman-trickster, so begins again the work of transformation. But not alone. "We live," Charles Olson wrote nearly two decades ago, "in an age in which inherited literature is being hit from two sides, from contemporary writers who are laying bases of new discourse at the same time that...scholars are making available...texts which are themselves eye-openers." (In brief, the forces we have brought together here.)

And that much is already a fact. Ethnopoetics, as one practical strategy for what Tarn calls "totalization," already exists. So we don't have to invent it here, but to discuss the complexities, the very real problems, of presentation and definition, from our own often different perspectives: as poets, anthropologists, artists, musicians, linguists, aestheticians, human beings who share between us multiple origins & identities. This, it seems to me, has hardly been done yet. Those in the "vanguards" have tended to remain separate, sometimes hardly aware of each other or each other's work. Some have felt, still feel, that the separation should continue, that even this small attempt at conversation is wasted effort, or worse: that you can only academicize the poet's work by speaking of it, as you can only destroy other cultures in the attempt to bridge them. That separation & that silence seem wrong, unnatural, to me.
And while I don’t want to exaggerate the importance of the “dialogue” we may be launching, or to make us feel that the move to a new poetry or life (including the sense of a new ethnos) depends on what we say here, I believe that the time for some deliberate exchange of information & ideas is long past—at least to keep us honest & to challenge our natural descent into platitude & slogan.

I hope at the same time that we can be aware of other challenges, of the discomforts already caused by the introduction (in a variety of ways) of an altered sense of ethnos. What we’ve been saying, those of us who have been pushing for a renewed poetic & human base, may seem self-evident from within this group. It may also coincide enough with social movements of great moral, political force to make open attacks on it infrequent. Or it may be accepted by schools & other established centers as a separate, isolated specialty, which doesn’t involve invasions of the old curriculum or assaults on the “hierarchy of higher forms.” But our strategy—for poetry in general or ethnopoetry in particular—shouldn’t be to rest with trivial concessions, but to continue to push for a confrontation all along the line: to smoke out the opposition, which is still strong, still entrenched, however much it plays a strategy of silence.

So I recently read with great interest an attack on America a Prophecy, the anthology I co-edited with George Quasha as an attempt to alter the range of our poetics in America—to celebrate the poetry already there—including but not confined to ethnopoetics. The attack is very clear, & it sets forth a fundamental question about poetry & much else in America (& with some change of terms, elsewhere in the world). The attacker this time is Donald Davie, & the attack, unlike some others, comes in the name of poets like Pound & Olson, though the misreading of both men (maybe the slavish reading in Pound’s case) is, for the time in which it appears, extraordinary, even pathological. Normally I wouldn’t want to go at something like this out of context, but Davie includes a summary sentence, which I would accept as setting the parameters for the conflict he proposes. What he says is:

...the crucial question confronting American culture right now is whether it conceives white civilization in America to date from 1776 if not 1620 (as Pound and Olson thought), or whether on the contrary it goes back effectively only to c. 1860 and the Open Door policy (as Rothenberg and Quasha seem to think).

The question here is very precisely put, though a prior one might be whether it’s still viable to project America as a “white civilization,” to single that out as an interest worth most favored status (as Davie seems to think). In this regard one remembers Olson writing to Creeley, “I have no doubt, say, that the American will more & more repossess himself of the Indian past”—one of the many instances of his dispute with the “European distinction.” Aside from that, Davie’s dates are instructive: 1620, which was not the time of the first White invasions, but of the first Anglo-White settlements. And “c. 1860 and the Open Door policy” that brought the great influx of non-English speaking Europeans—us other “ethnics” qua foreigners in that “hierarchy of higher forms.”

I hope, anyway, that you’ll just note that for the moment, & not assume, because most of us here are likely on the other side of it, that Davie’s position isn’t very widespread. I hope too that the differences between some of us in this symposium—differences that the meetings should bring out—won’t obscure his message & the common threat it represents.

NOTE. The “Pre-Face” then moved on to my written answers to a series of questions on ethnopoetics, etc., raised by William Spanos in Boundary 2 — answers I had completed just before the conference. They have since appeared in print (Boundary 2, Volume III, Number 3, 1975). — J.R.
2. July 1975

[Another key issue of ethnopoetics is the way it coincides with the movement of much contemporary poetry into the area of performance—in fact a widespread act of re-oralization. A few months after the symposium, I was able to complete the considerations begun in April & to read, talk & perform my way around the question of “poetry & performance.” The occasion was the annual meeting of the American Theater Association in Washington, D.C., & what follows is a composition from notes & tapes.]

There is a Seneca Indian song, a song that is part of a medicine society & ceremony called “shaking the pumpkin” or “the society of the mystic animals” or “the society of shamans,” which I have translated elsewhere in a more elaborate form than I will give here. But it is a key, in what it says, to the bewilderment I feel at where my own poetry & the poetry of my generation has taken me—to this place, for example, where I am to be celebrating a poetry of performance in our time tied up in some ways we have yet to define to a poetry of performance in those cultures we may think of as “primitive” or “primary” or “primal.” The words of the Seneca song, which I translated with the Seneca singer, Richard Johnny John, go like this (the title is our own addition):

I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND MYSELF OUT HERE & ACTING LIKE A CROW

I didn’t think I’d shake the pumpkin not just here & now not exactly tonight

I didn’t think I’d rip some meat off not just here & now not exactly tonight

Now, I had not shaken the pumpkin before, had not sung before or sung before to a rattle: I had not done any of these things & it would have seemed foolish to me then to have done them. It did seem foolish but at a point I was doing them & it no longer seemed foolish, seemed necessary if anything I had said about it before had a meaning. My own origins, from which I had been running for most of my grown life, should have told me as well, if I had been able then to give them my attention, for the living tradition of the Jews is also “oral,” from the mouth, & even in an age of writing, the word must be renewed by the processes of “speaking” & of “sounding.” So Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai said (in the century that began the dangerous process of writing down a large body of the still existing “oral tradition,” the records of discourse called THE MISHNAH): “He who reads without melody & repeats without song, concerning him the scripture says: therefore I also gave them statutes which were not to their advantage.” It is by this sounding & voicing (this near eruption into song) that the attention is brought to focus on the sources of the poem, the song, the discourse, in the prior act of composition (making or receiving), which was itself an act of focusing attention. In creating that attention, that intensity, the Senecas, who are otherwise as removed as we are from the primitive condition, begin the ceremony by invoking those “mystic animals” who were the first keepers of the song, who came once in a vision to a hunter lost & wounded in the woods, to cure him & to leave him with a set of keys by which to summon them again. The ceremony begins in darkness, then the rattle sounds, & makes a kind of light, a heat, that moves around the circle of those joined in the performance.

(At this point there follows a chanting, with rattle, of the opening songs to “Shaking the Pumpkin,” translated by myself & Richard Johnny John.)

Now, what has happened here, at least for me, is not a separated series of events or actions but a totality that I no longer want to break into its component parts: to isolate the words, say, as the poem. For my experience is the experience of everything that happens to me in that act: the movement of my arm, the sound (& feel) of pebbles against horn, the way that breaks across my voice, the tension in my throat, the full release of breath, the emptying that leaves me weak & ready to receive the next song, the song occurring, rising out of memory, becoming voice, becoming sound, becoming physical again, & then returning into silence. And it is also this room, this time & place, these others here with me. The event is different from the event of composition.
(in this case, to further complicate the matter, involves a second composition-by-translation), but the poem is everything-that-happens: & if it is, then to insist that it is only part of it (the words), is to mistake the event, to miss that total presence.

Before I am anything else, I am a poet & (living in the time I do) a stand-up performer of my own poetry. It is better for me to do poetry than to talk about it. I do it first & then I sound it: this is doing it a second time, a third a fourth a fifth time, to renew it by the sounding. My performance is this sounding of a poem: it is renewal of the poem, the poem’s enlivening. Without this sounding there would be no poem as I have come to do it (though, since I work by writing, there would be notes about the poem as I intended it). This is the return to voice, to song, as the poet Gary Snyder speaks of it: it is one side of the impulse towards the oral, towards a poetry of performance, as is that other side, discourse, that the poet David Antin speaks of. Poetry becomes the sounding—not the script apart, the preparation or notation, but the sounding. Where there is no writing, the sounding truly renews the poem, creates it in each instance, for here there is no poem without performance. Writing, that strange aid to memory, eventually becomes its surrogate, displaces memory itself—the last, great Muse. The poetry sounding becomes the poetry reading. This is the condition under which most of us work. If others would go more deeply into orality, would bring composition & performance together in a single improvised event, that would also be welcome. But I would like to describe it as it now is for me & why I have sought my model of the poem-as-performance (the poem in action) in the domain of what I came to call the “ethnopoetic.”

As a stand-up performer the poet retains a solitary stance. He is in no way the playwright of the old verse dramas, but the central (typically the only) figure in the performance in which he must play a part. The part he plays is the poet-as-himself, performing in a theater as yet without an actor — or much of anything else besides what the poet brings: words & a voice. The difference between the poet & the actor is somehow crucial: the basis of the poetry performance is in fact hostile to the presence, the manner, of the professional actor. That the poet as performer is otherwise motivated, otherwise related to the poem, is here a shared assumption: an insistence on a lack of separation between the maker & his work, & of a virtual innocence of any means of performance beyond the ones immediately to hand. The poet’s delivery may vary, he may read easily or he may falter, he may digress, he may drift at times into a drunken incoherence, he may fulfill or disappoint our expectations of how a poem is spoken. Somehow it is enough that he has risked himself to do as much as he can do: to stand there as a witness to his words, he who alone can sound them. That kind of witnessing is not without its precedents, as in the sounding of the written “law” within the ancient Jewish Temple, where the reader (sounder) was the witness to the meaning of a text devoid of vowels. It is one arrangement (there are others) that maintains the oral basis of a poetry, its openness, once we have entered on an age of writing. In the poetry of our own time, with its use of an approximate & highly individualized notation, the measure of a poem (& much of its meaning) is likewise only clear when it is being sounded: in this case sounded by its maker. The poet when he sounds his poem is witness to the way it goes, the way it came to happen in the first place. He is in fact the witness to a (prior) vision, to an image-of-the-world expressed through word & sound. The failure to communicate is a failure to communicate his credibility: his own relation to those words, that vision. The actor may attempt to take his place (& in certain kinds of theater today the actors have become the makers & the sounders of their own words), but as a witness to the poet’s words the actor’s credibility has yet to be established.

There is a widespread idea that the poets of our time, the artists in general, have abandoned the possibility of relating to poets of other times as models: that we live without a vision of ourselves as historical beings but are locked into an eternal present, not so much an opportunity as a trap. I have never seen our condition in those terms — have rather seen us as freeing ourselves, on the basis of conditions in the world itself, to a wider, more generous view of the past, of the historical totality of human experience, than has ever been possible. This process has been going on at least from the time of the Romantics, & it has produced a number of new images, new models or visions, of the past, from
which we now can draw. (Like any historical search, it functions to heighten our awareness of the present & the future.)

Increasingly the model, the prototype, of the poet has become the “shaman”; the solitary, inspired religious functionary of the late paleolithic. Partly this has been because of our own involvement with the kind of solitary, stand-up performance that I was just describing. But there is also a second side to it: the visionary & ecstatic, & a third perhaps: the communal. I will not concentrate on the last two (although they are in some ways the real heart of the matter) but will try to focus on the shaman's (proto-poet's) way of going / speaking / singing: his performance. In a deeper, if often more confused sense, what is involved here is the search for a primal ground: a desire to bypass a civilization that has become problematic & to return, briefly, often by proxy, to the origins of our humanity. Going back in time we continue to find diversity & yet, maybe because we're looking at it from the wrong end, the picture emerges of an intertribal, universal culture (& behind it a poetics) that has a number of discernible, defineable features. The most direct inheritors of this culture—up to their virtual disappearance in our time—are those hunting & gathering peoples, remnants of whom now exist as an endangered & ultimately doomed “fourth world.” Far from being mere “wild men,” mere fantacizing children, they had a world-view marked (Paul Radin tells us) by a strong sense of realism (“reality at white heat”) or, according to Stanley Diamond, “(by) modes of thinking (that) are substantially concrete, existential & nominalistic, within a personalistic context” & supremely able to “sustain contradictions.”

Here the dominant religious functionary is the shaman: he is the one who sees / the one who sings / the one who heals. He is not yet the bard, the tribal historian. He is not necessarily the speaker. He is typically withdrawn: experiences long periods of silence, other periods of exaltation. He may inherit his words, his songs, from others or he may come on them directly in a vision or a trance. He may be a prolific song-maker or he may be constantly renewing a small, fixed body of song. He may have helpers, but typically he works alone. He may improvise within the actual performance of his rites, but more often he will sound, will activate, the words or song delivered at another time & place.

So, among us the poet has come to play a performance role that resembles that of the shaman. (This is more than coincidence because there is an underlying ideology: communal, ecological, even historical: an identification, as Gary Snyder has it, with late paleolithic ideology & organization, seen as surviving in the “great subcultures” within the later city-states, civilizations, etc.) The poet like the shaman typically withdraws to solitude to find his poem or vision, then returns to sound it, give it life. He performs alone (or very occasionally with assistance, as in the work of Jackson Mac Low, say), because his presence is considered crucial & no other specialist has arisen to act in his place. He is also like the shaman in being at once an outsider, yet a person needed for the validation of a certain kind of experience important to the group. And even in societies otherwise hostile or indifferent to poetry as “literature,” he may be allowed a range of deviant, even anti-social behavior that many of his fellow-citizens do not enjoy. Again like the shaman, he will not only be allowed to act mad in public, but he will often be expected to do so. The act of the shaman — & his poetry — is like a public act of madness. It is like what the Senecas, in their great dream ceremony now obsolete, called “turning the mind upside down.” It shows itself as a release of alternative possibilities. “What do they want?” the poet wonders of those who watch him in his role of innocent, sometimes reluctant performer. But what? To know that madness is possible & that the contradictions can be sustained. From the first shaman — that solitary person — it flows out to whole companies of shamans, to whole societies of human beings: it heals the sickness of the body but more than that: the sickness of the soul. It is a “mode of thinking” & of acting that is “substantially concrete, existential & nominalistic, within a personalistic context” & “supremely able to sustain contradictions.” It is the primal exercise of human freedom against/& for the tribe.

Now, as many questions are left as are answered. Does the poem really heal? Or what kind of poem or song, or discourse, does heal—or sustain contradictions—or turn the mind upside down? What is the basis for seeing in cultures & poetries so far removed from us the kind of conjunctions I have so far assumed? And if the move from the “oral” to the
"literal" was tied up, as I believe it was, with the need of an emergent class of rulers for a more rigorous arrangement of society, why should we now expect a movement in the opposite direction? It is as yet hard to say, for our whole poetics (not just our ethnopoetics) is, like our life in general, up for grabs. What do we say about the function of our poetry, the thing we do? That it explores. That it initiates thought or action. That it proposes its own displacement. That it allows vulnerability & conflict. That it remains, like the best science, constantly open to change: to a continual change in our idea of what a poem is or may be. What language is, What experience is. What reality is. That for many of us it has become a fundamental process for the play & interchange of possibilities.

And it has come out of a conflict—more or less deeply felt—with inherited forms of poetry, literature, language, discourse: not in every instance but where these are recognized as repressive structures, forms of categorical thinking that act against that other free play of possibilities just alluded to. Against these inherited forms, the conventional literature that no longer fed us, we have both searched for & invented other forms. Some of us have doggedly gone from there to a re-viewing of the entire poetic past (of any poetry for that matter outside the immediate neighborhood) from the point of view of the present. Here there are two processes involved—not mutually exclusive. On the one hand the contemporary forms (the new means that we invent) make older forms visible: & on the other hand the forms that we uncover elsewhere help us in the reshaping, the resharpening, of our own tools. The past, come alive, is in motion with us. It is no longer somewhere else but, like the future, here—which is the only way it can be, towards a poetry of changes.
The Politics Of Ethnopoetics

I chose the title “Politics of Ethnopoetics” half in jest and half because you can say politics about almost anything and get away with it. Some of it, I suppose, genuinely is politics. This “politics” is fundamentally the question of what occidental and industrial technological civilization is doing to the earth. The earth: (I’m just going to remind us of a few facts), is 57 million square miles, 3.7 billion human beings, evolved over the last 4 million years; plus, 2 million species of insects, 1 million species of plants, 20 thousand species of fish, and 8,700 species of birds; constructed out of 97 naturally occurring surface elements with the power of the annual solar income of the sun. That is a lot of diversity.

Yesterday, (who was it), David Antin, I believe, told how the Tragedarians asked Plato to let them put on some tragedies. Plato said, “Very interesting, gentlemen, but I must tell you something. We have prepared here the greatest tragedy of all. It is called The State.”

From a very early age I found myself standing in an indefinable awe before the natural world. An attitude of gratitude, wonder, and a sense of protection especially as I began to see the hills being bulldozed down for roads and the forests of the Pacific Northwest magically float away on logging trucks. I grew up in a rural family in the state of Washington. My grandfather was a homesteader in the Pacific Northwest. The economic base of the whole region was and is essentially logging. In trying to grasp the dynamics of what was happening, rural state of Washington, 1930’s, depression, white boy out in the country, German on one side, Scotch-Irish on the other side, radical, that is to say, sort of grass roots union, I.W.W., and socialist-radical parents, I found nothing in their orientation, (critical as it was of American politics and economics), that could give me an access to understanding what was happening. I had to find that through reading and through imagination, which led me into a variety of politics, Marxist, Anarchist, and onwards.

This brings me now to a point where I would like to think of the possibility of a new humanities. Humanities, remember, being a Renaissance — post-Renaissance way of looking at the question of how to shake man loose from the theological vision of the Middle Ages. But I can’t think about our situation in anything less than a fifty thousand year time scale. Fifty thousand years is not very long. If we wanted to talk about hominid evolution we’d have to work with something like four million years. Fifty thousand years is a useful working time scale because we can be sure that through the whole of that period man has been in the same body and in the same mind that he is now. All the evidence we have indicates that imagination, intuition, intellect, wit, decision, speed, skill, was fully developed fifty thousand years ago. In fact, it may be that we were a little smarter fifty thousand years ago since brain size has somewhat declined on the average from that high point of Cro-Magnon. It is interesting that even the average size of the Neanderthal skull, (whom most people have a rather unflattering image of), indicates larger brain size than modern man. We don’t know why brain size declined. It probably has something to do with “society,” if you want to blame it on something. Society providing buffers and protection of an increasingly complicated order so that as it became larger in scope, and populations larger in size, it protected individuals from those demands for speed, skill, knowledge, and intelligence that were common in the Upper Paleolithic. The personal direct contact interface with the natural world required of hunters and gatherers — men and women both.

What we are witnessing in the world today is an unparalleled waterfall of destruction of a diversity of human cultures; plant species; animal species; of the richness of the biosphere and the millions of years of organic evolution that have gone into it. In a sense ethnopoetics is like some field of zoology which is studying disappearing species. We must have a concern with this because our subject matter is rapidly disappearing and we, (and I mean “we” to mean everyone, regardless of his color or ethnic background, who is now plugged in to the fossil fuel industrial society, we are all that “we”), we are the
ones who are in some inexorable, karmic, historical way responsible for its going down.

Four thousand different languages and cultures about the year 1900, also being swept away in the inexorable push towards monoculture. Monoculture has had two specific kinds of fuelling in the last six thousand years. In that fifty thousand year time scale, which I was speaking of, the major part, and here I owe a great deal to Dr. Stanley Diamond for my sense of this, the major part of man’s interesting career has been spent as a hunter and gatherer, in primary cultures. As recently as 12,000 years ago, agriculture began to play a small part in some corners of the world. It’s only in the last couple of millenia that agriculture has really penetrated widely. Civilization, 8,000 years old, class structure, surplus wealth accumulation, literate societies which on balance in that total represent a very small part of human experience; literacy representing an even tinier part of human experience since it’s only been in the last two centuries that any sizable proportion of any civilized country has had much literacy. Thus oral literature, the ballad, the folktale, myth, the songs, the subject matter of “ethnopoetics” has been the major literary experience of mankind, like about 98 percent as against 2 percent or probably even a smaller percentage. Understanding that, it becomes all the more poignant when we realize that the richness is being swept away.

Now, in the first issue of Alcheringa, Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock made a statement of intention which I’d like to refer back to because it also seems to me that gathering here in this way, almost five years later, we can take a look back and see how those original stated intentions of Alcheringa seem to us now and how we’ve worked with them. Eight points in this statement. “As the first magazine of the world’s tribal poetics, Alcheringa will not be a scholarly journal of ‘ethnopoetics,’ so much as a place where tribal poetry can appear in English translation and can act (in the oldest and newest of poetic traditions) to change men’s minds and lives.” Note that, “to change men’s minds and lives.” “While its sources will be different from other poetry magazines it will be aiming at the struggling and revelatory presentation that has been common to our avant-gardes. Along the way we hope: (1) by exploring the full range of man’s poieties to enlarge our understanding of what a poem may be; (2) to provide a ground for experiments in the translation of tribal/oral poetry and a forum to discuss the possibilities and problems of translation from widely divergent cultures; (3) to encourage poets to participate actively in the translation of tribal/oral poetry; (4) to encourage ethnologists and linguists to do work increasingly ignored by academic publications in their fields, namely to present the tribal poieties as values in themselves, rather than as ethnographic data; (5) to be a vanguard for the initiation of cooperative projects along these lines between poets, ethnologists, songmen, and others; (6) to return to complex/‘primitive’ systems of poetry, as (intermedia) performance, etc., and to explore ways of presenting these in translation; (7) to emphasize by example and commentary the relevance of tribal poetry to where we are today; (8) to combat cultural genocide in all of its manifestations.”

I think that most of us understand what has happened in regard to those areas of interaction described in points 2 through 7 over the last four or five years, so I’m going to concentrate my comments on the two points “combat cultural genocide” and “what a poem may be.”

To combat cultural genocide one needs a critique of civilization itself, and some thought about what happens when “crossing barriers” takes place; when different, small, relatively self-sufficient cultures begin to contact each other, and that interaction becomes stepped up by a historical process of growing populations, growing accumulation of surplus wealth and so forth. It’s probably true that there’s a certain basic cross-cultural distrust in small societies that is resolvable through trade, exchange, or periodic gambling games, festivities, and singing together. The sheer fact of distance alone, physical distance between two groups, between two households, makes one group think of those other people as “the others.”

The real arms race starts maybe with bronze weapons and certainly with iron. Raeding cultures emerge; that is the first turbulent kind of interface. Some people quit farming and hunting, and take up raiding for a living. This goes on today, in what Ray Dasmann calls the relationship between ecosystem cultures and biosphere cultures. Ecosystem cultures being those whose economic base of support is a natural region, a watershed, a plant zone, a natural territory within which they have to make their whole living. Living within the terms of an ecosystem, out
of self-interest if nothing else, you are careful. You don’t destroy the soils, you don’t kill all the game, you don’t log it off and let the water wash the soil away. Biosphere cultures are the cultures that begin with early civilization and the centralized state; are cultures that spread their economic support system out far enough that they can afford to wreck one ecosystem, and keep moving on. Well, that’s Rome, that’s Greece. It may be Babylon. It’s just a big enough spread that you can begin to be irresponsible about certain specific local territories. It leads us to imperialist civilization with capitalism and institutionalized economic growth. The first energy hit, to go back again to those two fuelings of monoculture, the first was slavery. The energy we operate by fundamentally is the annual solar income, via agrarian or natural hunting and gathering modes of receiving it plus your labor — man for man, woman for woman, labor. Slavery becomes the first energy hit to speed things up a bit.

The next big energy hit is fossil fuels. Fossil fuels from the 1880’s and not earlier really, literally responsible for the explosion of all growth curves and consumption curves we see in the world today. Impelled by and running parallel with a pre-established ideology of economic growth, but the two much reinforcing each other.

Within that context, we have a number of intellectual human beings especially of the occidental world that, parallel with the world-wide spread of occidental trading habits also became students of those things (and without involving ourselves at this point much into the argument of whether or not anthropology is always imperialism) we can’t help but see it as a culturally related factor. The very fact of anthropological curiosity is a function of being a member of an expanding civilization. The opposite of that, or the contrast to that, is to be in a cultural situation where you will not have any particular interest in what other peoples’ cultural habits are, but simply, hopefully, respect them. In Zen Buddhism they say, “mise mono ja nai,” which means this is not something we show to people. No radio interviews, no tapings, no videos, no movies, no visitors are permitted in Zen training establishments. It’s not for show. It’s open to everyone who wishes to participate but it’s not for show. That is the sense that insiders have in their own culture as members. They see people who come to them wanting to study (but not participate) as strangely floating around on the surface. We can begin to imagine how weird our anthropological efforts must look to people who are in that other kind of culture which is ecosystem based and deeply rooted in its own identity while not doubting in the least the humanity of other human beings.

So, just as a brief exercise I’d like to tackle this thing about “combat cultural genocide.” How do we combat cultural genocide? Has Alcheringa combatted cultural genocide within the last five years? Have any of us in any focussed way combatted cultural genocide? Where is cultural genocide taking place? Let’s take Brazil. We can talk about Brazil. In a recent issue of Critical Anthropology, the magazine of Marxist anthropology that Dr. Diamond has been associated with over the last few years from the New School, we have an article where Dr. Jack Stauder makes these suggestions to fellow teachers about how to take certain simple academic steps in the right direction. He says, if you’re going to be an anthropology teacher you should be also able to teach your students the dynamics of their own culture, at least in the critical area of understanding imperialism and capitalism. If you can’t communicate that to your students, then you’ve got no business talking to them about the Xingu. If you can’t explain the banking system, well, where are you? He says an anthropologist should be able to teach members of an oppressed culture the dynamics of imperialism, and useful economic understanding, in so far as they want to learn it. I know people who don’t want to put their heads into those occidental categories, but if they want to learn it they should be helped. It’s the difference between being victimized or being the master of the situation: to simply understand how things work. Dr. Stauder suggests that an anthropologist should play an active political role in her own society. And that we should ally ourselves to peoples’ struggles everywhere.

Now, let’s take Brazil, which is only one case in point on the globe but a very powerful one. People are of course oppressed everywhere, and the destruction of small traditions is taking place in countries of all degrees of complexity. The Brazilian case is particularly touching because it’s probably there that the last primary human beings in the world live: a few small groups apparently, that have not yet even been contacted by all of this recent 8,000 year nonsense. Two hundred and fifty known tribes existed in Brazil in 1900: eighty-seven have become extinct. Between
1900 and 1957 the Indian populations in Brazil dropped from over one million to less than two hundred thousand persons. The population of Brazilian Indians in the Amazon basin is now estimated at less than fifty thousand. Nambiquara, Cintas Largas, Kadiweu, Bororo, Waura, for example. This destruction is backed by large multi-national corporations. The second largest investor in Brazil is Volkswagen. Volkswagen apparently does not want to convert its western hemisphere profits all back into Euro-dollars, so it’s heavily invested in the development of cattle range in the Brazilian jungle, destruction of forests and replacement of that by grasses to feed the affluent taste for beef of the people of North America. Another is Georgia Pacific, in timber, a company which is also deforesting some of the finest remaining virgin tropical forests of the Philippines on contracts with the Philippine government which gives them a free hand to cut without any forestry thought at all. Reotinto Zinc, Litton Industries doing aerial surveys and mapping, Caterpillar Tractor in vast contracts for pushing out the jungle, going directly across the Xingu park. The Brazilian official statement is, “We think the only way for the Indians to improve their health, education and begin self-development is through development.” Now, before you laugh, ask yourself this question: Do you have a good answer to that argument? Do you want to take the position that the Indians of Brazil should be placed in a national park with a fence around it and have absolutely no contact with the civilized world at all? How do you answer that? I know as a student of anthropology in the 1950’s at Reed College in Oregon I became convinced (following along the lines of what my teachers were saying) that the traditional cultures of the world were doomed. We could study them, we could try to preserve what we could find of their languages, customs, myths, folktales, ethno-botanic knowledge and so forth, but it would be quixotic to think that we should invest any political effort in the actual defense of their cultural integrity because the assumption was almost automatic that there was a melting pot process of assimilation (that was probably o.k.) underway and what we had to look for at the other end of the tunnel was a hopeful, international, one world, humane modernism, fuelled with liberal and Marxist ideas. But Marxists, granted the precision of their critique on most points, often have a hard time thinking clearly about primitive cultures, and the usual tendency is to assume that they should become civilized. Right? So I’ll come back in a moment to what I think is maybe one way to approach an answer to that question, why do you say that they should be developed? You want to keep them from having aspirin? Or is it even possible?

These strange contradictions. In Argentina there’s a national park. One of the groups of the Mapuche lives there. The forest huts are deteriorating, not owing to laziness but because the park service decrees that no wood may be cut or gathered by the Indians. Surrounded by forest yet disallowed wood and fined if they should dare to cut any. The government provides bundled firewood, but never enough.

I’m going to read a few more notes just to remind us of the attitudes we run up against. These are quotations from Argentina, but I have heard the same thing said in Montana, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, northern California, central Oregon and so forth. Talking about the people called the Mapuche. A colonel of German origin, “Are you going to write about them? They’re alcoholics and they sleep with their own daughters.” A store owner of Arab origin, “But don’t worry for them. I hope they die. You had better concern yourself that there will be a good road built.” A restaurant owner, “I don’t understand them. They starve but they are also so proud that they don’t want to become dishwashers.” A lawyer with a tourist agency, “The Curruhuincas live marvelously without any shortages at all, by God, you and I would wish we had the same.” A high official of Park Nationale, “What do you want to say about prohibiting their goats? What we want is to throw them out of here. They are lazy, have bad customs and are dirty. What a spectacle for the tourists. We are studying a project of displacement to another part of the region where they can live as they wish without problems.” The official didn’t mention that any other region in Neuquen province is desert, bleak and barren, and besides the Curruhuinca Mapuche belong and are acknowledged as such under Argentinian law in the area of Lake Lacar.

I mentioned this because it’s on my mind, and it should be on all of our minds or our concern with ethno-linguistics is a farce. What can you do about it? Well, I’m involved in one small thing. Anne Waldman, Joanne Kyger, Michael McClure and myself are putting together a benefit poetry reading on the west coast in June to raise money for the Indigena group.
based in Berkeley, that is acting as an information gathering center and publishing a small newspaper on the ongoing problems of the peoples of Brazil. They don’t get much money from anywhere, just a few driblets of grants here and there. For some reason, the usually politically hip people of Berkeley and San Francisco simply haven’t gotten onto this. The imagination hasn’t gone that far, somehow. And there’s maybe some little tiny conflict, some little interface there that’s difficult between the Marxist way, the more orthodox radical way of looking at problems in Latin America, as against this specific thing of looking at the effects of an industrializing, civilizing spread into an area of totally self-sufficient and completely uncontacted folks.

One of the criteria that can be brought to bear against the whole process of industrial civilization is ecological. It has to do simply with this question of the reduction of diversity. I noticed some comments earlier in this conference by some people that seem to at least imply to me that they were in favor of, and assumed that, a kind of one-word assimilation of languages and cultures or, you know, some kind of internationalization, was a desirable process. The ecological critique goes like this, (I quote from Roy Rappaport, “Flow of Energy in an Agricultural Society”): “It may not be improper to characterize as ecological imperialism the elaboration of a world organization that is centered in industrial society and degrades the ecosystems of the agrarian societies it absorbs. The increasing scope of world organization and the increasing industrialization and energy consumption on which it depends have been taken by western man to virtually define social evolution and progress. What we have called progress or social evolution may be maladaptive. We may ask if the chances for human survival might not be enhanced by reversing the modern trend of successions in order to increase the diversity and stability of local, national, and regional ecosystems even, if need be, at the expense of the complexity and interdependence of international world-wide organizations. It seems to me that the trend toward decreasing ecosystem complexity and stability, rather than threats of pollution, overpopulation or even energy famine, is the ultimate ecological problem confronting man. Also, the most difficult to solve, since the solution cannot be reconciled with the values, goals, interests, political and economic institutions prevailing in industrialized and industrializing societies.”

Now, I want to make one statement to nail that down, in case that went past anybody’s ear. I was talking about economic growth the other day to a young woman. And she said, “But all life is growth; that’s natural, isn’t it?” So I had to explain this, following Ramon Margalef and others. Life moves, communities of life move in certain kinds of cycles, which after an occasion of disruption or turbulence, rapidly replace the disturbed fabric, but do it initially with a small number of species. As the fabric is repaired, species diversity begins to replace single species rapid growth, and increasing complexity becomes again the model, what they call “tending toward climax” resulting in the condition called climax. That is, maximum diversity and maximum stability in a natural system. Stable because there are so many interlocking points that one kind of, as they say, insult to the system does not go through too many pathways, but is localized and is corrected locally. If you have a field of nothing but grass, and grasshoppers land on it, that’s the end of your grass. If you have an acre of which grass is maybe 12% of the biomass, then the grasshoppers hit 12% of the biomass, but you still have the other 88%. That’s all.

The support implicit in that, the richness implicit in that and also the richness of the recycling of energy through what they call the detritus pathways (paths trod by the life forms which catch organic matter on the downswing rather than on the upswing), the fungi, insects, etc., that live in the rotten wood and the rotten leaves rather than live off the annual production of new biomass. Detritus is a key to that stability and maturity.

Now, in Dr. Eugene Odum’s terms, what we call civilization is an early succession phase; immature, monoculture system. What we call the primitive is a mature system with deep capacities for stability and protection built into it. In fact, it seems to be able to protect itself against everything except white sugar and the money economy trading relationship; and alcohol, kerosene, nails, and matches. It was John Stuart Mill who said, “No labor-saving invention ever really saved anybody any labor.”

So: ethnopoetics, first as a field. The politics of inventing a new academic field. Politics of having a magazine. Politics of having a conference like this. That’s just a little footnote on academic life in America, and that we do these things. I say this jokingly
because I'm grateful for what Jerome has done; I'm grateful for having been brought here today. But that's one level. The next level is "ethnopoetics" and that is, what do we do when we start going into other peoples' cultures and bringing back their poems and publishing them in our magazines? I'll argue the positive side of that and it's simply this. An expansionist imperialist culture feels most comfortable when it is able to believe that the people it is exploiting are somehow less than human. When it begins to get some kind of feedback that these people might be human beings like themselves it becomes increasingly difficult.

Collections of American Indian mythology, folklore, and song go back to the 1880's. The quantity becomes really large after around 1900 -- Annual Reports and Bulletins of the Bureau of American Ethnology, the American Ethnological Society, the Memoirs and Journal of the American Folklore Society, and so forth. A large body of American Indian literature in English, but almost no popular publication of it in forms which are easily available to large numbers of people. I ask why. I don't know; it may be just market economy at work, and nobody wanted to read that sort of thing. It may be that no one wanted it to be available outside a scholarly circle.

A similar case: the Ainu and the people of Japan. Dr. Kindaichi and his associates began collecting Ainu oral literature in the 1930's, one of the largest single bodies of oral literature that's ever been collected; in Japanese translation from Ainu. I find no popular Japanese publication of any of that material through the earlier decades: it was just last year that the first easily available paperback of a selection of the oral literature collected by Dr. Kindaichi and his associates has come out. Until now it was buried in very expensive rare scholarly books. The Iwanami Bunko series of paperbacks, about fifty cents a volume, have translations of all the literatures of the world — Dostoevski, Tolstoy, they've got it all in Japanese translation. So the publishing capacity was there. Why didn't it happen? Why did it just happen now? What will recent publication of the Villa Boas brother' book on the Xingu do for the Brazilian Indians? It will probably help. A few people will read that and begin to think, "These are human beings." So there is some tiny increment of political value from the publication of oral literatures.

For most of the 50,000 year time span, people weren't particularly self-conscious about their own body of songs, myths, and tales, but we have some illuminating cases from the 19th century illustrating how publication of ethnic literature reinforces a people's own sense of identity. Take Finland. A young doctor named Lonnrat set himself to walking widely through the northern parts of Finland, collecting the remaining fragments of songs and epics and tales that the people were still telling in the early 19th century. He strung those together in an order which he more or less perceived himself, and called it the Kalevala. It became overnight the Finnish national epic and helped the Finns hold up against the Swedes on one side and the Russians on the other. It may well be that Dr. Lonnrat's walking around in the summertime is responsible for the fact that there is a nation called Finland today.

Point 4 in the Alcheringa 8-point list was "encouraging ethnologists and linguists to do work." Something happens when you do that work.

This next piece is a bridge to the further section of my talk. In March, 1902, Alfred Kroeber was in Needles, California. He says: "At Ah'a-kwinyevai, in a sand-covered Mohave house, we found Inyo-Kutavère, which means 'Vanished-Pursue'... he went on for six days, each of three to four hours total narration by him and as many hours of translation by Jack Jones and writing down by me. Each evening, he believed, I think honestly, that one more day would bring him to the end. He freely admitted, when I asked him, that he had never told the story through from the beginning to the end. He had a number of times told parts of it at night to Mohave audiences until the last of them dropped off to sleep. When our sixth day ended he still again said another day would see us through. By then I was overdue at Berkeley. And as the prospective day might once more have stretched into several, I reluctantly broke off, promising him and myself that I would return to Needles when I could, not later than next winter, to conclude recording the tale. By next winter Inyo-Kutavère had died and the tale thus remains unfinished... He was stone blind. He was below the average of Mohave tallness, slight in figure, spare, almost frail with age, his gray hair long and unkempt, his features sharp, delicate, sensitive... He sat indoors on the loose sand floor of the house for the whole of the six days that I was with him in the frequent posture of Mohave men, his feet beneath him or behind him to
the side, not with legs crossed. He sat still but smoked all the Sweet Caporal cigarettes I provided. His house mates sat around and listened or went and came as they had things to do.”2 That old man sitting in the sand house telling his story is who we must become — not A.L. Kroeber, as fine as he was.

I don’t want to talk about ethnopoetry any more. What I want to talk about now is not the poetry of others, “ethnoi,” but the poetry of ourselves, Diné poetry, people-poetry, Maidu poetry, human being poetry. In the 50,000 year time scale we’re all the same people. We’re all equally primitive, give or take two or three thousand years here or a hundred years there. Homer then, from this standpoint, is not the beginning of a tradition but the end of a tradition. Homer incorporates and organizes the prior eight thousand years of oral material like the scribes who put the Japanese lore into writing finally. Homer launches those things again forward for another couple of thousand years so that we still have Ajax cleaning powder and Hercules blasting powder. Some kind of looping.

I was impressed by Lévi-Strauss’ opinion that everything has gone somewhat downhill in western culture since the neolithic. He also argues that writing systems have served largely through history to enslave men rather than to serve any useful religious, spiritual or esthetic purpose, since the original use of writing was to write down lists of slaves and to keep an account of what you had in your warehouse, and only much later became used in these other ways. However, the economic anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has changed my mind because he says the paleolithic is where it’s at. As mentioned earlier, ecological criteria are moving in this direction also. According to Sahlins’s research, Stone Age Economics, the upper paleolithic was the original affluent society, and he estimates that they worked on average of 15 hours a week. Sahlins says, “If you are willing to grant that paleolithic hunters were in business for their health, then the bow and arrow served their needs.” “In those societies nobody had very much but there were no poor people. There is no class of landless paupers in primitive culture. Landless paupers belong to civilization.” This is also interesting: the average intake of proteins, carbohydrates and all nutrients per day is higher for a primitive person than it was for the vast populations of serfs and peasants under the high civilized regimes.

The Chinese, who looked down on the Tibetans so much, were not themselves aware of the fact that the average nutrition for a Chinese person was far below the average nutrition for a Tibetan person living as a nomad in those barren upland wastes.

So, what is this poetics then that starts back there? Like Dr. Diamond said, primary experience. Our hands got this way by doing certain things a long time. The hand still must do those things or it isn’t what it can be. Beautiful little system. This is the origin of language and poetry from the standpoint of India: Brahma, the creator, is in a profound state of trance. He is silence, stillness. A thought moves somewhere in there. It manifests itself as song, the goddess Vak. The goddess Vak becomes the universe itself as, energy. Of that energy all sub-energies are born. Now, Vak, in Indo-European philology is the same as the Latin vox or the English voice. The goddess takes on another name: she’s also called Sarasvati, which means “the flowing one,” and she’s recognized today in India as the goddess of poetry, music and learning. She’s represented as wearing a white sari, riding a peacock, carrying the vina and a scroll.

In those primal days of that energy flow, language was just “seed syllables.” The practice of mantra chanting in India, which is the chanting of those seed syllables, is conceived of as being a way to take yourself back to fundamental sound energy levels. The sense of the universe as fundamentally sound and song, begins poetics. They also say in Sanskrit poetics that the original poetry is the sound of running water and the wind in the trees.

There is sacred song and secular song. In the case of sacred song there are two categories: songs which are made of magic syllables and have magical meaning only, and sacred songs which have literal meaning. In the category of secular song, you can think of all the songs of all the people of the world as going through divisions like these: lullabies to sing babies to sleep; playground rhymes for kids; power vision songs of adolescent initiation; courting songs of young people; work songs — net hauling, hammer swinging, rice transplanting, canoeing, riding; hunting songs, with a specific magical set of skills and understands; celebration songs, war songs, death songs. We can fit all of our own poetics into these.

One other category which is critical is “healing songs,” because out of the healing songs, songs that were obtained by people who got particularly strong
power vision songs and went back for more, evolved specialization: that is to say, the specialization of the shaman or medicine person as a singer/healer. That comes to us in history as the fellows Plato wanted to kick out. Now, I like to think that the concern with the planet, with the integrity of the biosphere, is a long and deeply-rooted concern of the poet for this reason: the role of the singer was to sing the voice of corn, the voice of the Pleiades, the voice of bison, the voice of antelope. To contact in a very special way an “other” that was not within the human sphere; something that could not be learned by continually consulting other human teachers, but could only be learned by venturing outside the borders and going into your own mind-wilderness, unconscious wilderness. Thus, poets were always “pagans,” which is why Blake said Milton was of the devil’s party but he didn’t know it. The devil is, after all, not the devil at all, he is the miming elk shaman dancer at Trois Frères, with elk antlers and a pelt on his back, and what he’s doing has to do with animal fertility in the springtime.

At bottom is the question of how you prepare your mind to become a singer. How to prepare your mind to be a singer. An attitude of openness, inwardness, gratitude; plus meditation, fasting, a little suffering, some rupturing of the day-to-day ties with the social fabric. I quote again from the Papago: “A man who desires song did not put his mind on words and tunes. He put it on pleasing the supernaturals. He must be a good hunter or a good warrior. Perhaps they would like his ways. And one day in natural sleep he would hear singing. He hears a song and he knows it is the hawk singing to him of the great white birds that fly in from the ocean. Perhaps the clouds sing or the wind or the feathery red rain spiders on its invisible rope. The reward of heroism is not personal glory nor riches. The reward is dreams. One who performs acts of heroism puts himself in contact with the supernatural. After that, and not before, he fasts and waits for a vision. The Papago holds to the belief that visions do not come to the unworthy, but to the worthy man who shows himself humble there comes a dream and the dream always contains a song.”

The symbolism of the muse, the goddess, is strong in our occidental tradition and it’s also strong in the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions of India. The Chinese tradition is somewhat different but has very interesting contacts with a kind of muse point of view very early that became covered over: It’s in Taoism, and within the emphasis on the female, the feminine, the spirit of the valley, the yin power and so forth. Taoism being, following Dr. Joseph Needham’s assessment of it in Science and Civilization in China, the largest single coherent chunk of matrilineal descent, mother consciousness-oriented, neolithic culture that went through the, so to speak, sound barrier of civilization in the Iron Age and came out the other side halfway intact. Thus through its whole political history it has been anti-feudal and anti-patriarchal, so much so that Dr. Needham says that in a way Taoism was a 2,000 year-long holding action for the Chinese communist revolution. Dr. Needham is a bio-chemist from England.

Our own mythology — mostly accepted on faith — is the scientific view of the universe. There’s an interesting convergence that I want to develop a little bit now, which is delightful. It’s the Gaia Hypothesis. The earth-goddess again. Two scientists, James Lovelock and Sidney Epton, in England, have done a paper called “The Quest for Gaia.” Gaia, in Greek mythology, is the original earth-goddess sprung from Chaos, who produced Uranus, mated with Uranus, mothered Chronos, the Titans, the Cyclops and the Giants, and then the next generation was the first generation of gods.

The Gaia hypothesis is a biochemists’ hypothesis, that the whole of the biosphere is one living organism which has strategically programmed its evolution for 3 billion years, including producing us. (Which may have been its one mistake.) One of the most interesting evidences of this kind of work is the releasing of oxygen into the atmosphere by oceanic micro-organisms, creating first an oxygen environment but then also by a breakdown of certain oxygen molecules creating the ozone shield screening ultraviolet rays, permitting cells to move out onto the land. As cells get out onto the land, more oxygen, more ozone shield is created, thus increasing the possibility of the spread of life. “Thus, green plants not only get the benefit of carbon dioxide but also are warmed by the radiant flux returned to the ground by the atmosphere. The atmosphere’s window on space is transparent to visible light but is closed at the ultraviolet end by ozone absorption and carbon dioxide and water vapor. This grand scale synergy of green plants in the atmosphere is the result of millions of years of evolution of life and of the at-
mosphere which are therefore closely interdependent." The atmosphere is the creation of life for its own uses. Hence, the planet earth looks like a nacreous shell from outer space such as that which Venus might have stepped out of.

Poetics of the earth. Concentrations of communication-energy result in language, certain kinds of compressions of language result in mythologies, compression of mythologies brings us to songs. "The transmission" this is Dr. H. T. Odum — "the transmission of information is an important part of any complex system. Small energy flows that have high amplification factors have value in proportion to the energies they control. As the smallest of energy flows, information pathways may have the highest value of all when they open work gate valves on power circuits. The quality of this information, tidy energies in the right form, is so high that in the right control circuit it may obtain huge amplifications and control vast power flows." In the great universe, the main "theme" of energy flow is in massive objects coming together realizing their own gravity. Solar radiation per square meter out in space is 1.395. 99.98% of the energy influx on the earth is solar. The tiniest fraction of that is captured by the chlorophyll of plant leaves. Here's the poetics: "Morowitz has presented the case, in thermodynamics, for the hypothesis that a steady flow of energy from the inexhaustible source of the sun to the unfillable sink of outer space, by way of the earth, is mathematically destined to cause the organization of matter into an increasingly ordered state. The resulting balancing act involves the ceaseless clustering of bonded atoms into molecules of higher and higher complexity and the emergence of cycles for the storage and release of energy. In a non-equilibrium steady state, which is postulated, the solar energy would not just flow to the earth and radiate away; it's thermodynamically inevitable that it must rearrange matter into symmetry, away from probability, against entropy, lifting it so to speak into a constantly changing condition of rearrangement and molecular ornamentation. If there were to be sounds to represent this process, they would have the arrangement of the Brandenburg concertos, but I'm open to wondering whether the same events are recalled by the rhythms of insects, the long pulsing runs of bird songs, the descants of whales, the modulated vibrations of millions of locusts in migration.

That is, you know, on some subliminal level what we're tuned into — for our language, for our songs. It keeps bringing us back around to earth: I'm going to quote one which you all know. "Don Juan squatted in front of me. He caressed the ground gently. "This is the predilection of the two warriors, this earth, this world. For a warrior there can be no greater love. Only if one loves this earth with unbending passion can one release one's sadness. A warrior is joyful because his love is unalterable and his beloved the earth embraces him and bestows on him gifts. This lovely being, which is alive to its last recesses and understands every feeling, soothed me, cured me of my pains and finally when I had understood my love for it, it taught me freedom."

Now, looking at our poetry of North America — Turtle Island — in the light of the past, of other traditions, and this old new sense of the Earth, it seems to me that we are just beginning. It wasn't until the 3rd century A.D. in China that landscape poetry began to emerge, poetry which developed over a number of centuries and ultimately amplified, informed, explored the seasons, the rivers, the waterfalls, the mountains, creating a lore of reference and allusion to plants, each in their season, and the qualities of those seasons in relations to human affairs.

We're just starting, in the last ten years here, to begin to make songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children. When you see your first deer of the day you sing your salute to the deer, or your first red-wing blackbird — I saw one this morning! Such poesies will be created by us as we re-inhabit this land with people who know they belong to it; for whom "primitive" is not a word that means past, but primary, and future. They will be created as we learn to see, region by region, how we live specifically (plant life!) in each place. The poems will leap out past the automobiles and TV sets of today into the vastness of the Milky Way (visible only when the electricity is turned down), to enrich and humanize the scientific cosmologies. These poesies to come will help us learn to be people of knowledge in this universe in community with the other people — non-human included — brothers and sisters.
Notes

1. Information on South America from various publications of the *Indigena* group (P.O. Box 4073, Berkeley, CA. 94704).


Then proceeding from the individual to the aggregate of Individuals & disregarding all chronology except that of mind I should perfect them (my students) i) in the history of Savage Tribes. ii) of semi-barbarous nations. iii) of nations emerging from semi-barbarism. iv) of civilized states. v) of luxurious states. vi) of revolutionary states. vii) of Colonies. During these studies I should intermix the knowledge of languages and instruct my scholars in Belles Lettres and the principles of composition.

S.T. Coleridge, c.1795

1. Poetry And Anthropology

I begin with a disclaimer. This is as tentative as possible a paper for more than one reason. I am laying out a grid over territory without being sure of either grid or territory. Beginning with something apparently simple — a hunch about heraldry — I have been drawn into the flyways of contemporary interdisciplinary thought. This thought is moving at such speed that it requires total attention to navigation: I am a pilot, however, and not a navigator. My comfort, if there is any, springs from the fact that my fears regarding this periplos mimic so well the periplos itself. The journey takes us eventually through the cloudy Scylla and Charybdis of closed and open poetries: the fears center on whether I now have enough data to begin speaking this paper at all, or whether I will ever have enough to end it. This is a series of connected reflexions rather than a closely linked text: the problem of which disciplinary "language" or "languages" (if any) in which to talk being fundamental to the attempt.

1.2. I have long been interested in the reasons why such a strong confluence of the anthropological sciences and the arts, specifically poetry, has been characteristic of our time. To document this would require a survey of: first, general relations between aesthetics and the social sciences, second, the interest of modernist poets in contemporary anthropologists like Frazer and Harrison, followed by similar post-modernist interests down to the ethnopoetic preoccupations of many of us today. Such a survey might well begin with a catalogue of those poets and social scientists who have been trained, or have had practice, in each other’s disciplines. I cannot do this now but I believe that a number of agreeable surprises would emerge.

1.3. While the confrontation of poets — and other artists — with the arcaic and the primitive differs in detail as we pass from men like Pound and Eliot, through Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, Futurism and other such, down to our own "ethnopoets," the charter for such a confrontation is best expressed right now in Jerome Rothenberg’s Preface to Technicians of the Sacred (1968). Another way of formulating such a charter would involve recourse to a highly formalized discipline such as “Poetics,” a field of discourse straddling, or at least touching on, linguistics, stylistics, semantics and semiology. One view of poetry allowed by such a discipline — a view informed by the sciences of communication — would take the art as a cognitive system characterized by the presence of distinctive features, oppositions and transformations, standing among other cognitive systems. I wish to concentrate on the cognitive here without in the least denying other functions such as the expressive.

But object-language and metalanguage inhibit each other. A poet, years ago, put it concisely to linguists as follows: “Thank God poets do all this by instinct and don’t need to learn all these rules!” In addition, it is unfortunately true that thinking of considerable importance — in structuralism to give but one instance — is also now a bandwagon to which seeming access can be had without too much trouble by a thoughtless and gullible public. In view of all this, let me be clear that, here, I am talking to poets: as my own kind and as the most readily available of human beings. Though like bowerbirds in their art, they may appear too often to be like magpies and cuckoos in their philosophy. Academic scientists and
humanists, on the other hand, so rarely take time out of their disciplines that they often, like the dodo, cannot be talked to at all. I shall therefore be as colloquial as possible.

2. The Aesthetics Of Classification

2.1. A poet, then, could be interested in anthropology as the discipline dealing, amongst others, with societies which have a heavy investment in "techniques of the sacred" for the reasons outlined by Rothenberg. He proposes a confluence between their poets and ours on the basis of analogies involving: orality (preliterate/postliterate); imagism (prelogical/postlogical); formal minimalization/participational maximalization; intermedia-ness; somaticism; shaman-ism, etc. What interests me most, however, is somewhat different and runs thus: 1) the extent to which both poetry and anthropology deal with the process of classification, 2) the extent to which the anthropological study of classification might lead to valuable understandings in poetics and aesthetics and 3) the relevance of 1. and 2. to contemporary debates among poets on the origin, nature and function of poetry. By classifying, I mean something like the activity of arranging, organizing or ordering, according to various criteria such as structure or origin, of phenomena into groups the totality of which forms a system. I am more concerned at present with structure than origin but not exclusively. On this occasion, I will talk of the aesthetic pleasure which I believe to be universally obtainable from the act of classification. I will also dwell on that act as part of an exploration of art objects (seen both as wholes and as sums of parts), both at the level of the object itself and at the level of the classifying mind in its production and consumption of objects.

2.2. I choose to begin with the simple promptings that led to this paper. I happen to be writing the first volume of a prose work provisionally entitled Atlantis: an Auto-Anthropology. This is an attempt to objectivize a structure baptized "Nathaniel Tarn" and uses "autobiographical" events only insofar as they seem to relate to the elucidation of that structure. Keys to that structure usually come in the form of preferential choices in a range of passions, interests and hobbies all of which seem to me to be characterized by one fundamental trait. I shall be calling this trait "heraldic" and the total of these preoccupations the "heraldic vision."

My thinking about this seems to begin with the recollection of a childhood experience. I am looking at a beloved or favorite object, let us say a pencil or a toy motorcar. Whatever its actual color, I imagine it in a different color, and then another, and then another. I have a yellow pencil, say, and I imagine the pencil is blue, or red, or green. I may well go on to blue with red stripes, green stripes, and so forth. This fantasy causes me very great pleasure; I might almost say a form of bliss. I seem to be what cognitive psychology calls a "color-child" and I now become interested, incidentally, in what happens to children who do not entirely make the usual passage from "color-child" to "form-child." Reflecting on all this at the time of writing, I note that I am enjoying a proliferation of objects in decorative terms, a pleasing but, as far as I can see, non-functional classificatoriness. I have in fact a paradigm of pencils in mind which is almost as real as the yellow pencil itself.

This has to do with a kind of species-related totality. In view of what I have to say later about a wider kind of totality, let me also record this. Around the age of 11 or so, I imagine a collection of modeler's kits which would allow me possession of a private, concrete "natural history." There are to be wooden or plastic models of sheep, dogs, camels, bears... in fact: all animals, all birds, all fish, perhaps all plants, etc. The collection is to be housed in a special room with thousands of drawers and closets. It is pleasant to note that such fantasies have now been embodied: such kits — if not all of them — can now be bought in stores.6

Remembering this was prompted by a consideration, while working on the Atlantis, of the nature and origin in me of another passion. I began to think of possible links between the ways in which I enjoyed beauty. I have always enjoyed, and still enjoy, watching birds. The birds I probably enjoy watching most fall under Family Parulidae, the wood warblers. There are some 50 or so of these in North America alone. Asking myself what I love about watching them, I answer that the body, in a visual sense, is virtually always the same while the range of color and pattern within the basic body-form is different.7 I find this as blissful now as I found my pencil fantasies blissful as a child.

I go on from this in a number of directions, in-
cluding philately, uniforms and liveries, badges of identification, certain forms of packaging, etc. Heraldic systems continue potent until this day: they even change across the board sometimes, as when all airline companies change their plane-liveries at more or less the same moment. I'll take two more examples.

It has seemed to me, for instance, that a strong liking for, almost to the point of "collecting," islands may be connected to this theme. I seem to envisage islands as fairly constant in form and variable in content pattern. That is: I imagine or fantasize something round, with bays, beaches, hills and streams, perhaps a central mountain, located in various parts. But, while islands do have interesting biological characteristics, while there may well be much actual topographical overlap (on the model, say, of North Bay, South Bay, East Bay, West Bay), while "islands" related to social stratification are often formed within a mainland context, something new is occurring here. My imagination or fantasy is strongly at work here, since many islands (witness the British Isles) are not round at all. It is almost as if my fantasy were approximating "archetypal" behavior: "my" islands resemble the kind of cosmic models archaic world-views generate, together with the sacred cities that often embody or parallel these models.

It has also occurred to me, to take my final example, that the way in which I perceive the bodies of the opposite sex may verge on the "heraldic." Primary and secondary sexual characteristics seem to me an almost boundless field in which the interplay of what the good Lord sends our way and what we might fantasize as our ideal bedmate or mates can exercise the erotic imagination (of males, of course, I would not wish to presume ...). That classification into "families," "sub-families," "genera" and "species" may occur in this domain also goes without saying.

2.3. The root metaphor I propose to account for the common characteristics of these instances is that of "heraldry." I stress the word metaphor. As a historical phenomenon, heraldry originated in medieval times, predominantly in Europe and Japan, where men of a certain class distinguished each other individually and by family through the use of badges or emblems transferable onto banners, arms, armor, clothes, servants' liveries and so forth. The characteristic design (let's take the European case) involved a basic form gradually standardized as a shield, but easily adaptable to other objects. This shield remained fairly constant in catalogues and compendia: the contents of course had to vary in order to function at all. My knowledge of heraldry is limited at this time, but it does seem that simple shields came first (plain monocolored shields) followed by simple geometrical divisions (horizontal, vertical, diagonal, etc.) and then a whole array of other forms: zoomorphs being perhaps most popular. Faced with the need to develop this system by the spread of chivalry and tempted by the large number of decorative purposes that shields could be put to, heraldry flourished into an art-field of great variety and beauty.

What we seem to have, then, here (and in related fields such as flags, seals, tartans and the like) is 1) a fairly simple form — the shield — controlling 2) a fairly wide field of content elements whose permutations continue to generate an almost infinite, or sometimes truly infinite, number of possible devices or shields.

2.4. I pause now for some clarification. We are familiar, from semiotics, with the notion that a surprisingly large array of variants can be generated in a sign system on the basis of very few variables. But semiotics may be over-metalinguistic for many of us. We are responsible, I believe, for finding an operational base from which the majority of artists probably do start and which they share, to a major extent, with their public. There are grave problems here.

Looking at a bird, say, does not normally cause me to re-question in toto the nature of "reality." There is reason to suppose that my sighting, and a companion’s sighting, will very largely overlap. The aspect of reality I begin with (even if I am fortunate enough to end up with Blake’s universe-in-a-bird) has to do with the bird as recognizably 1) a bird, 2) of a certain family (warbler), 3) of a certain species (yellow warbler). This is taxonomy: there is a history of taxonomy and now, with Foucault, we even have its "archeology." My particular interest, however, does not rest there. I am interested in the relation of 3) to 2): that is, I am thrilled by the fact of many species in relation to each other so as to form a family.

I am also noticing that natural selection has given us a certain number of species, neither less, nor more. It is almost (shades of Kant!) as if a god had said: let there be so many species, neither more, nor less. It is as if a god had selected, from an imagineably
Now we classify birds — and much else — on the basis of extant distinguishing and contrasting features: we cut up the "real" out there as some god might have cut it up. A kindred, but contrasting need concerns itself with classifying things which do not have existing contrasting features. Take the case of five brands of pretty identical cornflakes. The seller's task is to find an emblem which will persuade the consumer that his cornflakes are different and, additionally if possible (but this occurs in the accompanying message more than in the emblem), the only ones worth buying. This is a kind of "heraldry": medieval soldiers, reading a field of battle, had to know which biologically identical male human was so socially non-identical as to be worth either killing or sparing and defending. That which signed him as such was his coat of arms. A property of this kind of classification is that it spreads and oozes. It generates as many contrasted shields as are needed in any situation — while ensuring, always, a lack of overlap — and can, one assumes, always generate more. Here, man is a "god" but his creativity almost seems superior to the divine in that man's imagination never need stop breeding. I'll come back to this in section 4.2.

2.5. What about my pencils, islands, bodies, etc?
Other sets of problems loom.

i) some series are "natural" (birds, islands, bodies); others "cultural" (pencils, stamps, uniforms, cosmological models).

ii) of the "cultural" series, some are "material" (pencils, stamps, etc); others more "ideological" (cosmological models).

iii) when fantasy comes into play, new kinds of classification appear to emerge. It is as if they had to do mostly with a) an imposition of the "cultural" onto the "natural" and/or b) an imposition of the "ideological-cultural" onto the "material-cultural." Thus the "natural" and the "material-cultural" might, in many ways, be similarly treated or overlap.

iv) the impositions seem to be connected with a process involving making objects "same" or "different" (homogenization/heterogenization or identification/discrimination).

v) the area of overlap in iii) may relate to the fact that, whereas all "natural" phenomena are going, upon being perceived, to possess contrasting features, assignment by human intervention of contrasting features to "cultural" phenomena is going to differ according to whether the "cultural" phenomenon be material or ideological. You can represent an airplane, as you can a bird, by a picture isomorphic with the plane or by an arbitrary sign. An airline, as a company, or an air force, qua force, is going to have to be represented only by a sign basically arbitrary, however much a depictive aspect may enter into it (e.g. a pair of "wings"). Thus, "material-cultural" phenomena are going to behave more "naturally." When fantasizing about pencils (or planes) I can multiply the colors (equivalent to all warblers) or I can multiply the one color (equivalent to warblers of one species). My fantasy is transforming a "cultural" into a "natural" object. The process is complex. I can seem to be doing this through using a "natural" feature such as color. But the situation is "culturally" tinged when I imagine (as I did when a child) not pencils in all possible "natural" colors but pencils in those "cultural" colors I knew to be available to pencil-makers. At the other end of the scale, I can take a set of all available airline or air-force "logos" and note the extent to which they begin to look "species-like" in the sense that "wings" or an equivalent ("bird," "pegasus" etc.) will stand a very high chance of inclusion in the design. I cannot exhaust the matter at this tentative writing, but it does seem as if this aspect of the selective function of consciousness suggests that, while everything is ab initio "cultural," much of our endeavor comes to look like a transformation — or a "depositing" — of the cultural into the natural.

2.6. Let us further complicate the picture for a moment.

a) in the warbler case, I merely recognize a member of a warbler species. It is isomorphic with its description in a field-guide to birds. I limit myself to enjoying the variety of species. The same could be said of, say, stamps. I could even "collect" pilots' or stewardess' wings.

b) in the island case, I recognize that islands are "really" multi-shaped and isomorphic with their description in an atlas. But I fantasize that they are all round with central mountains, etc. Here, I homogenize the "natural" by projecting an ideal-type onto it.

c) in the pencil case, I do not start with "natural" shapes whose variety I recognize, but with a
"material-cultural" shape which is, by and large, standard. This very standardization, perhaps, is one cause of my heterogenization by projection in my childhood.

2.7. Note the interplay between homogenization and heterogenization. "Projecting," or collecting, pencils of one color would be trivial. Fantasizing that a set of pencils of many colors were actually of one color would be bizarre, or even pathological. The island fantasy escapes pathology because islands are not standardized in the first place. But why do I tend to standardize them by homogenization? Because I have to get them, as it were, down to a certain level of co-existence into a "collectible" paradigm. This suggests that I am getting my pencils up, but by heterogenization, to such a level of paradigmaticity. It also suggests that I am getting women down when thinking of a "type," that is: standardizing by homogenization, while, simultaneously, raising the "type" itself by accepting a certain range of differentials within the total possible range. The result may also be described in terms of a "band" or "frequency width" of paradigmaticity.

Again, I am reminded that my pleasures come from the interplay of shield and shields and that I will interfere with reality "heraldically" by adjusting it to this requirement of pleasure.

Clearly, much depends on the level at which one chooses to signify and thereby project/select the interesting characteristics: collecting the "same" stamp, for instance, occurs often but it occurs at the level of micro-differentiation and not homogenization. As soon as we touch on imagination and fantasy, we have to deal with complexities of "archetypes," "prototypes," "preformations," "ideal-types" and so on at one end of the scale, and with "idiolects," "canons" and "lexicons" at the more individual end. I am left, at present, with some very tentative terms such as "real," "projective" and "selective" heraldry which continue to require further refinement.

2.8. A possible "heraldry" not mentioned as yet: that of personae or masks (in poetics) or roles (in sociology and psychology), where the ego would be the shield, its masks the shields, might constitute a bridge towards the social sciences. We might wish to ask, at some point, whether the question of individual/social should enter into our discussion of parts and wholes: indeed we would be repeating a Durkheimian journey were we to do so. I note, in passing, such things as the fact that I never seemed to fantasize about functions in my pencil case (by giving the pencils different colored leads for example). I note too that the question of function must be gone into for "heraldry" in general insofar as there does seem to be a problem in developmental psychology regarding the exact relation between function and decoration. If we imagine two men roaming the forest, do they fight on meeting because they have swords and shields, or because their shields are of a different color? Such a naive question reminds us that shields seem to identify individuals before they identify groups and lineages: or is this an illusion? Such a rag-bag of references to anthropology implies no more than further questions at some later date. For the time being, let me pass to the problem of shield/shields or whole/parts in recent anthropological research.

A major area of attention paid to classificatory procedures has been in the anthropological work on so-called "primitive classification" of Durkheim, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. These procedures are associated, in tribal contexts, with "Totemism." Simplifying grossly, "Totemism" has to do with selection among natural objects (often but not exclusively zoological or botanical) by a tribal group such that the differences perceived between the objects selected will be reflected back on the group in order to es-
establish different sub-groups within it. The difference between eagle and crow, for instance, will be used to establish a difference between biologically identical sub-groups now sociologically non-identical as eagle-people and crow-people. This allows the division of the group into sub-groups for all sorts of purposes including, eventually, the division of labor. Natural species, then, are not just “good for eating” as anthropology held before Lévi-Strauss, but they are also “good for thinking.” Classification of the universe around men — both natural and cultural as well as material and ideological — is necessary to the very function of society.

 provisionally, however, I would like to point out that, whether we take the “totemic” symbol as emblematic (with Durkheim) or as archival (with Lévi Strauss), it is not required of anthropological theory that the symbols be “good for beauty” in addition to being good for eating and thinking. Now, even if I were dealing only with one poetic imagination — my own idiosyncratic one — I hope to be suggesting that there is a primary aesthetic component to the act of classification, both in the production and consumption aspects of the “heraldic vision,” which cannot be reduced to any form of function other than the aesthetic. This hypothesis, and I would not like to think of it as more than that at present, may have implications for the study of art.

3. Classification and Totalization: The Heraldic Vision in Blake

3.1. I now want to give this discussion some badly needed content by looking into the “heraldic vision” as I perceive it at work in Blake.

First, however, I refer to an important mechanism identified by Lévi-Strauss in his discussion of the classificatory aspects of “myth” and “totemism.” A classificatory system of the “totemic” type establishes, by means of a series of species abstracted from the known world, a group of referential categories such that each species, together with much that pertains to it, will form a category until the exhaustion or saturation of that world. Further, these categories will form a system. The “totemic” symbol acts within the grid so formed as a transformational operator capable of being moved between extreme poles of universalization/generalization and individualization/particularization. The movement would seem to be most often expressed as a process of totalization or detotalization (putting together and taking to pieces) of the totemic operator.

Let it be so that the whole world for Tribe X is divided up between three sub-groups known as Bear-people, Seal-people, Eagle-people. Many items from the environment, habitat, food, habits etc., etc. of the bear, the seal and the eagle will fall into the class constituted by each animal — so much so sometimes that the whole known world will be divided up between the three. The three animals will also be taken to pieces: head of bear, head of seal, head of eagle; etc., etc. all the way through the anatomy. Each zoomorph could, then, for various purposes be seen as a run from, say, (all bears / certain kinds of bears / certain colors of bears / a local group of bears / the food, habitat, etc., etc.). Same with seal and eagle. Totalization would then tend to involve any movement to the generalization pole, while detotalization tends to move towards the particularization pole. Processually, to use a term in this context from the anthropologist Victor Turner, detotalization might be the taking to pieces of a system for dialectical purposes, normally with some form of re-totalization in view. This seems to me to be paradigmatic of artistic creation. But let’s get to Blake.

3.2. What, then, is the content of such great Prophecies as The Four Zoas and Jerusalem? What Northrop Frye has identified as the essential Romantic myth might be read as follows. An entity, Albion, exists in a state which seems like repose. It is not clear whether Albion is equal to, or co-terminous with, the universe (view one), or whether he is smaller or lesser than the universe (view two). A perturbation, not unlike the Fall in Genesis, occurs in Albion as a result of which Albion is menaced with disintegration or actually disintegrates. Follows a long conflict or set of conflicts which are the matter of a poetry with as high a degree of redundancy as one finds in any major art. Whether certain divine forces remain outside of Albion (view two) or whether they are internal to Albion (view one), goody forces eventually prevail over baddy forces, integration over disintegration. Albion falls into parts but returns in the end to totality.

This resembles totalization and detotalization in Lévi-Strauss. In effect, the disintegration of Albion, the Cosmic Man, is not unakin to a society (or, more
reduced model in the definition of aesthetic

ence (1966:ch.1).

that one of Levi-Strauss’s most convincing arguments
relating to the visual arts specifies the role of the
whose function, when totalized, is to produce a

duced model of the cosmos. 18 Here I should note
that this, for art, may imply an inversion of what
happens in Lévi-Strauss, for totemism). Albion breaks
up into Albion 1.2.3.4...n serving, if you like, as
‘totems’ to sub-groups named after them
(Islam tribes of Israel): the sons and daughters
of Albion in their manifold complexity. This is a
model for other detotalizations: tribes of Britain;
counties, cities, cathedrals and universities of Britain;
revolutionary nations of Blake’s time, etc., and
generates the matrix in which the “Human Composite”
can be apprehended diachronically. Blake follows a
process familiar from primitive classification, of dividing
up the world among the lineages of Albion so that
we get embarassingly detailed lists in the Prophecies
whose function, when totalized, is to produce a re-
duced model of the cosmos.18 Here I should note
that one of Lévi-Strauss’s most convincing arguments
relating to the visual arts specifies the role of the
reduced model in the definition of aesthetic experience (1966:ch.1).

3.3. The term I oppose in my own usage to the
Edenic “ecclesia” is sparagmos: a rendering, tearing
or mangling applicable, as I learn, to the dismember-
ment of fertility gods as well as to the Crucified
Christ. 19 I probably got it from Frye
(1965:148,192-3,222) though my usage is, I believe,
different. Sparagmos here is detotalization. Now,
there is every reason to believe that Blake saw the
sparagmos of Albion as occurring over and over again,
either within a cosmic Fall and Redemption (if we
take the view Albion = Cosmos) or not (if we take
the view Albion < Cosmos). This constant re-
ocurrence would follow from the notion that each
reader of the Prophecies is himself or herself Albion,
as well as their writer Blake himself, indeed that all
men and women are potential Albions.20 From this
point of view, it becomes immaterial to discuss
whether sparagmos comes before ecclesia or the re-
verse: as far as the ideology behind the poem, or the
process the poem is trying to promote, are concerned,
this is chicken-and-egg-land. What is very important,
however, concerns the fact that the formal constraint
on this ideological matter tends to operate in one
direction and not in its reverse. The form of a pro-
phesy given by Blake will in effect turn out to follow
the sequence ecclesia-sparagmos-ecclesia (nova) (or
initial total, detotalization, re-totalization) rather
than either i) sparagmos-ecclesia-sparagmos or ii) an
endless chain which could only exist in virtuality. An
art object, both then and now, can only exhibit a
certain cut in reality, a certain portion of it and we
do have to look at what we actually have in hand.21
This is far from meaning, of course, that Blake does
not do his best at most times to mask this constraint:
I’ll pick up on this in a moment.

I would argue from this that closure (initial total)
is a sine qua non of the art object in its initial mo-
moment or “genesis” (in Zen terms: its original face) and
that most such objects will work or be worked back
towards closure as a terminal retotalization as well.
This argument may be unsympathetic to partisans of
a totally “open” poetry. Would they be more likely
to accept a dialectical view in which, working out of
initial closure, detotalization would stand for the pro-
cessual, “open” element in poetics? This question
takes us into our next section.

4. Structure And Process:
The Contemporary Debate

4.1. We come out here onto the fertile delta of
contemporary poetic debate. I am not far from think-
ing that the closed/open dialectic just suggested is, in
fact, the root transform of a whole series of problems
including, among others: whole/part; content/form;
space/time (or synchrony/diachrony); visual/verbal;
written/oral. At a higher level of abstraction, we
might have a parallel run of pairs such as culture/
nature; discontinuity/continuity; paradigm/syntagn;
metaphor/metonymy. A long hard look is needed at
each of these pairs: by their very nature they resist
such regimentation.22 But let’s give them a trial
flight.

4.2. The great issues of our episteme revolve
around the issues at stake between structuralism on
the one hand and phenomenology on the other.23
The criticism frequently levelled at structuralism (it
would be more correct to speak of structuralisms or
structuralist methods and the same may be true of
phenomenologies) is that it detracts from the value of
human time by denying its sequential character, the conditions of its freedom, by organizing it for us, very variously of course, in a predominantly spatial manner. "Organization," here, may well be, or mean, imprisonment. The reply to such criticism, if I understand it correctly, generally involves the claim that, in order to perceive time at all, and certainly in order to present it, discontinuities have to be introduced into the sequence which will eventually lead to some form of spatial presentation. As Foucault puts it, sequential arrangements are foreign to representation, hence his stress on such pairs as taxonomy and genesis, rhetoric and grammar etc. (1973: 70, 82, 84-5, 113, 132-138). As Gombrich (1960: 297-298) and Goodman (1968:7) insist, there is no innocent eye: "The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past..."24 "History," as Lévi-Strauss puts it, is always "history for" a particular human purpose or viewpoint and, as such, can never be seized in its sequential purity. (1966:257)

My own training happens to have been in structuralism rather than in "process" philosophy or phenomenology. Structuralism and the "heraldic vision" share many elements: what is chicken and what is egg here I will not debate just now. Let me see how I fare in trying to accommodate both viewpoints. It is no more than a trial.

Telescoping Albion and the Divine Imagination, as Blake I believe gives us license to do, let Albion stand for the state of a poet's mind at the outset of a creative act. Wherever Los stands in the chain Albion let him be Los if you will. The poet's mind will contain a world-model which might be partly or wholly unconscious (the sum of the life to date, the sum of the poems). I see that model — as first found in the mental thicket — as closed in upon itself, whole, rich with content, spaced out as a garden (hortus conclusus), visual in that that teems with images, engraved upon the thicket, i.e. primarily written.25 It will do no harm to invoke organicism, to speak of a seed or field of seeds. The field of seeds is a field of metaphors, a paradigm of possible adventures in nomination, the inscribed code is bursting to get out and express itself. We start, let us be clear, with culture and not with nature. There is no "origin" of art any more than there is origin of language: Adam is a fiction invented because a story appears to have to begin somewhere, because culture has to imitate nature in giving an art object an origin, a genesis, a birth.

Starting from our initial total or world-model, we next see the generation of process. The part thrusts itself out of the whole in the manner of a shoot or of a sparmacatic Fall. It manifests itself, out of content, as form, espousing the sequentiality of time, verbal in seeking out its form, oral in the very biology of its manifestation. It is, in a word, projective. For Blake, this processual aspect has been brilliantly described by George Quasha in terms of poetic torsion (1970). Olson, of course, has given us its charter for our present, (1966). Our model calls for a localization of metaphor in the initial seed: once the discourse is embarked upon, the process must be resolutely syntagmatic and metonymic, constraining or reducing the order of similarity to that of contiguity by the sheer power of imaginative voice. The motto of this stage of the creation is perhaps Je Maintiendrai: these things will stick together by God though I have to pay for it with the world.26

Re-totalization carries Albion back to Eden in the form of a "fruit." But how does the "fruit" become the "seed" of a new art object? The possibility for me is that the artist, representing in his moment of achievement culture as the run of all existing and virtual art objects, seeks to introduce his re-totalization into nature as if it were a natural object, an idea familiar perhaps from the Marxist view that human history must eventually dissolve back into natural history. This pretence changes "fruit" into "seed" by transforming a completion into a beginning, a re-totalization into an initial world-model ready for process again. The significance of an Adam, or Albion, lies in the pretence on the part of art that its objects have a natural origin, that art imitates life or, indeed, is life. In reality, of course, we know that life not only imitates art, it is a product of art.

4.3. I return to my theme by asking how the poem seeks out its processual way within detotalization. Operating between the initial total and the re-totalization, the poem works as if it were passing from a "real heraldry," through a "projective heraldry" to a "selective heraldry." I am aware myself, when writing about an object, of a strong urge to catalogue its elements, to exhaust its description, to saturate the representational field with a fully-responsible isomorphic portrait of the object. Let's suppose I treat of a beloved body as a "heraldic object." I am tempted to say "the hair is... the eyes are... the lips are...
etc., etc.” (this happens in renaissance “blazons”). I am aware, as I do this, of a debilitating aspect to my activity. This arises, I think, from the fact that, in this detotalization, I am striving to distinguish these elements from those of all other possible bodies belonging to the same “heraldry.” In order to do so, however, I have to refer back to my initial total: what I know of the “real heraldry” of the female body. This backward look — like the look to Eurydice — kills the object. The way forward implies selection for maximal artistic stress by rigorous attention to the elements in their particularity, a particularity which opens the elements to other paradigms in the oncoming metaphorical process of the re-totalization. This move forward is exhilarating rather than debilitating, moving through projection to “selective heraldry” and the establishment of the personal paradigm of femininity. Now Eurydice is above ground in the full view of day, now I can look at her and face the new structure. She can now be deposited into nature so that she becomes the new lover from whom I, or another poet, male or female, may move forward again.27

Note that the poem here is in no way different from an act of love seen in and for itself, as well as in its aspect as an act in a chain of acts. We have been asking, after all, not only for an aesthetic of the individual art-object but also for an aesthetic of the run of all existing or virtual art objects. The lovers start as structures for each other. As the act progresses, they sparagmatize vis-à-vis of each other into a kaleidoscope of bodily parts. After climax, they fall gradually back into themselves and into the unity of their faces, but it is a condition of love that these faces be not the faces they were before: a re-totalization has occurred which will carry each of them into the next sexual moment.

Three other notations. First: the property of process is to cause one to believe, while it is moving forward, that nothing but process exists, and this may be fed in no small measure by the pretence that art is life. Yet process is moving inexorably back towards re-totalization, towards structure. This too could be taken as an aspect of “living” if death were also: but death is the last thing we want to look at. However this may be, I report here another fact of my experience which is that, at the height of the creative act, I experience the feeling that nothing I can possibly utter is or could be non-poetic. I attain, in other words, total virtuality at the apex of the processual function. I find however that it is precisely then, in that golden moment, that I am aware that the flow has stopped, may indeed have stopped days before. We are back in that which has been done, in structure. But we have noted the extraordinary “naturalness” of the processual experience.28

Second, in regard to the “shield” and its variants, I would argue that the heterocosmic view of the art-object (that which makes us refer to world-models and their elements) arises from the fact that we establish, “heraldically,” a metaphor of pantocratic power in the poetic process. Contradictions between the many and the one, the whole and its parts, are resolved by men into “heraldic” systems in order that they might partake of the pleasure of knowing what the one form is which is behind a plethora of contents. We give ourselves godhood in the deadly serious games of art by miming the pleasure we think a god enjoys in his total knowledge of his creation. Our religions may be no more than projections from the aesthetic pleasure we derive from the “heraldic vision” in our arts.

Third: there is an aspect of sparagmos we have not yet considered and that has to do with the flying apart of culture we seem to be experiencing in our time. Much of our major poetry has tried to deal with this in a conservative sense, the sense of: “these fragments I have shored against my ruins.” It is perhaps for this reason that it seems to be the form that mimics the cultural sparagmos whereas the content continues to proclaim a desire for the whole (see, for instance, Davenport:1969:173). Does this desire continue in the more progressive, radical processual poets of the new “metapoetries”?29 Do their works “return to structure” or not? What is the present status of the aesthetic of the fragment, the aesthetic of unendlichkeit? What is the role of Rothenberg’s criteria of multi-medianess and maximal participation in this debate? The love of, and miming of, origins and genesis in our search for the “primitive” I may have accounted for. The set of this paper has not allowed the same attention to some of Rothenberg’s other criteria.
5. The Veil Of The Goddess

5.1. I must press on to an end. What we now have to consider, it seems to me, is a crucial determination of the role of time and space in the poetic imagination. I have tried to review, albeit with a bias, the respective positions of structuralism and phenomenology. There may, however, be another option, one which has always had a great appeal for the poetic imagination. This option may be termed Hermeticism, or, as I prefer to call it, with a sociological echo in mind, “Initiation.” I would not be the first to perceive a kinship between this and some aspects of structuralism (Hartman, 1966:160; Spanos, 1970:97). This has caused antagonism towards “Initiation” on the part of certain literary critics, especially those who stress the importance of historicity.

It would be simple indeed to say that “Initiation” radically spatializes time in the sense that the repetitiveness of Albion's detotalization and retotalization is equivalent to circularity. Circularity, as Poulet has amply demonstrated, is archetypal spatialization (1966). But I have tried to show that re-totalization is never identical with totalization: the “fruit” in culture, if not in nature (and who is to tell, with mutation possible?) is always at a step removed from the “seed.” The truth is that there are two Hermeticisms, one in which, yes, human nature really is eternally the same, human problems likewise and there is nothing new under the sun; another in which some form of accommodation with History becomes possible by postulating an evolutionary factor in human consciousness and problematicus. The writings of Owen Barfield will spring to mind here and cause us perhaps to look at re-evaluations of the relative weight which Western and Eastern initiatic systems should have among ourselves as poets today (1965). In any event, it would seem possible for the poetic imagination to escape from the stark alternative of i) a point of view from which History is impossible and ii) another from which nothing but History is possible. Perhaps we have a both/and situation rather than the depressingly familiar either/or; perhaps we have too a possibility of coming to terms with both the closed and the open factors in our arts as Makers.

5.2. Before I try to draw the implications of this, let me insert here the recognition of a new direction in anthropology that poets ought to welcome. Symbolic anthropology, in the hands of Victor Turner for example, calls for close attention to the “unacknowledged legislators of mankind” as “possessed by spirits of change before changes become visible in public arenas” (1969:23, 260-3; 1974: 17-18, 28). It is especially pleasing to see how often Turner invokes Blake. Turner’s notions of “structure” and “communitas” move in the direction, unthinkable a few years ago, of bringing within the sociological consciousness — if not the conditions of a balancing a-sociality — at least those of a creatively oriented anti-sociality or, as he phrases it, “liminality” (1974: 47, 52, 268-9, 298). Coming to his work after the main formulation of this paper, I have found with excitement marked correspondences between Turner and myself on a variety of questions.30

There is no doubt that, in conjunction with structuralist anthropology, an Anglo-American symbolic and/or cognitive anthropology alive to both structuralism and phenomenology is developing rapidly with exciting interdisciplinary implications for cognitive psychology, linguistics and aesthetics. I hope to look in this field to such names as Leach (1968, 1969); Geertz (1971, 1973); Douglas (1970); Fernandez (1971); Tedlock (1972); Hall (1969); Hymes (1974); Munn (1974); Gossen (1974) and Crapanzano (1973) among many others, without forgetting such teachers of mine as Griaule (1965), Firth (1973) and Redfield (1953). If I may put in a personal note here, I find it ironic that anthropology was beginning to take this direction just as I was giving it up in despair of it ever doing so! Whatever my prophetic powers may be this says little for my predictive ones!

5.3. I go back to the matter of 5.2. Poetry in our time is required to be closed in that it is now, after the demise or near demise of formal religion, one of the chief depositories of our culture’s traditions. I don’t know whether shamans need erudition but priests probably do and the names of Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Duncan, Mac Low, Kelly, Dorn among many others hardly warrant a view that poetry and scholarship belong to different worlds. Poetry, with us, is also required to be open, however, in the accepted sense that no tradition can be tradition at all unless it is always making itself new. Here already there is no closure without openness, nor openness without closure and while, processually, we must
always be “open on the forward side” (in Antin’s words, 1972) in order to believe in our operation at all, the danger of bathos alone would prevent us from saying that we go the way of all flesh like all flesh all the time.

Time and Space are both dimensions of all experience which can be and are shaped by the mind both individually and socially. There is unlikely to be pure space or pure time in our experience, but there can be transformations in which space and time might be apprehended by the mind, indeed the whole being, as reduced to zero, whether by the greatest magnification, on the one hand, or the greatest reduction, on the other, according to the model (via positiva or via negativa, if you will) employed. The spatialization of time is then but one such transformation and I would suspect that a temporalization of space might well co-exist with it: indeed this may be one possible reading of the art of music so dear to Lévi-Strauss. These transformations will usually serve a function, they will be “for” in the sense of geography “for” or history “for.”

But again, not necessarily. In regard to “Initiation,” I would add that, as we move from the world of input and output, or from the world of self-other reciprocity, through the world of self-self-reciprocity, towards the world of non-reciprocity (Mendelson: 1965:218) everything happens as if the categories of space and time as normally known to us cease to be relevant. The passage from reciprocity to non-reciprocity is total, immediate and irreversible. To the best of our knowledge, the rules of the world of reciprocity govern us until that total moment. After that moment, if we are to take informants’ exegesis seriously, they cease to be so binding. In this case, the accepted borders of the sociological would be transcended. For what occurs when the mountains which have been mountains, and then have not been mountains, become mountains again (Zen saying) is strictly defined as non-reciprocal. It is interesting, however, that a new non-reciprocal “sociology” arises immediately on the symbolic level, characterized by the absolute coterminousness of whole and parts and the summation of all time and all space. Thus the assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Buddhism; the great white rose of Dante’s Paradiso; Blake’s “Great Harvest and Vintage of the Nations” among others. I read this transform, at any level on which we might require a metaphysics, as equivalent to the de-

position of the art-object by culture into nature, so that a new and as yet unheard of culture might be chartered with a genesis.

5.4. The concept of a “heraldic vision” might appeal to poets because the average view of human time produces something slower than the scientific view of time. Even if culture is on the move with ever accelerating speed, something in the human condition appears to require a continued defense of “human universals.” These universals pretend that the human condition is timeless, that human happiness/unhappiness have never really varied much, that knowledge and beauty serve as consolations for the near-impossibility of our condition, that the world of the senses is steady, that the sun will come up tomorrow as it came up yesterday and today, and that it will be recognizable as the sun. What matter if these views are, in one way or another, patently untrue, false, mythical and inauthentic? If they have always been so? Our dilemma lies in the fact that we only have to say they are to feel a terrible anxiety: it is also true! we shout: it is not only untrue, it is also true!

There would seem to be something permanently archaic then in man’s requirements (including the aesthetics of cognition) which expresses itself through the poet as guarantor of these universals. It has been pointed out that the archetypal and the primal (structure) are different from the archaic and the primitive (event). The archetypal and the primal pretend at an origin or genesis: it is the condition of their efficacy that they cannot believe their pretence. The most beautiful contradiction in art is that it will be authentic to itself only by being inauthentic to nature. Ars longa vita brevis but art must pretend to be brief if life is going to tolerate it at all. We live forever and die forever exactly in the same moment.31

5.5. In describing a waterfall, Coleridge, that great precursor of so many of us, spoke of the eternally similar form and the endless variety of content: “the continual change of the Matter, the perpetual Same-

ness of the Form (1956-71, II, 853-4, c.f. 1961: item 2832).” Coming upon this recently how could I not recognize, with the particular affect one reserves for one’s relations with Samuel Taylor, the essential precondition of the “heraldic vision?”32

Insofar as the widest universe has always been
there from the beginning, insofar as we do not ever discover but only re-discover, we adhere to the primal and the archetypal, that is: to closure. Insofar as by our poetic acts alone, in that one scandal of the creative process, we have our only becoming, we move forward out of the primitive and archaic into history to “make it new.” That the existential contradiction is absolute here is implied and accepted by what I’ve said before.

Whether the widening of the universe of discourse, the process of poetic discovery, will ever re-totalize us into Eden or not it is forever too early to say. Here the full beauty of homo ludens, the player, trickster or joker, stands at the gate whipping us sometimes, gently dancing with us at others. As we move towards whatever awaits us, into whatever freedoms, it remains a fundamental poetic task to keep alive the idea of unity, of the shield, the emblem of that wholeness, initiatic or not, which we wish for ourselves and for others. My notion is that it is ultimately initiatic and that it would square with a cosmic heraldry which provides, universally, the basic model of human security. The “Human Composite” in Blake is the image of this: I am a good enough Durkheimian to accept that we are all one man. For the rest, the tribe has always been there, fellow tribesmen, and it is also true that the tribe has only just begun. There is that mysterious call, at the end of Faust, to the eternal Shekhinah. Let us now convene each other to the eternal narrative and commentary on the eternal Shekhinah.

Footnotes

1. In Cornwell, 1973:137. C.f. 159,193,226,356. The original sub-title of the paper was “a cognitive model for ethnopoetics.” I believe now that it has wider implications.

2. For a historical view, a very partial list of authors might read: Herodotus, Lucretius, Montaigne, Hobbes, Vico, Rousseau, Coleridge. We would be dealing with concepts like “savage,” “barbarian,” “natural” etc. The times direct us to Vico: see Abrams (1958: 78-84, 105-114,120, noting, incidentally, Coleridge’s nuanced attitude to primitivism:120) and Tagliacozzo (1969).

3. For one beginning, see Tarn (1972).

4. For an early view on Surrealism and anthropology, see Tarn (1967b). On early anthropology I have recently found Peckham (1970) very useful.

5. The market abounds in books on structuralism of very unequal value. Due to the deep distrust of real interdisciplinary work in many parts of the academy (no matter how much lip service), specialists in one discipline can foist their “summaries” on colleagues who are not prepared to read the primary texts. A recent book in the art field — I abstain from naming it — has short introductions to such worthies as Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Piaget and Chomsky which are so garbled as to be totally unreadable. This hardly inspires confidence in the rest of the work.

6. I am not sure, at the time of writing, whether, in the case of pencils and toys, there were preferences among colors or no. I imagine there were. Nor can I remember the age, but I believe I was older than 4-5, probably much older. I believe I imagined the kits before I knew about ship and plane kits, but I may very well be wrong. I assume I was, by kit time, at least in part a form-child.

I am much indebted to Dr. Tom Trabasso who kindly listened to these elucubrations and put me onto Suchman-Trabasso (1966). I intend looking at Suchman (1966) and other comparable material. Many questions are raised in my mind as to the subsequent careers of people in whom the color-child remains alive (our culture intended). See also note 13.

7. I am aware of the division into some 15 genera but the visual implications seem to me negligible at this point. This may need refinement. Interest in birds goes back at least to age 9 in my childhood, in flowers to early infancy.

8. Banks, schools, churches, municipalities, armies still continue to rely on some form of heraldry, especially in some European countries, though the fact that the U.S. prefers “seals” to shields
should mislead no one. Transportation liveries (airlines, train companies, automobile makes, etc.) still excite many hobbyists, as well as a variety of uniforms from those of armed forces to sport teams. Much commercial packaging contains heraldic elements which need study: the approach would not be quite the same as Barthes' in *Mythologies*, but that is an important text. In philately, I have become interested in the recent trend to “thematic” collecting.

9. In Maya studies, I remember the work of Paul Kirchoff, but have no references at the time of writing. In Asiatic studies, likewise, the name of R. Heine-Geldern as well as the monumental work of Paul Mus: *Barabudur*. I am instructed that the current *summa* is Wheatley’s *The Pivot of the Four Quarters* (1971) but have not yet seen this. The work of Jung and Campbell is so replete with such materials that there is no point in citing particular loci. Mandalas would, of course, have to enter here: on this, see Tucci (1961).

10. I have barely begun my reading on heraldry with von Volborth (1974) and Pine (1969). In order to keep matters as simple as possible, I have abstained from getting into heraldic terminology at this juncture! We will doubtless have to deal with eventually: i) a system of classification, ii) an art of heraldry developed, or influenced, by artists of the caliber of Durer. This might provide a situation not too different from that of calligraphic art as Levi-Strauss discusses it (1969:21). This has many implications I prefer to leave aside for the time being.

11. See Lévi-Strauss (1966:10). Note in passing the non-sociological nature of “family” here. A sociological family could only be composed of warblers of one species!

12. I am under no illusions as to Freudian reactions to the topic of collection. But there are other questions. The formation of paradigms of any sort would seem to imply collection. On the surface, collection implies the consumer but, in the form of *collage*, does it not also pertain to the producer, and especially in our day? Is collection one basic form of the artistic process? If so, would this be true of random-procedure levels in composition as well? How significant is random-procedure really and what is its exact relation to mimesis in the widest sense of co-relating “natural” and “cultural” orders? (Here I need more work on such contemporaries as Cage and Mac Low). What about the *objet trouvè* in surrealism, taken together with what seems to me to be a surrealist ambivalence about whether anything is ever truly random: *le hasard objectif*? Is it not true that, for surrealists, there is always a wider sphere of discourse within which the elements of metaphor brought from the most disparate universes of discourse (let’s say Lautreamont's sowing machine and umbrella) cease to be perceived as separate and contradictory. See Breton (1969) and his *L'amour fou*; see also a badly neglected classic on surrealist myths: Carrouges (1954).

13. I have been keeping such words as “projective” and “selective” quite loose here in the conviction that I am not well qualified in the psychological approaches which would help. It is clear that Gestalt Psychology must have its say here, possibly through such work as Arnheim’s (1974) in aesthetics. I confess to a deplorable ignorance at this time of Piaget.

My debt to Dr. Trabasso (see note 6) extends to his putting me in touch with the work of Rosch (1973 and in press) and Nelson (1974). Detailed consideration of these exciting developments lies before me. Telescoping unforgivably, what time has allowed of only as a brief glance to date, prompts me to want to know more about views in which cultural categories seem to be less arbitrary than had been thought and Euclidian space comes to us initially structured. This must have implications for the respective roles of “nature” and “culture” in classification. I would wish to know more about the implications for a “heraldic vision” of Rosch’s analog, as opposed to digital models. Wilson’s thesis that concept develops out of experience of a single instance, that perceptual analysis (detotalization) is derivative (often in terms of color and size) from a conceptual core-meaning whose essence is function seems to allow a translation in which “function” would come before “decoration.” In terms of “heraldry” this might read shield for defense comes before shields for beauty: see section 2.8. But I need guidance here.

I am instructed that D.E. Berlyne (1960, 1971, 1974) would be material, for instance to the question of saying neither too much nor too little in a poem: the problem of “stimulus complexity” (see section 4.3. of this paper). I have not yet been able to look at this at all.

N.b: sections 2.4 to 2.7 have been re-written.
since initial presentation. I am indebted to personal communications with Drs. Trabasso and Nelson as well as to discussions with research assistants and students. I would especially like to thank Janet Rodney, Janet Glor, Yael Zerubavel.


See also Durkheim (1968) and Durkheim and Mauss (1963).


16. On Turner's contribution's, see section 5.2. of this paper.

17. See especially Frye (1968: ch.1.)

18. Blake is, of course, highly aware of the systematic nature of his enterprise in his feeling that he must create his system in order not to be enslaved by another's. The Prophecies I am dealing with in this area are mainly: The Four Zoas, Milton and Jerusalem. For detailed lists of the type I discussed here, see Erdman's Blake (1965: 158-9, 181, 206-208, 223-225). But this is an initial suggestion — the process is ubiquitous in Blake — and I have made no attempt yet to catalogue all the lists. For charts of category ascription which should not appear strange to specialists of Pueblo Amerindians, for instance, see Damon (1971:212).

For an excellent study of Balzacian cosmic models, see Butor (1960). Followed by Tarn (1966a).

19. These theological considerations remind me that it would be interesting to open a brief digression here which would start with Coleridge on the Greek gods and go on to consider why there has been — in spite of so many efforts to eradicate them — such a persistence of classical pantheons in the thematics of poetry down to this day. This, also, is for the future. For now, I would guess that some form of polytheism (rather perhaps than pantheism) is necessary to the kind of "vision" I am postulating here, a societal one in that the gods of a polytheistic situation are, de facto, a society. The poem no longer viewed as machine, or as a plant, but as society. While recent poets have tended to bring other pantheons into their work, I guess that Maya and Buddhist pantheons (they seem to predominate) are fulfilling the same function as the Greco-Romans do as late as Pound and Eliot. Davenport's Pound studies (1969) show quite clearly that at least two sub-groups in Pound's "society" — the goodies and the baddies — are represented by two different sets of gods standing for different social values, and there are probably more than two. Davenport's emerging work on Persephone and the archaic, with brilliant intimations in his recent Tatlin!, will doubtless be of cardinal importance here.

20. I shall want to look at 1) being torn apart, 2) falling apart. There may be little difference. The Baccha may be a good place to start.

The very degree of redundancy in the Prophecies is one aspect among many of Blake's generalized view of the basic scenario.

We might also decide that the uncertainty about Albion=Cosmos/Albion < Cosmos may be one of the ways in which Blake deliberately sets up tensions within the text in order to leave open a very difficult question. It occurs to me that one formulation of "view two" would run: Albion is an emanation of the Cosmos, but not only one — since, for every individual, every nation, every cosmos, there is an "Albion" in the same sense in which there is a Buddha in Buddhism for each such class. Should "view one" prevail, Albion would probably have to be equated with the Eternal Reality, the Unwobbling Pivot, Atman, Nirvana, and other such. The radical contradiction here at one level is resolvable at another level: see section 5 of this paper.

21. I am indebted, here, of course to the theory of narrative from Propp on down.

As it passes from process back into structure, the poem would immediately open up again into paradigmatic scope. Taking Dante's masterpiece at this moment would then involve, at least: 1) Dante's trip as pilgrim from which he does not return until the moment we read the last line of
Paradiso, ii) Dante’s trip as scriptor from which he has returned the moment we even approach the poem; iii) Dante’s rehearsal of his trip at the time of his death, upon which he has not yet set out; iv) Dante’s no longer being among us; v) the application of all this to Everyman. This can be refined. Such considerations have not been foreign to Dante scholarship, of course.

22. I might be tempted to place another pair “structuralism/serialism” among the “higher level of abstraction” pairs here listed if I could be sure of understanding Lévi-Strauss’ discussion of it (1969: 23-26). On my reservations here, see note 14.

23. I am indebted for what follows to a discussion with William V. Spanos at Binghamton in early 1975 and for a subsequent reading of his criticism, especially (1970). One may be justified in seeing some aspects of this confrontation as an extension of what I take to be a crucial confrontation in the first half of the century, that between Surrealism and Marxism.

For an early, much too conservative, formulation of some of these issues in terms of private/public poetries in relation to scientific thinking see Tarn (1966b).

24. The quotation is from Goodman (1968:7). I am aware of not having paid enough attention here to historians of art and theoreticians of aesthetics. Such authors as Arnheim (1971, 1974) and Gombrich (1960, 1963) spring to mind, there are many others. Spanos indicates Worringer (1963) as an important master. Nodelman’s extremely useful piece (1966) calls attention to the strukturforschung school of such scholars as Riegl and von Kaschnitz-Weinberg: unfortunately not too much of this seems available in translation.

25. On the primacy of the written, homework on Jacques Derrida (1967 and others) obviously remains to be done.

It is clear that an artist, especially if he be “processual” in his feelings, might reject the suggestion that he starts out with any kind of “world-model” as he begins to write his poem. As I have pointed out, the illusion that, while process occurs, there is nothing else but process: i.e. there is nothing else but liberty and freedom, is the illusion which is necessary to the act of the poem, the performance of it, its making. Nevertheless, I believe that the poet is constrained by structure both at the outset and at the termination of his creative act. The initial constraint may well be unconscious; I might even hazard the guess that there is repression for very pertinent reasons. To a reader of Lévi-Strauss, this question also opens out onto the problematic ratio of unconscious/conscious components in his view of classification.

In a valuable recent conversation (2/25/76) on open/closed; structural/processual; influence/“transmission,” George Quasha proposed ceasing to equate “open-form” poetry with openendedness and looking at what happens in the middle of a poem.

26. Reading some notes made in 1970 after writing this, I find: “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection (i.e. metaphor) into the axis of combination” (i.e. metonymy): Jakobson (1966: 358). On structure as that through which it is possible to pass from the seen to the spoken, see Foucault (1973: 134-5).

27. Another take on this: Orpheus “looks back” at regret for Eurydice and can pay no attention to the Bacchantes. They tear him to pieces and throw him into a river (process). A “selected” Orpheus, composed of head and lyre will land on Lesbos: future shrines from which the god will speak again as oracle.

There has not been time at this dateline (3/8/76) to adjust 4.3 to the re-written 2.4-2.7.

28. I hope to develop a model of “litanical,” “idyllic” and “elegiac” functions in the short poem, or lyric, as an outcome of such observations.

29. See Quasha (1973).


On the problem of the anti-social and the asocial (while recognizing that, methodologically, Turner might refuse such a view) I still prefer the model set out on the basis of Buddhist material in Mendelson (1965: especially 218, see also

I have not yet pondered properly Turner's material on color symbolism. The arguments in (1967: ch. 3 especially at 88-91), obviously require this.

Turner's discussion of orectic/normative referential polarization in symbols—in the general context of a statement such as Gehlen's that "man is by nature a cultural creature" seem to me to bear strong relationship to what I say here regarding the role of any art object in the production of another, see (1969: 9, 17, 23).

It is part of the imbalance of this paper that anthropologists critical of a lack of historicity receive less attention: I think of Stanley Diamond, Eric Wolf and the authors included in Hymes (1972) among many others. The anthropology of Robin Fox, with its ethnological connections, is of major importance for another view of "historicity" as well as seminal for what I would like to look forward to as a bio-aesthetics.

31. I wish I could have more time to think on 5.4.: it obviously requires refinement. I would certainly like to consider this material in the light of Barthes' view, set out in Mythologies, that bourgeois culture's fundamental inauthenticity springs from its transformation of "culture" into "nature" precisely in order to avoid change, Nature, involving "human nature," if seen as invariant, inhibits any desire or motivation for social change. From his point of view as a Marxist at that date, Barthes criticizes this. My own view, inspired by the impossibility of Baudelaire's "N'importe où pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde," to which I would add "pourvu que ce soit hors de cette langue," as well as its eternal desirability, seems to be moving in the direction of a radically schizoid thesis regarding art and nature only capable of being resolved at the level of what I here call "initiation." As men, we experience genesis, living and dying. As artists we create a deathless order. The order must pretend to be subjected to genesis, however, in order that we can tolerate the discrepancy between ourselves and our creations. That is: while Barthes' inauthenticity may be deplorable from a political point of view (and I would so deplore it even in myself), it may be a basic human requirement on some other level. The "beautiful contradictions"

continue to puzzle us, sometimes ludically, sometimes intolerably.

The view that modern literature is a return to a pre-classical episteme is found at large in Barthes: my most recent reading of it is in Foucault (1973: 43-4, 81, 89, 96, 118-20 and, especially, 103). I bring this up in connection with our consideration of the archaic and the archetypal.

32. It is clear from many suggestions that a reading of Goethe would occasion similar feelings of reverence. For two such suggestions, see Hendel (1955: 30-32) and Arnheim (1974: 73).
Texts Referred To

To facilitate reference, I have quoted from English translations of foreign works wherever possible but have tried to give the date of original publication in brackets at the end of reference. The list includes works found useful lately but not referred to directly in this draft.


Tarn, N. 1966a: "The Created Creator and the Agony of Time: Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin" (in ms.)


Towards A Poetics Of Performance

Hunting Circuits, Ceremonial Centers, and Theatres

The earliest human societies were hunting and gathering bands. These bands were neither primitive nor poor; the best evidence suggests an abundance of food, small families (birth control was practiced), an established range; the cultural level—at least in terms of painting and sculpting—was very high: the masterpieces of the caves of southwest Europe and the mobile art of Eurasia are testimony enough. Human bands did not live in one spot, neither did they wander aimlessly. Each band had its own circuit: a route through time/space in a specific range. I say “time/space” because the hunting schedule was not gratuitous; it took into account the movement of game in pursuit of its own feeding and mating patterns. In brief, humans occupied an ecological niche that kept bands on the move in a regular, repetitious pattern, following game and adjusting to the seasons.

Repetitious beyond modern calculation: evidence shows that certain decorated caves were in constant use for more than 10,000 years. What kind of use shall be made clear soon. Human bands did not number more than 40 to 70 individuals, and more than one band used adjacent and overlapping ranges. For most of the year bands probably met only occasionally, by chance, or perhaps to exchange information and goods. But indications are that at special times—when game was assembled in one area, when certain edible fruits and nuts were ripe for gathering—a concentration of bands took place. This still happens among the few hunting peoples left, in the Kalahari with the !Kung, at the coroborees of the Australian aborigines; the farming and hunting highlands tribes in New Guinea stage elaborate “payback” or exchange ceremonies on a regular basis.1 Pilgrimages, family reunions marked by feasting and the exchange of gifts, and theatrical performances are three other variations on the same action.

V. and F. Reynolds report a strikingly similar phenomenon among the chimpanzees of the Budongo Forest in Africa. The Reynolds’ account makes me want to root “going out to the theatre” or “ceremonial gathering” in behavior common to humans and certain other species.

Garner (1896: 59-60) wrote that according to native hearsay, “one of the most remarkable habits of the chimpanzee is the kanjo as it is called in his native tongue. The word . . . implies more of the idea of ‘carnival.’ It is believed that more than one family takes part in these festivities.” He went on to describe how the chimpanzees fashion a drum from damp clay and wait for it to dry. Then “the chimpanzees assemble by night in great numbers and the carnival begins. One or two will beat violently on this dry clay, while others jump up and down in a wild grotesque manner. Some of them utter long rolling sounds as if trying to sing . . . and the festivities continue in this fashion for hours.”

Apart from the question of the drum, the account given above describes quite well what occurred in the Budongo Forest in its extreme form, as we heard it six times, once when we were very close to the chimpanzees. Only twice, however, did this happen at night; the four other times it lasted for a few hours during the daytime.

The “carnivals” consisted of prolonged noise for periods of hours, whereas ordinary outbursts of calling and drumming lasted a few minutes only. Although it was not possible to know the reason for this unusual behavior, twice it seemed to be associated with the meeting at a common food source of bands that may have been relatively unfamiliar to each other.2

The Reynolds aren’t sure what the carnivals were for—they think it may signal a move from one food source to another. It does occur when certain edible fruits are ripe. The 19th Century report indicating some kind of entertainment (singing, dancing, drumming) apparently romanticizes and anthropomorphizes the gathering of chimpanzees: a mood of excitement and well-being, the meeting of many
animals from different bands who are on friendly terms with each other. This description fits neatly that of human gatherings. But the Reynolds confirm the 19th century reports:

Calls were coming from all directions at once and all groups concerned seemed to be moving about rapidly. As we oriented toward the source of one outburst, another came from another direction. Stamping and fast-running feet were heard sometimes behind, sometimes in front and howling outbursts and prolonged rolls of drums (as many as 13 rapid beats) shaking the ground surprised us every few yards.3

What these carnivals are are prototypes of celebratory, theatrical events. Their qualities are worth noting; (1) a gathering of bands—not individuals—who are neither living with nor total strangers to each other; (2) the sharing of food or, at least, a food source; (3) singing, dancing (rhythmic movement), drumming: entertainment; (4) use of a place that is not a “home” for any group as the grounds for the gathering. (In regard to the last point I note that even in our own culture parties held in the home use rooms especially marked out or decorated “for the occasion”; and other rooms are more or less off limits.)

The entertainment aspect of the gathering is of special importance. This kind of behavior Turner describes as “liminal,” it characterizes initiation rites and pilgrimages. At celebratory gatherings people are free to engage in behavior and associations that would otherwise be forbidden: in fact, special non-ordinary behavior is not only permitted—it is expected, prepared for, rehearsed.

Where two or more groups meet on a seasonal schedule, where there is abundant food either available or stored, and where there is a geographical marker—cave, hill, waterhold, etc.—there is likelihood of a ceremonial center. Of the many differences between human and ape ceremonial centers none is more decisive than the fact that only humans permanently transform the space by “writing” on it or attaching a lore to it. The art in the caves of southwest Europe and the stories of the Aborigines about the landmarks in their range are means of transforming natural spaces into cultural items: ways of making theatres. But every architectural construction or modification is the making of a cultural place—what is spacial about a theatre?

A theatre is a place whose only or main use is to stage performances. A performance is an event which includes at its center a drama, in the strict sense of Turner’s definition. It is my belief that this kind of space, a theatre place, did not arrive late in human cultures (say with the Greeks of the 5th century B.C.) but was there from the beginning: it is itself one of the marks which, taken together, characterize our species. The first theatres were ceremonial centers—part of a system of hunting, following food sources according to a seasonal schedule, meeting other human bands, celebrating, and making the celebration by some kind of writing on a space; an integration of geography, calendar, social interaction, and the ability of people to transform natural items into cultural items.

![Figure One](image-url)

FIGURE ONE: At places where seasonal hunting circuits intersect at a landmark ceremonial centers are established.

The first theatres were not merely “natural spaces”—as the Budongo Forest where the chimpanzees stage their carnivals is—but were also, and fundamentally, “cultural places.” The transformation of space into place is at the heart of the construction of a theatre; this transformation is accomplished by “writing on space,” as the cave art of the paleolithic period demonstrates so well.4 This writing need not be visual, it can be oral as with the Aborigines. The Aborigines are a people with few material possessions but possessing a culture rich in kinship systems, rites, myths, songs, and dances. With them the transformation of space into place cannot be seen so much as it can be heard. Remembering the Aborigines we must be cautious when assuming an area that has left
little visual evidence of high art is necessarily artistically impoverished.

The functions of the ceremonies—or performances—at the ceremonial centers, and the exact procedures, cannot be known precisely. Heelmarks left in the clay in at least one of the caves indicate dancing; authorities generally agree that performances of some kind took place. But more often than not the reconstructions suit the tastes of the reconstructor: fertility rites, initiations, shamanist-curing, and so on. Our own tastes run towards "ecological rituals" such as outlined by Roy A. Rappaport: performances which regulate economic, political, and religious interaction among neighboring groups whose relation with each other alternates between hostility and collaboration. In fact, Rappaport in *Pigs for the Ancestors* discusses war as part of a total ecological system. My own views are close to Rappaport's:

R ritual, particularly in the context of a ritual cycle, operates as a regulating mechanism in a system, or set of interlocking systems, in which such variables as the arena of available land, necessary lengths of fallow periods, size and composition of both human and pig populations, tropic requirements of pigs and people, energy expended in various activities, and the frequency of misfortunes are included. (...) Underlying these hypotheses is the belief that much is to be gained by regarding culture, in some of its aspects, as part of the means by which animals of the human species maintain themselves in their environments. Rappaport is writing of a contemporary New Guinea people; I am trying to reconstruct performances of paleolithic hunters—I think both bear relevantly on patterns within modern industrial societies. Extrapolating from Rappaport, from the pictorial and other evidence within the caves, and from patterns within contemporary theatre I think I can say that the performances at the ceremonial centers occurring where hunting bands met functioned in at least the following ways:

1. To maintain friendly relations.
2. To exchange goods, mates, trophies, techniques.
3. To show and exchange dances, songs, dramas.

Furthermore, I think these performances followed rhythms familiar to us of:

1. Gathering.
2. Performing.
3. Dispersing.

In other words, people came to a special place, did something that can be called theatre, and went on their way. Simple and self-apparent as this rhythm may seem it is not the only thing that can happen when two or more groups approach each other. They could avoid each other, meet in combat, pass each other by as travellers do on a road, and so on. The pattern of gathering, performing, dispersing is one which I call the basic theatrical pattern.

This pattern occurs "naturally" in urban settings. An accident happens, or is caused to happen (as in guerilla theatre); a crowd gathers to see what's happened. The crowd makes a circle around the event or, as is the case with accidents, around the aftermath of the event. Talk in the crowd is about what happened, to whom, why; this talk is largely interrogative: like dramas and courtroom trials, which are formal versions of the street accident, the event itself is absorbed into the action of reconstructing what took place. In trials this is done verbally; in dramas this is done analogically, by doing again what happened (actually, fictionally, mythically, religiously). The questions asked in the crowd are those which Brecht wanted theatre audiences to ask of dramas. The shape of this kind of street event—a heated center with involved spectators blending out to a cool rim where people come, peer in, and move on—is like that of some medieval street theatre. Accidents conform to the basic performance pattern; even after the event is "cleaned up" some "writing" is left on the site: for example, bloodstains, knots of witnesses and the curious, and so on. Only slowly does the event evaporate and the crowd disperse. I call such events "eruptions."
FIGURE TWO: An Eruption, with a heated center, a cool rim, with spectators coming and going. The eruption occurs either after an accident or during an event whose development is predictable such as an argument, the construction or demolition of a building, and so on.

An eruption is like a theatrical performance because it is not the accident itself that gathers and keeps an audience. They are held by a reconstruction or reenactment of the event. In the case of an argument or, at a much slower pace, the construction of a building watched by sidewalk superintendents, it is the unfolding of an event which can be measured against a predictable scenario that gathers and holds people. Totally unpredictable occurrences—a falling wall, sudden gunfire—scatter people; only after the wall has fallen or the shooting stops does the crowd gather to make the drama.

Eruptions are one kind of "natural" theatre, processions are another. Together they form the bipolar model of the performances that took place in the ceremonial centers at the intersecting points of paleolithic hunting bands moving across the terrain on their seasonal treks. In a procession—which is a kind of pilgrimage—the event moves along a prescribed path, spectators gather along the route, and at appointed places the procession halts and performances are played. Parades, funeral corteges, political marches, the Bread & Puppet Theatre are processions.

FIGURE THREE: A Procession, with a fixed route and a known goal. At several points along the way the procession stops and performances are played. Spectators watch the procession pass by, some may join and go on to the goal.

Usually a procession moves to a goal: the funeral to the grave, the political march to the speakers' stand, the circus parade to the big-top, the pilgrimage to the shrine. The event performed at the goal of the procession is the opposite of an eruption: it is well planned for, rehearsed, ritualized.

However, eruptions and processions can occur simultaneously, especially when large numbers of people are involved and the leadership of a group is flexible. The meeting of bands of chimpanzees in the Budongo Forest is both eruptive and processional: at a known place in a known circuit the abundance of food, the meeting with strange bands, triggers an eruption of the "carnival." It is my belief that a roughly similar thing happened countless times on the hunting circuits of paleolithic humans. Out of these hunting circuits developed ritual circuits, meeting places, ceremonial centers, and theatres.

The fact that theatres occur at special times in special places is worldwide. It locates theatre in a complex of performance activities which also includes rites of passage, sports, and trials (duels, ritual combats, courtroom trials). Theatres are maps of the cultures where they exist. That is, theatre is analogical not only in the "literary" sense—the stories dramas tell, the convention of explicating action by staging it—but also in the architectonic sense. Thus, for example, the Athenian theatre of the 5th Century B.C. has at its center the altar of Dionysus, around this altar the chorus dances physically between the audience and the men who play the dramatic roles; the semicircular tiers of seats—not individuated as in modern theatres but curving communal benches—literally enfolds the drama, containing its agons within an Athenian solidarity. Conceptually this pattern of solidarity containing agon is repeated in the contest among the poets for the best play and the solidarity of the Athenian polis which sponsored the contest and awarded the prize.

(see Figure Four)

The proscenium theatre of the 18th to 20th centuries in the West, a style that is now passing through modification in use and the construction of new kinds of theatres (arena, thrust, environmental), also shows a definite sociometric design.

(see Figure Five)
FIGURE FOUR: At the center of the Athenian theatre was the open eye of the Altar of Dionysus. Around it danced the Chorus, giving a nest of solidarity for the agonistic actions of the actors. The audience nests both Chorus and actors. But the agon of the contest among poets for the prize surrounds the whole theatrical event. Yet the solidarity of Athens, the polis, provides the ultimate nest for the entire sequence of performances. Each agon is literally held in a nest of solidarity. The outer nest — the polis — is not metaphorical: there were definite geographical, ideological, and social limits to Athens; and each person knew what it was to be a citizen. The shape of the theatre is a version of the social system which alternated agon and solidarity; which was open about debate and interrogation, but closed about who was or was not a member, a citizen.

The Greek amphitheatre is open, beyond and around it the city can be seen during performances which take place in daylight. It is the city, the polis, that is tightly boundaried geographically and ideologically. The proscenium theatre is a tightly boundaried individual building with access from the street strictly controlled. Within the part of the structure where the performance takes place and is viewed much effort is spent in directing attention only on the drama; everything not in the show is hidden or sunk in darkness. The building, like the events within it, is compartmentalized; the time for the audience to look at each other is regulated and is limited to before the show and intermissions. The proscenium theatre is divided into three precincts. The lobby, "A," actually begins in the street in front of the theatre; the lobby is open to all, patrons and non-patrons. In the lobby the box office offers tickets for sale to those who want to go beyond the lobby into the house. Theatre workers enter the building from another door, the stage door, because part of the proscenium style — a version of the industrial practice of separating the production of goods from their marketing — is to conceal all preparations from the patrons. The house, "B," is divided into different classes of seats some better than others; however, even the cheap seats are individual. Usually the house is gaudily decorated, displaying cash outlay, even though during the show these decorations can’t be seen. The box seats are placed so that patrons sitting there can be seen by other spectators. A curtain covers most of the wall facing the seats. The curtain announces itself as a formidable, if temporary, barrier. However, even when lifted patrons are not allowed on stage.

The stage, "C," itself takes up a surprisingly small part of the whole structure. The stage is architecturally separated from the house by the proscenium arch, a unique and dominating feature. The arch is actually a wall interrupted in its center portion so that quite literally the audience is in one room looking into another with the wall separating the two rooms partially removed. As the proscenium theatre developed over the 17th through 20th centuries the forestage jutting into the house receded until it vanished eliminating any sharing of space between the stage and the house. The open theatre movement of the 20th century has made the playing space part of the viewing space once again; this has been attempted in many variations — thrust stage, arena, environmental. In the proscenium theatre the part of the stage visible to the audience is a surprisingly small portion of the arena behind the proscenium. In the Greek theatre almost every space was visible, as well as the city behind and around the theatre. In the proscenium theatre the wings, flies, dressing rooms, offices, and storage bins are all concealed. The stage portion of the building is usually more than half the area of the theatre, but from the house it looks much less spacious than the house. Flies and wings were developed to facilitate quick changes of scenery — visual surprises. Additional storage space was necessary as productions involving bulks of scenery were kept for future productions; dressing rooms became more ornate as costumes and makeup
FIGURE FIVE: The theatre is not in itself a central structure at the heart of a clearly boundaried polis. It is in a theatre district which is one neighborhood in an ill-defined "Urban area." Other theatres adjoin or are close to the theatre.

The theatre itself is divided into three areas: lobby, house, stage. Fixed seating aims the audience at the stage. The stage floor is open, often slightly raked so as to tilt the action toward the house. Stage machinery is hidden in wings and flies; quick scene changes are possible.

The lobby, which extends into the street under the theatre marquee is a gathering place for the audience.
increased in complexity. The "C" space of the proscenium theatre is an efficient engine for quick scene changes and mounting sumptuous effects; this theatre produces "numbers" and coups de théâtre like a many-coursed meal at an expensive restaurant. Every attempt is made to hide how much they cost. Dramas written for the proscenium include one or two intermissions because it's necessary for patrons to see each other, evaluate the product they've purchased, drink, smoke, and re-experience the thrill of the rising curtain.

Theatres are located in a theatre district; performances are offered in the interstices of the work week or on general holidays. Being a model of the mercantile process the theatre can't impede that process; appealing to the middle class it is not proper to entice people from their jobs. The theatre district stimulates consumer appetites offering a sequence of shows just as each show offers a sequence of scenes. Competition is fierce among theatres — this competition is for customers, not prizes; when prizes are given they are used to attract more customers. Most shows fail (which means they don't attract buyers) but hits run as long as people will pay to see them regardless of their artistic quality. Thus, in all these ways, the proscenium theatre is a model of capitalism in its classic phase. Today, as capitalism evolves into corporatism, new kinds of theatres arise. Cultural centers — art fortresses run not by impresarios but boards of directors — are examples of conglomeratism. Environmental theatres — built in cheap hit-and-run spaces, often in out of the way neighborhoods — exemplify a resistance and alternative to the conglomerate; but environmental theatres exist only in the creases of contemporary society, and off leavings, like cockroaches.

Creases are not marginal — they run through the actual and conceptual center of society, like faults in the earth's crust. Creases are places to hide, but more importantly they signal area of instability, disturbance, and radical change in the social plane. This change is always a "change in direction," that is, not a change only of technique. Throughout the urban environment in places abandoned, or not yet reclaimed, individuals and small groups work. Even in large, apparently smooth operations like corporations and universities creases exist; look for them, quite literally, in "out of the way places." An existing neighborhood is not transformed instantly by the bulldozer (as when building a cultural center whose monuments rest on murdered neighborhoods) but step-by-step through infiltration and renovation. At the time when a balance/tension exists between several classes, income levels, interests, and uses — as in New York's Soho — crease phenomena — experimental art, active bars and cafes, street life, parties which move from living area to living area — peak. But when a threshold of visibility and "stability" is crossed, the neighborhood freezes in a new form, becomes an "attraction" (like the theatre district which draws most of its life from outside its own precinct), and the crease is smoothed out. Then artists — and others who need a crease environment — follow along, or create, a new fault.

The fact that theatre places are scenographic models of socio-metric patterns is universal. Pointing out that "most of the traditional theatre performances (of India) are open-air events, organized on the level ground, a platform stage, or as a mobile processional spectacle," Suresh Awasthi goes on to say:

They are presented in fields after the harvest, streets, open spaces outside town (often permanently designated for performances), fairs, markets, and — especially for the Ramayana and the Krishna legend shows — temple gardens, riverbanks, market squares, and courtyards. (...) The performances are social events not separated from the community activity. The actor is an active member of his community. He is also a farmer, a mechanic, a carpenter, a fruit vendor, a vegetable hawker. (...) An important factor that determines the nature of the scenography in this theatre is the nonrealistic and metaphysical treatment of time and place.11

Traditional Indian theatre is very like Western medieval theatre — and modern avantgarde or experimental theatre. In all cases the performer often has a second or third occupation, but this does not mean that his skills as a performer are amateurish; far from it, a connection to a community may deepen all aspects of his art. The flexible treatment of time and space — the ability of one space to be transformed into many places through the skills of the performer more than through the illusionistic devices of the scenographer — goes hand-in-hand with a transformational view of character (role doubling, role switching) and a close contact with the audience (the performer both as character and as story-teller, the
use of such devices as the aside and direct address to the audience). The connectedness—a mobility among spheres of reality rather than social mobility in the modern sense—is an important quality of traditional performances, and even the avantgarde (where the life of the bohemian is lived outside the usual social categories). The totality of theatre is nowhere better expressed than among the Aborigines:

The daily life of the Aborigines is rewarding but routine. There is a kind of low-key pace to the everyday round of living. In their ritual lives, however, the Aborigines attain a heightened sense of drama. Sharp images appear and colors deepen. The Aborigines are masters of stagecraft and achieve remarkable visual and musical effects with the limited materials at hand. (...) Gradually I experienced the central truth of Aboriginal religion: that is not a thing by itself but an inseparable part of a whole that encompasses every aspect of daily life, every individual, and every time—past, present, and future. It is nothing less than the theme of existence, and as such constitutes one of the most sophisticated and unique religious and philosophical systems known to man.12

We are accustomed to a theatre that locates “the real” in relationships among individual people: but most of world theatre takes a broader, and deeper, view of what’s real. Modern Western theatre is mimetic, reactualizing on stage what has occurred elsewhere. Traditional theatre, and again I include the avantgarde in this category, is transformational, creating or incarnating in a theatre place what cannot take place anywhere else. Just as a farm is a field where edible foods are grown, so a theatre is a place where transformations of time, place, and persons (human and nonhuman) are accomplished. Aborigine scenography creates a theatre out of a combination of natural and built elements. Each rock, waterhole, tree, and stream is embedded in a matrix of legend and dramatic action. Thus a particular place is where a ceremony takes place, where a mythic event has happened in the past, where beings manifest themselves through songs and dances, and where everyday and special actions converge—for example, a waterhole is a place where people come to drink and where ceremonies are enacted. Modifications of space transforming it into a theatre may consist of clearing the space and doing sand or rock paintings; or a space may become a theatre by being “learned”—a novice is taught the legends, songs, and dances associated with a space: geography itself is socialized; the uninitiated sees nothing but an outcropping of rock or a waterhole, while the initiated experiences a dense theatrical setting. This technique of creating a theatre place by poetic means is used by Shakespeare and practitioners of guerrilla theatre.

Transformances

Victor Turner analyzes “social dramas” using theatrical terminology to describe disharmonic or crisis situations. These situations—arguments, combats, rites of passage—are inherently dramatic because participants not only do things, they try to show others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a “performed for an audience” aspect. Erving Goffman takes a more directly scenographic approach in using the theatrical paradigm. He believes all social interaction is staged—people prepare backstage, confront others while wearing masks and playing roles, use the main stage area for the performance of routines, and so on.13 For both Turner and Goffman the basic human plot is the same: someone begins to move to a new place in the social order; this move is accomplished through ritual, or blocked; in either case a crisis arises because any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected ceremonially—that is, by means of theatre.

Turner says that “Social dramas are units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations. Typically, they have four main phases of public action. (...) These are: 1. Breach of regular, norm-governed social relations. (...) 2. Crisis during which (...) there is a tendency for the breach to widen. (...) Each public crisis has what I now call liminal characteristics, since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary, it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. (...) 3. Redressive action (ranging) from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual. (...) Redress, too, has its liminal features, its being ‘betwixt and between,’ and, as such, furnishes a distanced replication and critique
of the events leading up to and composing the ‘crisis.’ This replication may be in the rational idiom of a judicial process, or in the metaphorical and symbolic idiom of a ritual process. (...) 4. The final phase (...) consists either of the reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between contesting parties.” 14 This way of growing by means of conflict and schism Bateson calls “schismogenesis.” 15 It is a major agency of human cultural growth.

Turner’s dramatistic approach is interesting on many levels. The replication of the redressive action phase is, of course, a theatrical performance, a formal re-staging of events. The whole four-phase plan, also, is a drama — this scheme can be discerned in any Greek tragedy, Shakespearean play, or drama of Ibsen or O’Neill. It is less easy to find in Chekhov, Ionesco, or Beckett — but is is there; the way it is distorted opens insight into dramatic structure. For example, in Waiting for Godot there is breach (the separation from Godot) and crisis (waiting, the arrival of the Boy at the end of each act to tell Gogo and Didi that Godot will not come). There is a truncated redressive action: the (negative) doing of nothing, which is all the characters can (not) do. But there’s no re-integration. Significantly the play ends with the stage direction “They do not move.” Most other dramas, the plays of Shakespeare for example, end with a journey: to get crowned, to go to the grave to dispose of corpses, to go to the authorities to relate what’s happened. Life literally “goes on.” This movement at the ultimate moment of drama is akin to the Ita, missa est which concludes the Mass: it is a dismissal of the audience, a signal within the drama that the theatrical event is coming to a close. The performance continues as the audience disperses, spreading the news (good or bad) of the show. Even a play as non-conventional and non-religious as Mother Courage and Her Children follows this nearly universal pattern. The play climaxes in scene 11 with the murder of Kattrin. The next and final scene is Courage’s leave-taking of her daughter (lullaby and burial), and the tag (comparable to the final couplets of Shakespearean drama), directed to the audience, reminding them that the everyday world is about to resume, is Courage’s shout as she hitches herself to her wagon, “I’ve got to get back into business. Hey, take me with you!” The last action of the play is Courage marching off, on the move.

Turner says that this Western pattern of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration is actually universal. He shows how Ndembu (African) social process conforms to this dramatic paradigm. I could show how Aborigine, Papua-New Guinean, and Indian social process conforms. What is just as interesting is that the theatre of every culture I know about also conforms. This suggests a universal dramatic structure parallel to social process: drama is that art whose subject, structure, and action is social process.

I want to go two steps beyond what may be, after all, just an elaborate tautology. First, the basic performance structure underlies, literally contains, the dramatic structure.

| Breach-Crisis-Redressive Action-Reintegration |
| GATHERING | PERFORMING | DISPERSING |

The bottom line is solidarity, not conflict; the action is transformation. Conflict is made possible (in the theatre, and perhaps in society too) by the building of a nest out of the agreement to gather at a specific time and place, and to disperse once the performance is over. Especially the extreme forms of violence that characterize drama are contained in this nest built from an agreed-on social procedure. In all cultures people “go to” the theatre: they make special times and places for it; and there are special observances, practices, rituals that lead into the performance and away from it. Not only getting to the theatre, but entering the exact precinct where the show is to be performed involves ceremony: ticket-taking, passing through gates, entering in controllable groups, finding a place from which to watch. Ending the show and going away also involves ceremony: applause or some ratification of the conclusion of the formal performance, a wiping away of the reality of the show and a re-establishment of the reality of everyday life. The performers even more intensely than the audience prepare for the performance and then participate in “cooling-off” procedures after the show is over. In many cultures this cooling-off involves ritual to retire props or costumes. The closing of a sacred ark is as important as its opening.

Too little study has been made of the liminal approaches and leavings of performance — how the audience gets to, and into, the performance place, and how they go from that place; and in what ways this gathering/dispersing is related to the prepa-
The coming and going of both audience and performers guarantees (in Goffman's usage) the existence of the "theatrical frame" so that events can be experienced as actual re-actualizations: in other words, the reality of performance is in the performing; a spectator need not intervene in the theatre to prevent murder as he might feel compelled to do in ordinary life — this is because the violence on stage is actually a performance. That doesn't make it "less real" but "different real." Theatre, to be effective, must maintain its double presence, as a here and now performance of there and then events. The gap between "here and now" and "there and then" allows for an audience to contemplate the action, and to entertain alternatives, for drama is the art of enacting only one of a range of virtual alternatives. It is a luxury usually unaffordable in ordinary life; and very educational. Oedipus would be much different if there were a plague afflicting the town where the drama was being played and the audience believed the plague would end if the murderer of their former leader — a murderer they knew is concealed in their midst — was found and brought to judgment here and now. Some people want performance to achieve this level of authenticity. But when drama approaches this limit it changes fundamentally: either the events enacted are symbolic — as in the knocking out of an incisor tooth, circumcision, or scarring — or they are transformed entirely as at rock concerts where music played by (temporary) folk heroes leads to euphoric hysteria. Or the theatrical frame is imposed so strongly as to permit the enactment of "aesthetic dramas" only: shows whose actions, though extreme, as in the staging of Oedipus with his poked out eyes, are recognized by everyone, including the performers, as a "playing with" rather than a "real doing of." This "playing with" is not inauthentic — it results in changes happening to both performers and spectators.

People who want to make "everything real" including killing animals, the "art" of self-mutilation, or "snuff films" where people are actually murdered are deceiving themselves if they feel they are approaching a deeper or more essential reality. All of these actions — like the Roman gladitorial games or Aztec human sacrifices — are as symbolic and make-believe as anything on a stage. What happens is that living beings are reified into symbolic agents. Such reification is monstrous, I condemn it without exception. It is no justification to point out that modern warfare does the same, killing "things" at a distance. Nor will these blood performances act as a cathartic: violence mimetically replicated, or actualized, stimulates more violence. It also deadens peoples' abilities to intervene outside the theatre when they see violence being done.

Second, Turner locates the essential drama in conflict and conflict resolution. I locate it in transformation — in using theatre as a way to experiment with, act out, and ratify change. Transformations in theatre occur in three different places, and at different levels: (1) in the drama, that is, in the story;¹⁷ (2) in the performers whose special task it is to temporarily undergo a rearrangement of their body/mind; (3) in the audience where changes may either be temporary (entertainment) or permanent (ritual).¹⁸ All over the world performances are accompanied by eating and drinking. In New Guinea, Australia, and Africa feasting is at the very center of theatre; even in modern Western theatre a show without something to eat or drink at intermission or just before or after the theatre is most unusual. This action recalls not only the chimpanzee carnivals but the hunting circuit; it suggests that theatre stimulates appetites, and is an oral/visceral art.¹⁹ And, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, the basic transformation from raw to cooked is a paradigm of culture-making: the transformation from natural into human.²⁰ At its deepest level this is what theatre is "about," the ability to frame and control, to change from raw to cooked, the most problematic (violent, dangerous, sexual, taboo) items of human interaction.

Theatre includes mechanisms for transformation at all levels. At the level of the staging there are costumes and masks, exercises and incantations, incense and music: all designed to "make believe" in the literal sense — to help the performers make into another person, or being, at another time in another place and to manifest this presence here and now so that time and place are doubled. At the level of the audience a change in mood and/or consciousness is effected; this change is either temporary or permanent. And, in some kinds of performances — rites of passage, for example — a permanent change of status of the participants is achieved. But all of these changes are in the service of social homeostasis. Changes within a system are accomplished in order to maintain the balance of the whole system. It is necessary to change girls into women (in an initiation rite) because somewhere else
within the system women are being changed into dead people (in funeral rites); a vacancy exists that must be filled. It is less easy to see how this works in an aesthetic drama, say a performance of Long Day’s Journey into Night.

The key difference between social and aesthetic dramas is the permanence of the transformations effected. Some kinds of social dramas such as feuds, trials, and wars effect permanent change. In other kinds of performances which share qualities both of social and aesthetic drama — rites of passage, political ceremonies — changes in status are permanent (or at least cannot be undone except through more ritual) while changes in the body are either temporary, the wearing of some costume, or not severe: piercing an ear or septum, circumcision. The ordeals which are features of initiation rites, though extreme, are temporary. But the idea of these body alterations and ordeals is to signal and/or enforce a permanent change in the participants. In aesthetic drama no permanent body change is effected. A gap is intentionally opened between what happens to the figures in the story and what happens to the performers playing that story. To play a person in love, or someone who murders or is murdered (to use common examples from Western theatre) or to be transformed into a god, or to go into trance (to use common examples from non-Western theatre) involves fundamental, if temporary, transformations of being, not mere appearances.

Aesthetic drama works a transformation on the audience who is separate from the performers. This separation is a chief evidence of the existence of aesthetic drama. In social drama all present are participants, though some are more decisively involved than others. In aesthetic drama everyone in the theatre are participants in the performance while only those playing roles in the drama are participants in the dramatic event nested within the performance event. This performance event is fundamentally social, and it is at the level of performance that aesthetic and social drama converges. The function of aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama does for its participants: to provide a place for, and a means of, transformation. Rituals carry participants across limins, transforming them into different persons. For example, a young man is a “bachelor” and through the ceremony of marriage he becomes a “husband.”

His status during that ceremony, but only then, is that of “groom.” Groom is the liminal role he plays as a way of transformation from bachelor into husband. Aesthetic drama compels a transformation of the spectators’ view of the world by rubbing their senses against enactments of extreme events, much more extreme than they would usually witness. The nesting pattern makes it possible for the spectator to reflect on these events rather than flee from them or intervene in them. That reflection is the liminal time during which the transformation of consciousness takes place.

The situation for the actor in aesthetic drama is complicated because the drama is repeated many times and each time the actor is supposed to start from nearly the same place. In other words, although spectators come and go, and they are encouraged to change, techniques are developed to prepare the actor for, and bring him down from the experience of playing relatively unchanged — no more changed than any ordinary career changes a person. Metaphorically speaking, the actor is a circular printing press who, in rolling over makes an impression on his audience; but he is not ready to roll over again until he is back in his original position; for each performance there is a new audience on whom an impression is to be made. The actor makes a journey that ends where it began, while the audience is “moved” to a new place. In aesthetic drama techniques have been developed to transform the actor into the role and other techniques are used to bring him back to his ordinary self. In some ritual theatre the officiators are very like actors in aesthetic drama: the shaman working a cure must effect change in his patient, and often does this by transforming himself into another being; but at the end of his performance the shaman must return back to his ordinary existence. It is this ability to “get into” and “get back from” that makes the shaman a continually useful person, not one who can be used once only. Thus there are at least three categories of performance: (1) aesthetic, where the audience changes consciousness while the performer “rolls over,” (2) ritual drama where the object of the ceremony is transformed while the officiating performer “rolls over,” (3) social drama where all involved change.

The ambiguity of theatre since 1960 regarding whether or not an event is “really happening” is an outcome of the blurring of the boundaries between
these categories of performance. So much of experience can now be theatricalized by editing bits of events for showing "news" that people feel nothing strange about a complementary actualization of art. When people watch extreme events knowing these are (1) actually happening and (2) edited to make them even more dramatic and to make them fit into a "showtime" format, but also knowing (3) that as observers they are stripped of all possibility of intervention—that is, they are turned into an audience in the formal sense—the reaction is paralysis and despair. Emotional feedback is not even possible for the media are not used as two-way communications systems as live theatre is. Another reaction is making art more "real," introducing into aesthetics the interventions and feedback eliminated from ordinary life.

Thus it is increasingly common in theatre to witness actual encounters among people, the staging of religious retreats and meetings (as Grotowski is now doing), and involving the audience directly in the story. These are attempts to regain some balance between information—which today overwhelms people—and action, which seems more and more difficult to effect. Terrorism, as opposed to ordinary street violence which is a function of economic deprivation, is a way of getting the attention of society, of making a show; it signals a basic dysfunction of the communications process. The actualization of art—is traditional in many parts of the world: avantgarde and political theatre find already prepared paths. I once strongly encouraged these breaches of categories.

I try now in my work with The Performance Group, and in my teaching, to locate the actuality of performances in the immediate theatrical event recognized as such. I emphasize the gathering and dispersing aspects of performance. Upon entering the theatre spectators are greeted, either by me or other Group members. They see the performance being prepared—actors getting into costume, musicians tuning up, technical equipment checked. etc. Intermissions, and less formal breaks in the narration such as scene shifts, are underlined. In Mother Goose a full meal was served during intermission—during this break in the narration the performance was carried on by other means, by mingling performers and audience, by encouraging spectators to use parts of the space otherwise, and at other times, reserved for the performers (see photo). I try to establish non-

story-telling time as an integral part of the whole performance scheme, while clearly separating this time from the drama. When the drama is over I speak to spectators as they are leaving. I direct many of them back to the performers so that the experience ends not with a dramatic moment, or even the curtain call, but with discussions, greetings, and leave-takings.

The history of intermissions in the Western theatre is an interesting example of the importance of the underlying social event as a nest for the dramatic event. When performances were staged outdoors (medieval, Elizabethan) the spectators could all see each other in daylight. The court performances of masques and dramas were so lit that spectators could see each other as well as the actors. This kind of general illumination, and a mixing of focus including spectators as well as actors, continued throughout the 17th and the 18th centuries. But as scene changes began to necessitate complicated machinery which producers wanted to mask from the audience, the front curtain was introduced and the forestage was eliminated in steps. Also changed lighting, especially in the 19th century with the introduction first of gas and then of electricity, widened the gap between stage and house until the stage was brightly lit and the house dark. In this situation naturalism arose, with its slice-of-life and peeping Tom staging. But along with these conventions came the intermission: a formal period when the house was illuminated and the spectators, either remaining in the house or, troup ing to lounges and restaurants, had the opportunity to see each other. The intermission served the purpose, that was not necessary either in outdoor or fully lit theatres, of giving the spectators a chance to see themselves; this is a way of confirming the fulfillment of the "gathering," the getting together of a group, or the formation of a group by virtue of having gotten together. Performances such as Grotowski's which keep the audience in the dark and with no intermission generate anxiety and contradict the social impulses of theatre. I do not criticize such performances, but note that they run against the grain of the Western tradition; in the deepest sense they are unconventional.

The techniques I use to show that "a story is being played for you, all around you, needing your active support" actualize the "performance nest" wherein the drama happens. Performers in The Performance Group are trained to display their double identities: as themselves and as the characters they are playing.
Katrin (Leeny Sack) looking at Yvette (Elizabeth LeCompte) in The Performance Group's production of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, scene 3. All other people in the photo are spectators. Some are sitting at the edge of a pit 25' long, 8' wide and 7' deep. (photo by Clem Fiori)

By keeping these both out front the spectator sees the performer choosing to act in a certain way. Even "being in character" is seen as a choice not an inevitability. Thus the spectator, too, is encouraged to choose how to receive each action. There is not fixed seating, several actions go on simultaneously — spectators can shift focus from one aspect of the performance to another; and by no means are these aspects all concerned with the drama: a spectator can focus on a performer changing costume (that is, being another character), the technical crew, other spectators, etc. Instead of working for a unanimity of reaction, as in sentimental drama, I strive for a diversity of opportunities. These encourage spectators to react intellectually and ideologically as well as emotionally. What is "really happening" is a gathering of spectators of different ages, sexes, classes, and ideologies watching a group of performers tell a story by theatrical means. Within this context the Group explores the most radical theatrical means we can handle: participation, environmental staging, multi-focus, etc. These are combined with the traditional theatrical means of our culture: narration and characterization.
Eilif (Timothy Shelton) lying in the pit in The Performance Group's production of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, scene 8. The edges have been cleared of all but one spectator. During the supper served after scene 3 spectators roam freely throughout the theater, mixing with performers. In all other scenes there is a frequent exchange of playing and spectating spaces. (photo by Clem Fiori)
What Performers Do: The Ecstasy/Trance Wheel

Looking at performing in a world-wide scan, two kinds of process are identifiable. A performer is either "subtracted," achieving transparency, eliminating "from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one's own organism;" or he is "added to," becoming more or other than he is when not performing, he is "doubled," to use Artaud's word. The first technique, that of the shaman, is ecstasy; the second, that of the Balinese dancer, is trance. In the West we have terms for these two kinds of acting: the actor in ecstasy is Cieslak in The Constant Prince, Grotowski's "holy actor;" the actor in trance, possessed by another, is Stanislawski as Vershinin, the "character actor."

To be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious. The Balinese say that if a trance dancer hurts himself that shows that the trance was not genuine. In some kinds of trance the possessed and the possessor are both visible. Jane Belo describes a Balinese horse dance where

the player would start out riding the hobbyhorse, being so to speak, the horseman. But in his trance activity he would soon become identified with the horse—he would prance, gallop about, stamp, and kick as a horse—or perhaps it would be fairer to say that he would be the horse and rider in one. For though he would sit on the hobby-horse, his legs had to serve from the beginning as the legs of the beast. 22

This is the centaur; and it is an example of the performer's double identity. When, in Western theatre, we speak of an actor "portraying a role," using a metaphor from painting where the artist studies and we speak of an actor "portraying a former's double identity. When, in Western theatre, the main fact of theatrical performance: that the "portrayal" is a transformation of the performer's body/mind; the "canvas" or "material" is the performer. Interviewing Balinese performers of sanghyangs, village trance performances, Belo probed the way trance possession happens:

GM: What is your feeling when you are first smoked? 23
Darja: Somehow or other suddenly I lose consciousness. The people singing I hear. If people call out, calling me "Tjittah!" (a pig call) like that, I hear it too. If people talk of other things, I don't hear it.

GM: When you are a sanghyang pig, and people insult you, do you hear it?
Darja: I hear it. If anyone insults me I am furious.
GM: When you finish playing, how do you feel, tired or not?
Darja: When it's just over, I don't feel tired yet. But the next day after that, my body is sick.

GM: When you become sanghyang snake, what is the feeling like, and where do you feel your body to be?
Darja: When I'm a sanghyang snake suddenly my thoughts are delicious. Thus, my feelings being delicious suddenly I see something like forest, woods, with many many trees. When by body is like that, as a snake, my feeling is of going through the woods, and I am pleased.

GM: And if you're a sanghyang puppy, what does your body feel like? Where do you feel yourself to be?
Darja: I just feel like a puppy. I feel happy to run along the ground. I am very pleased, just like a puppy running on the ground. As long as I can run on the ground, I'm happy.
GM: And if you're a sanghyang potato, where do you feel yourself to be, and like what?
Darja: I feel I am in the garden, like a potato planted in the garden.

GM: And if you're a sanghyang broom, what's it like, and where do you feel?
Darja: Like sweeping filth in the middle of the ground. Like sweeping filth in the street, in the village. I feel I am being carried off by the broom, led on to sweep. 24

Belo notes that "a considerable crowd had to be present to insure that the trancer did not get out of hand." She tells of the time when a man playing a pig escaped from the courtyard. He was not caught until the next morning. "He had by that time ravaged the gardens, trampled and eaten the plants, which was not good for the village. He had also, being a pig, eaten large quantities of excreta he had found in the roadways, which was not good for him." 25

Belo finds these accounts "surprisingly satisfactory," and I do too. They show that trance performing is a kind of character acting: being possessed by another = become another. Eliade says that shamans, too, are often possessed by animals.
And LaBarre says that this kind of performing arose very early in human history, associated with hunting:

Mimetic ritual — part symbolic gesture in the telling, play, or practice, and part boast-become-magic, compelling that wish to come true — must have appeared early. (...) The puzzling character of Asiatic-American "Trickster" as a mixture of clown, culture hero and demigod, comes only from the procrustean attempt to force our categories on the clear and consistent aboriginal data. (...) The trickster (is) the animal form or familiar of the shaman himself. The great antiquity of the trickster should be suggested first of all by his being much the same in both Paeleosiberian and American hunting tribes. (...) We must not forget the element of entertainment in Old World shamanism: were tales of the erotic escapades of eagle-Zeus once told in the same tone of voice as those of Sibero-American Raven? And did not shamanistic rivalry develop into both the Dionysian bard-contests of Greek drama in the Old World and into midewewin medicine-shows in the New?27

Balinese trance, shamanic possession, the Trickster are not examples of acting in the Stanislavski tradition. But neither are they essentially different. Stanislavski developed exercises — sense memory, emotional recall, playing the through-line of action, etc. — so that actors could "get inside of" and act "as if" they were other people. Stanislavski's approach is humanist and psychological, but still a version of the ancient technique of performing by becoming or being possessed by another.

Belo says that the pleasure of the "trance experience is connected with the surrendering of the self-impulse. (...) Being a pig, a toad, a snake, or a creepy spirit are all enactments of the feeling of lowness in a very literal, childish, and direct manner." She thinks this "urge to be low" is one of the foundations of trance.28 To be low is to take the physical perspective of a child; to be filthy — playing with excrement and mud — is a regression to infantile behavior. It opens a channel to farce — and farce is probably more ancient than tragedy.29 Finally, to be low is to escape from rigid mores — being low is a way to be free.

But these phenomena are only half of the dialectic of performing. The other half is ecstasy: a soaring away from the body, an emptying of the body. Eliade:

The shamanic costume tends to give the shaman a new, magical body in animal form. The three chief types are that of the bird, the reindeer (stag), and the bear — but especially the bird. (...) Feathers are mentioned more or less everywhere in the descriptions of shamanic costumes. More significantly, the very structure of the costumes seeks to imitate as faithfully as possible the shape of a bird. (...) Siberian, Eskimo, and North American shamans fly. All over the world the same magical power is credited to sorcerers and medicine men. (...) An adequate analysis of the symbolism of magical flight would lead us too far. We will simply observe that two important mythical motifs have contributed to give it its present structure: the mythical image of the soul in the form of a bird and the idea of birds as psychopomps.30

An example of this kind of performing is the Aborigine "dreamtime" songs and dances. A person, often in sleep but sometimes while awake, is transported to the original "timeless mythical past during which totemic beings traveled from place to place across the desert performing creative acts."31 Some of these beings are natural species such as kangaroo and emu; but some are special beings like Wati Kutjara (the Two Men) and Wanampi (the Water Snake). "Although they lived in the past, the dreamtime beings are still thought of as being alive and exerting influence over present-day people."32 Performances are passed on down the generations. When new material is added it is learned by "dreaming": a man participates with the mythical beings in their ceremonies, then he teaches his comrades what he has learned. Aborigine performances are staged with extreme care, especially regarding scenography, body decorations, and execution of song and dance routines. This care is not a matter of beauty in our sense — smoothness, efficiency; but of making sure
FIGURE SIX: The ecstatic flight of the shaman leaves the body empty and transparent: absolutely vulnerable. Cieslak travels by means of subtraction towards ecstasy when he plays the Prince in *The Con­stant Prince*. The trance dancers of Bali are possessed or “taken over” by whomever or whatever possesses them. Olivier travels by means of addition towards possession; he systematically converts the “as if” of his Hamlet into a “becoming of” Hamlet. Those techniques of performer training which begin with a movement toward ecstasy — psychophysical exercises, yoga, etc. — help the performer “follow impulses,” that is, yield and become transparent. In this state a performer may suddenly “drop into” his role because the vulnerability of ecstasy can be suddenly transformed into the totality of trance possession.
that all the prescribed steps are taken in proper order. Propriety is more important than artistry. If the material is new every care is taken that it is learned exactly and passed on intact.

During his “poor theatre” phase (1960-68) Grotowski followed a procedure close to that of the Aborigines. But instead of seeking material in the dreamtime (archeology, history), Grotowski’s performers sought it in their own experiences.

In our opinion the conditions essential to the art of acting are the following, and should be made the object of a methodical investigation:

(a) To stimulate a process of self-revelation, going back as far as the subconscious, yet canalizing this stimulus in order to obtain the required reaction.

(b) To be able to articulate this process, discipline it, and convert it into signs. In concrete terms, this means to construct a score whose notes are tiny elements of contact, reactions to the stimuli of the outside world: what we call “give and take.”

(c) To eliminate from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one’s own organism, both psychical and physical (the two forming a whole). 33

Using this method Grotowski composed “gesticulatory ideograms” comparable to the signs of medieval European theatre, Peking Opera, and other fixed forms. But Grotowski’s ideograms were “immediate and spontaneous (…) a living form possessing its own logic.” 34 This was because his actors were transparent: they were able to let impulses pass through them so that their gestures were at one and the same time intimate and impersonal. Grotowski, his scenographers, and the performers of Akropolis, The Constant Prince, and Apocalypsis cum Figuris (first version) achieved a total ikonography of body, voice, group composition, and architecture. The totality was so complete that Western audiences felt uncomfortable: even oriental performances as tightly structured as Nō or Kathakali allow open spaces for audience inattention. The productions of the Polish Laboratory Theatre were totally without “noise.” Such clarity of signal evoked as much anxiety as it did pleasure.

No performing is “pure” ecstasy or trance. Always there is a shifting, dialectical tension between the two.

Rehearsal Procedures

Every aspect of gathering — performing — dispersing needs careful examination both from the point of view of the performers and of the spectators. In expanding our knowledge beyond drama to performing and beyond performing to the whole performance process much will be learned not only about art-making (for theatre, as Alexander Alland pointed out to me, is the only art where the creative process is by necessity visible) but also about social life, because theatre is both intentionally and non-consciously a paradigm of culture and culture-making. In this concluding section I will look only briefly at one small aspect of this large problem: what rehearsal is. I think I will be able to show how that the essential ritual action of theatre takes place during rehearsals.

At the 1957 Macy Foundation Conference on Group Processes Ray Birdwhistell explained the following model:

We have been running trajectories on dancing and other acts described as graceful behavior.

Note B and A as trajectories of an arm or leg or body. A is a smooth curve; B is a zig zag line. The sizes of these zigzags are unimportant. It is the shape of the movement with which I am concerned. A and B express the same trajectory. However, ultimately trajectory A shows minimal variation or adjustment within the scope of the trajectory. In A there is a minimum of messages being reacted to in process. This is “grace.” In B multiple messages are being introduced into the system and there is a zigzag. The things we call graceful are always multi-message acts in which the secondary messages are minimized, and there the role of the whole is maximized. 35
Lorenz pointed out that:

with the elimination of the noise in the movement, when the movement becomes graceful, it becomes more unambiguous as a signal. (...) That is exactly the situation in which the communicating system of expression movements is, because the receptor part of the system, whether IRM (Innate Release Mechanisms) or learned Gestalt, has its limitations with regard to pregnancy. The more pregnant and simple the movement is, the easier it is to take up unambiguously by receptor. Therefore, there is a strong selection pressure working in the direction of making all signal movements, these releasing movements, more and more graceful, and that is also what reminds us of a dance.36

Grace = simplification = increasing the signal efficiency of a movement = a dance.

Some artworks, even performances, are notoriously complex. The Ramayana, the Bible, the Odyssey, the plays of Shakespeare, the spectacles of Robert Wilson — are these less graceful (that is, less artistic) than the plays of Beckett or the paintings of Mondrian? Clearly, a single, normative standard for "evaluating art" abolishes any cultural, historical, or evolutionary perspective. The difficulty is solved by relocating the question of simplification (grace) from a comparison of the finished work in its exhibition phase to the work in its exhibition phase to the work in the process of being made in its selection-of-what’s-done-as-against-all-other-possibilities phase. It is not a matter of comparing the work to other works, or to the world. Important and revealing as such comparisons are, they yield nothing concerning the issue Birdwhistell raises. One must fold the work back on itself, comparing its completed state to the process of inventing it, to its own internal procedures during that time when it was not yet ready for showing. Although all arts have this phase only performance requires it to be public, that is, acted out among the performers as rehearsal. Comparing a work to its own process of creation applies to multi-authored works such as the Homeric epics, and the Bible, and medieval cathedrals and all other projects that extend beyond a single person’s attention or life-span. In these cases the process of making the work has an extra step, that of arriving at a “finished form” that cannot be known with certainty beforehand. This solidification, completion, historical ratification is a process of rehearsal: how a work is re-worked until it crosses a threshold of “acceptability” after which it can be “shown.”

The theatre is unique in that it is always undergoing the rehearsal process. Even the most traditional works with apparently fixed forms are rehearsed, that is, changed to accord with immediate circumstances. These changes, tectonic when a dogma is fixed in writing as the Catholic Mass is, move slowly — but then suddenly readjust themselves around a fault in the ritual. In this way the Vatican Council II legislated the saying of the Mass in the vernacular. With aesthetic drama there is a delight taken in the reinterpretations of the classics; but there are also unspoken limits — if a theater group goes beyond these it is not praised for being inventive but attacked for “violating” the material. Such was the reaction against The Performance Group for our productions of Dionysus in 69 (Euripides’ The Bacchae) and Macbeth (Shakespeare’s Macbeth). But even in doing a brand new play a tension arises between the author’s intentions and what finally happens on the stage. Sometimes, as in the famous disputes between Chekhov and Stanislavski, Williams and Kazan, the tension reaches a breaking point.

But what exactly is the “rehearsal process”? At the Macy Conference W. Gray Walter commented on Birdwhistell’s model:

Grace may be the result of efficiency in a goal-directed movement. In the case of an artificial animal or guided weapon, the early guided weapons and some modern ones, when they are searching and are not goal-directed, have a trajectory with a messy curve like B. They perform a hunting movement, which looks quite random and is certainly not very graceful. It is jerky and disjointed, incoherent, often a series of cycloid loops. But the moment the goal or target is perceived, the trajectory becomes a graceful parabola or hyperbola. So, the appearance of a goal will transform a graceless and exploratory mode of behavior (which may have a high information potential in it, in the sense that it is looking in many directions) into one which has only one bit of information, if the target is there, but looks smooth and pretty.37

Early rehearsals, or workshops, are jerky and disjointed, often incoherent. The work is indeed a hunt, actions with “high information potential,” but very little goal-orientation. Even in working on texted material this kind of “looking around” marks early
rehearsals: actors try a variety of interpretations, designers bring in many sketches and models, most of which are rejected, the director doesn't really know what he wants. And especially if the project is to develop its own text and actions the basic question of the early work is an anxiety-laden, "What are we doing?" If, by a certain time, a target is not visible (not only a production date but a vision of what is to be produced), the project falters, then fails. A director may maintain confidence by imposing order in the guise of set exercises; but he may do this soon and cut off chances of discovering new actions. A balance is needed. Comparable processes occur in traditional societies. John Emigh writes about a rehearsal of a funeral ceremony on the Sepik River:

As the rehearsal proceeded an old man would stop the singing from time to time to make suggestions on style or phrasing or, just as often, just as much a part of the event being rehearsed, he would comment on the meaning of song words, on the details of the story. The rehearsal was at once remarkably informal and absolutely effective. A middle-aged woman with an extraordinary, searing voice seemed to be in control of the singing. She would start and stop at whim, repeating phrases, checking points with the old man, pausing to hear his explanations. (....) As the rehearsal proceeded, men and women would occasionally drift by. The assembled singers and drum beaters and witnesses practiced the movements of the dance to accompany the mother's lament. 38

We are used to rehearsals for weddings, funerals, and other religious and civic ceremonies. In all cases rehearsal is a way of selecting from the possible actions, those actions to be performed, of simplifying these to make them as clear as possible in regard both to the matrix from which they have been taken and the audience to which they are meant to communicate. Along with this primary task the secondary work of rehearsal is to have each performer perform his part with maximum clarity. If farcical actions are to be performed this clarity may be the drunken stagger of a Chaplin attempting to cross a street. Clarity means efficiency in terms of the kind of signal being sent; that signal may be messy: then one works for the clearest signal reading "mess" that one can compose.

Comparable to rehearsal, but not exactly identical to it, is preparation. The Aborigines spend many hours preparing for a ten minute dance. They carefully lay out all the implements of the dance, they paint their bodies, they prepare the dancing area. Before each performance members of The Performance Group take up to two hours warming up their voices, doing psychophysical exercises, dance steps, and yoga, reviewing difficult bits from the show, etc. The Moscow Art Theatre was famous for its preparation period immediately before an actor went onto the stage. Every performer I know goes through a routine before performing. These preparations literally "compose" the person and the group: they are a kinesic recapitulation of the rehearsal process; they allow for a settling into the special tasks at hand, a concentration by means of shrinking the world to the dimensions of the theatre.

Both rehearsal and preparation employ the same means: repetition, simplification, exaggeration, rhythmic action, the transformation of "natural sequences" of behavior into "composed sequences." These means comprise the ritual process as understood by ethologists. Thus it is in rehearsals/preparations that I detect the fundamental ritual of theatre.

I find nothing disturbing about relating the finest achievements of human art — indeed, the very process of making art: the ritual action of rehearsal and preparation — to animal behavior, because I detect no break between animal and human behavior. And especially in the realm of artistic-ritual behavior I find continuities and analogies. Activities thicken — get more complicated, dense, symbolic, contradictory, and multivocal — along a continuum of expanding consciousness. The human achievement — shared by a few primates and aquatic mammals but not elaborated by them — is the ability to make decisions based on virtual as well as actual alternatives. These virtual alternatives take on a life of their own. Theatre is the art of actualizing them, and rehearsal is the means of developing their individual shapes and rhythms. By turning possibilities into action, into performances, whole worlds otherwise not lived are born. Theatre doesn't arrive suddenly and stay fixed either in its cultural or individual manifestations. It is insinuated along a web of associations spun from play, games, hunting, slaughter and distribution of meat, ceremonial centers, trials, rites of passage, story-telling. Rehearsals and recollections — preplay and afterplay — converge in the theatrical event.
Footnotes


3. Ibid., p. 409.


5. See P. J. Ucko and A. Rosenfeld, Paleolithic Cave Art (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967). This book is a summary of scholarly thought on the subject. They say: “The relative frequencies of animals, the absence of representations of vegetation and also the evidence reviewed in the previous pages, which shows that many representations were intended to be viewed, suggest that ‘theatre’ may well be behind some of the parietal representations” (p. 229). Although there are many disputes in the field of cave art, all authorities agree that performances of some kind (rites, increase ceremonies, theatre) took place in the caves. The antiquity, one could almost say the primacy, of performance is clear.


8. In England, medieval cycle plays were staged on wagons which moved from site to site renenacting their plays. The wagon was used as a staging area, a backdrop, and a dressing room. The audience gathered around as the play moved from the wagon to the street, employing both the raised space of the wagon and the flat space of the street. Spectators stood in the street and looked from the windows surrounding the narrow roadway. Playing of plays began at dawn and ran throughout the day; there must’ve been much coming and going among the audience. This mixing of social and aesthetic continued into the Renaissance. See Richard Souther, The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1973).

9. I use the word natural to mean the kind of theatre that happens in everyday life; there is no need to stage or create it: when an accident or dispute occurs people will watch it; when something sumptuous visually passes by people will turn to look at it pass, whether it be an ocean liner going down river or a head of state motorcading up a street. There’s no accounting for taste.

10. Box seats themselves developed from the earlier practice of allowing special people to sit on the stage itself. When this became disruptive — or, rather, when the disruptions were no longer tolerable — boxes came into fashion. It is interesting how in environmental theatre the presence of everyone, or anyone, on stage — or in the same area as where the players play — is a democratization of the presence onstage of some of the audience, the rich and/or privileged. It extends to everyone a once restricted privilege.


16. As of this writing I have just heard of an ultimate violent theatre: the pornographic “snuff film.” In these movies a person is hired to make a porn film but at the moment of climax the person is killed: the camera records the shock and agony of the murdered and the actions of the murderers. The film is then exhibited for high admission to private parties. Sometimes, it is said, a person agrees to be killed in the film, usually for much money. The comparison of snuff porn to the Roman gladitorial games is obvious; and the decadence of these shows is equally clear. As for the cathartic effect of viewing violent activities, studies reported by Eibl-Eibesfeldt in Ethology: The Biology of Behavior (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), pp. 329, 331-332, indicate that the cathartic effect of witnessing violence is short-lived. “In the long run, the possibility of discharging aggressive impulses constitutes a kind of training for aggression. The animal becomes more aggressive” (p. 329). The subject is complicated but, as for me, I draw the line against “reality games” that include physical injury and death on ethical grounds.

17. Drama is about the changes that happen to the characters. Take any drama and compare who, where, and what any character is at the beginning and at the end, and also see what the scenes are about: always they are about changes, from life to death, from not in love to in love (or out again), from rich to poor or vice-versa, etc.

18. See my “From Ritual to Theatre and Back,” op. cit.


20. See C. Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). His complicated, and seminal, work elaborates the “two contrasts — nature/culture, raw/cooked” (p. 338). In terms of theatre the “cooked action” is not simply an imitation of problematic behavior, it is an entirely new, but analogically related or metaphoric re-enactment, state, or sequence of behavior. The rites of passage apply to classes of behavior that have to be socialized as well as to individuals who need to be transported from one status to another.


23. A trance dancer is “smoked” by inhaling the fumes of incense which is burned under his nose. As far as I can determine the smoke itself is not psychotropic; it does not “cause” the trance — it is a decisive moment in the process of achieving trance. When only part of the body is to go into trance — as when the hand becomes a broom — only that part is smoked. The smoking procedure is not confined to Bali — I saw it in Sri Lanka too. GM is Goesti Made Soemeng, a Balinese member of Belo’s research team.

24. Ibid., p. 222.


28. Belo, op cit., p. 223. “The feeling of lowness, which Darma described as delightful, fits in with the whole constellation of ideas about being mounted, being sat on, and so forth, wherein the pleasurable quality of the trance experience is connected with the surrendering of self-impulses. This is one aspect of the trance state which seems to have reverberations in the trance vocabulary in whatever country these phenomena appear — and the aspect which is perhaps the hardest for non-trancers to grasp.” This “surrendering of the self-impulses” in trance is a surrendering to a definite other: an animal, spirit, person, etc. In ecstasy it is a pure giving up, as in Zen meditation.

29. Although I do not have time to expound here, the short episodes of farce, the swift, violent action, the surprising reversals offer internal evidence for its antiquity; and the fact that every culture has farce performances while only relatively few have tragedies (in the strict, formal sense of, say, Greek tragedy or Japanese Nō) indicates that the universal form is more ancient.

30. Eliade, op cit., pp. 156, 477-479


38. John Emigh in a letter distributed to several of his friends. Emigh observed the rehearsal in 1974.
George Quasha

The Age Of The Open Secret
a writing piece on Ethnopoetics, the Other Tradition, and social transformation

in the Middle is the Word...

At root Ethnopoetics, the word, instructs us where it wants to take us. Since its first use by Jerome Rothenberg in 1968 [Stony Brook 1/2] its range has broadened from a concern primarily with translation from oral and tribal poetries to a more complex stance toward language and consciousness. Its present aim is as wide as present poetics, and like any Metapoetics it resists contain­ment. We come to it now in the middle of its career. It’s a word with a secret.

At root: Ethno-, “from” Indo-European seu-², defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as people, our people, we ourselves, of our kind. It lives on in self/selbst and in the reflexive pronouns of French and Spanish. It has to do with what goes on here, it has to do with the local.

At root, therefore, Ethnopoetics wants to say: self-poetics, our kind poetries, and, with a residual Romantic nuance, self-making. What does an Ethno- do? That question translates into language as: What does any local band of people living together do in their poetry?

The answer, at root, is: 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.

Moving out from the root, the word constellates Self (the individual), People (community), and Locus (time and place, the Here, and the presence of the Gods or genius loci). Perhaps it speaks clearest as

If we found this Logograph inscribed beside the Humpback Fluteplayer in Chaco Canyon we would have to invite Jacques Derrida in for consultation. But Ethnopoetics does not in itself imply anything at all about the primacy of the written or the primacy of the oral, though it may entertain itself with that sportive engagement. Ethnopoetics is an activity and an operation performed on the language of thought, a poetic act of the kind I call NeoLogos. It’s sheer invention intended to account for and promote a variety of thinking that has been a long while in getting going. That variety of thinking is Metapoetic.
in that its first strategy is to destroy a conceptual boundary between anthropology and poetry.

Ethnopoetics is a name for the thinking and speaking about interfacing local realizations of poetry, particularly as these realizations break in on the practice of anthropology and of our own contemporary poetics. It stands for our readiness to think about certain problems not necessarily called up by literary history or the study of Western culture and "tradition." These problems—variously the concern of linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and poetics—necessarily call us beyond any consensus of opinion, beyond any and all cultural agreements, and into an area of transformations. They are problems, "things thrown forward," which even to name is to close off from further transformation. This is so because of the difficulty of thinking outside a consensus. Ethnopoetics, understood as a Metapoetics or a strategy of interconceptual transformations, is an opportunity to do just that. It can view the problems—matters having to do with the Self, the People, and the Locus (the Other)—outside the confines of "the tradition," because its mode of operation is to keep one foot on home ground and one foot in alien territory. Ethnopoetics belongs not to the mainstream of Western intellectual tradition but to a sort of permanent subculture, what I am calling (and will speak of later as) the Other Tradition. The great danger for Ethnopoetics is that it lose track of its sourceful relation to this "alien lineage" and be absorbed back into the consensus.

**NeoLogos or word-magic**

To create a word is to add a valence to history, or to contribute to its ambivalence. By signifying a new area of conscious activity it is itself a sign indicating our willingness to be responsible for what we have already been doing. And therefore to do it with more vigorous self-awareness. So Ethnopoetics is first of all a word calling attention to itself. Implicitly it means something like the self-awareness of self-making.

It is worth laboring to reveal the convolutions of imaginal thinking that lies hidden in a new term, particularly if the term is designed to generate history. After all, we are living in an age in which it is possible to invent a word and then invite poets and scholars to rally round it, producing talk and learned papers and political "dialogue" that soon become text, publication, and further talk, and onward into the chain of "begats," eventually to award academic degrees in the field of study conjured by the term. Who can doubt the magical power of words in our time? Is not Ethnopoetics a thaumaturgic act equal in effect to those like acts in societies structurally remote from our own which it is the business of Ethnopoetics to study?

Why, it borders on the "offensive," or at least on the paradoxical, that Ethnopoetics should be a strategy for engaging with (while keeping at a distance) magical poieties and that it is itself a fit object for "ethnopoetic study." Such is the fate, alas, of the self-awareness of self-making, that it is itself an instance of the social transformation that it urges on us, holding up the mirror of "non-Western" and "tribal" society—or what might be called, following a Castaneda coinage, "non-ordinary society." But it's a social transformation of a peculiarly and ineluctably Western kind, reflected in the fact of the world's way of embodying a paradox. As far as Ethnopoetics is concerned, it's a paradox that will either make it or break it.

***a hero of Between***

There are many levels of this paradox involving powerful words and the "consciousness of consciousness." Consider the case of Carlos Castaneda as the instance of a man caught between two worlds or in his own phrase between two "descriptions of the world." He offers us a description of two descriptions of the world in the act of colliding, and his own description is viewed from the "inside" of the conflict, at the very verge. He differs from his master don Juan in regarding even the world of Power (the separate reality which Castaneda no longer has reason to doubt) as a special consensus. What is convincing about his account is that he presents it with a "personal" tonality, *as experienced in the self*, and that at the same time he maintains a clarity about the separate descriptions of the world and the unlikelihood of their happy marriage. He is doubly initiate. On one side he engages us because he addresses the part of us that can easily imagine itself faced by such a situation. On another side he maintains a level of sophistication that is not merely the
comicbook anthropologist bugging the brujo, represented by the persona of Carlitos; it is an actual awareness of the roles played by special and general consensus. And it’s just this doubleness, this pervasive tendency toward the amphibolous, that makes his books so much of our moment. Acuteness of self-awareness combined with consciousness at the boundary of interlapping ethnosystems, or psychosystems, keeps us in touch with our own hunger for the Other. And it furthers our awareness of what many of us have long known to be the problem with encountering “separate realities,” whether visionary or merely cultural. In itself this is nothing new to the West, but it has a poignancy rare even in the West.

Castaneda is a convert, but not in the sense of a man taking on new beliefs. He is rather a man utterly transformed in his mode of knowing the world but who has paradoxically not lost his ability to describe it (and take notes in the thick of it) and then to go about the country trying to generate a new anthropology. He’s a man with a poetics, and an Ethnopoetics at that. In the simplest sense this means that he has found a way of making one local event visible in terms of another very different local situation, in such a way that the latter is challenged and in some measure altered by the former. He carries the transformation of his own mind over to the locality from which he was transformed, while doing that peculiarly Western thing we call the “consciousness of consciousness” — a step in the direction of what Owen Barfield calls “final participation.” The “conversion” is of the nature of electrical conversion, from A/C to D/C, and is reversible according to context; or it is of the nature of alchemical conversion. But above all the conversion is . . . in the text.

What then do we call Carlos Castaneda — Anthropologist? Ethnopoet? Ethnonovelist? In the first book many of us were engaged with the encounter with don Juan but turned up our noses at the thin effort at a structural analysis in Part Two. Perhaps we said, “How could he? Poor Carlitos, he’s hopeless.” And from then on he had us. He had us doubly, and on our own terms: either he had us on the grounds of personal or professional arrogance or both. Either we were saying, “If it were ME out there in Sonora, I wouldn’t ask all those idiotic questions” — in which case we viewed ourselves as more susceptible of initiation to don Juan’s consen-

sus. Or: “If he’s going to do a structural analysis, at least he could be thorough,” or something like that — in which case we validated another consensus. (The power of the second consensus is greater and more variously expressive than it was usual to acknowledge in opinions about The Teachings of Don Juan.) Well, Carlos had us coming and going. We were “Castaneda’d,” as subsequent books made almost inescapably clear. We had missed the poetics of the Ethnopoetics: how, for instance, he kept us reading and fantasizing about what in another context might be branded “the occult,” even as he laid on thick a doctrine that ought to (even if it hasn’t) shake anthropology to the root. It was a doctrine that included the world of Power and its virtual poetics and that laid bare a devastating weakness in anthropological assumptions; yet it opened a door for an Ethnopoetics capable of entertaining multiple consensus.

Meanwhile his idiotic questions kept don Juan talking and us reading. And we and Time magazine were one in panting after our first Ethnopoetic Thrillers. The fact that the basic “message” included little that wasn’t said in a wide variety of sources from William Blake to Zen and the Art of Archery was rightly of little importance. It was the paradoxical situation of Castaneda that lured us, hooked as we were on a brilliant poetics. That the most widely read structural analysis in America should be so flawed and insubstantial has a poetic justice and grotesque humor too little appreciated — and least of all in the solemn profession of anthropology.

The point is not that the Castaneda books are in every way unique. There had been Griaule’s Ogotemmeli for the complexity of a remote “ethnic” teaching. There had been Jaime de Angulo for depth of sympathetic participation on the part of a Western individual, and also for the cultivation of an “alien” poetics (storytelling). What is unusual in the Castaneda is the radical exposure of the “Ethnos” as “self.” We read don Juan’s intention on the screen of his apprentice’s psyche — and the lucidity of the teaching is the product, not of an analysis, but of Castaneda’s discursive risk. He plays the fool — or, in view of the poetics, we might say, he plays the Fool (shades of Lear).

It has been usual for readers to remark, “Don Juan is terrific, but Carlos is a bore,” although this reaction may be less common
after *Tales of Power*. Castaneda is our Ethnopoetic Hero. At present don Juan is simply one more brilliant and utterly remote (but for this Hero for Our Time) Master, who rightly (from the Sorcerer’s point of view) has nothing but contempt for timid enterprises like Ethnopoetics. Don Juan has no use for the kind of magic that Ethnopoetics — the word — is capable of wielding. But we do. Castaneda does, because he makes books. He makes “virtual participation” and the “thinking through.” And he does it, as the poet does it, by way of personal transformation, exposing the “spot on the porch” as the locus of self in the act of discovering power in the self. And implicitly he leaves no room for a “discipline” or “science” or “-ology” that does not ground itself in self-transformation. He leaves no room — though he may not fully grasp this himself — for any procedure divorced from poetics. Poetics is the knowing-of-making. It implies *work* and *working through*, and in the practice of a poet like Blake or Robert Duncan it resonates with the alchemical *Opus*. That is, knowledge of the way of working carries in the process of even the most abstract thinking the transformation itself. I am suggesting here that Ethnopoetics, deriving as it does from *this* sense of poetics, wants to move in the direction of discursive transformation. It reads *the self-knowing-in-making*, where “making” is doubly directional and involves *alteration* of the self and of the meaning of knowing. It entertains multiple concensus in order to be subject to one, but subject of itself. In this view Ethnopoetics suggests the work-on-and-of-the-self that our poetics has been since Blake’s *Milton*, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, or Rimbaud’s use of that strange reflexive verb, *se travailler*.

I say “our poetics” deliberately and at the risk of sounding pretentious. There’s really no other way at this point in history than to claim or reclaim this “our,” *this* Ethnos, that most belongs to us. It has to do with forming a conscious link with the Other Tradition in which the poets mentioned above have played their part and which now invades anthropology from within. A danger of Ethnopoetics as a “field of study” is that it distracts us from what is most ours. What we don’t need at this point is more academic misplaced concreteness by way of another “formal area of study.” Anything not “worked through” in the terms of our own self-making banishes again the Other Tradition and strands us in generality. And it cuts us off from any genuine link with structurally “alien” societies just as, if Castaneda had not surrendered to the magical *transference*, don Juan would have returned him to the bus depot. And if he hadn’t performed the doubly magical *double transference*, back into discourse, he wouldn’t be our Ethnopoetic Hero.

**the Other Tradition**

Since Ethnopoetics can hardly avoid examining its relation to “tradition” — intellectual history, social science, literature, etc. — and since it deals with the “traditional,” it will be necessary for us (from the angle of Metapoetics) to challenge the very idea of tradition. Not so much to destroy it as to open it to what almost every understanding excludes. And one strategy for doing this is to recognize a “secondary” activity within the West that runs counter to, or outside, the mainstream, the consensus. Pound mentions that “Frobenius uses the term Paideuma for the tangle or complex of the rooted ideas of any period” and opposes it to the ´Zeitgeist,´ and the distinction is something like active against passive, with Paideuma representing “the gristly roots of ideas that are in action.” ([Guide to *Kulchur*, 57-58.]) And in the *Pisan Cantos* he speaks of picking “a live tradition from the air.” But sometimes for Pound, and almost always for Eliot, “the Tradition” is a “cultural” and mainly literary cohesive force that is built on some questionable exclusions, and for that reason they both missed the special significance of Romanticism for the history of consciousness and discourse. This “omission” is serious but it indicates not so much a “fault” in the poetics as a limitation in the strategy and historical context. Pound built one of the bridges to the “postmodern,” which crosses into an area of history where the consensus of tradition is obsolete. The Other Tradition embodies the will to break the consensus, and so it stands outside of linear time — in the “continuous present.” Like Blake’s *Jerusalem* it projects a “time” in which history is absorbed in the transformations of discourse, and that time Blake saw as a dimension of the Present where we speak “in Visionary Forms Dramatic.” Everything said is totally itself and intrinsically intelligible, without reference to the past. Past and future are continuous creations and therefore *open*. 
For Ethnopoetics diachronics is only a sliderule, a rather crude and suppositional instrument for keeping track of the consensus. For instance it may use a diachronic perspective to avoid programmatically excluding valuable Western contributions to the poetics of our Ethnos. I'm not now thinking only of the earlier exclusions of Blake and Goethe’s “science,” which in any case are no longer endangered species. I’m thinking also of the need to recognize those more remote and “exceptional” points where an Other Tradition has surfaced. In this area the works of Frances Yates are obviously useful in plotting the careers of other Ur-Ethnopoetic Heroes like 15th to 17th century figures: Marsilio Ficino, John Dee, Giordano Bruno, Michael Maier, and Robert Fludd. It would be an interesting exercise in Ethnopoetic diachronics to constellate a “virtual progression” — a progression not of actual “influence” but of thinkable linkage — from what Yates calls “The Rosicrucian Enlightenment,” through Blake, Goethe, and Nerval, on to Alfred Jarry, and Erik Satie, certain Dadaists and Surrealists, unclassifiable poets like René Daumal and Harry Crosby, and into the present. This might be called a 'Pata-Ethnopoetic investigation, aimed at studying the “laws governing exceptions,” as Jarry spoke of 'Pataphysics, with an eye to discovering one more “imaginial solution.” It would show, for instance, a strange connection between the Rosicrucian manifestos and those especially of Jarry and also the Dadaists and Surrealists; it would show the “power” that may be presumed in creating a “special consensus,” particularly an imaginal one such as the “Invisible College of the Rose Cross Fraternity” (pictured rather wildly by one Theophilus Schweighardt, see frontispiece to The Rosicrucian Enlightenment) and the original College of 'Pataphysics. No members of the R.C. Fraternity ever identified themselves as such and none are known to have existed. As for the journeys of Christian Rosencruz, they rather resemble those of Dr. Faustroll, 'Pataphysician. And as to the “reality” of these “colleges,” one is tempted to answer in the manner of don Juan when Carlos asked if he really flew like a bird.

The Other Tradition, viewed diachronically, marches across the psychic screen and then has a way of disappearing, as if by sleight of history. Like Ethnopoetics it is the mirage created by word-magic. Concretize it beyond the direct ripples of saying it and you run the classic academic risk, what Whitehead has called misplaced concreteness and Owen Barfield idolatry. By viewing “tradition” as a function of saying you snatch it out of the hands of the past and return it to the authority of the present.

We can’t diachronically pin down the Other Tradition, we can only register its breach. To call it a tradition at all is to call into play some existing distinctions for the purpose of bringing them to a new pitch. We can notice, for instance, how Literary Tradition, the chain of literacy, generates connectivity by “influence,” and how the Oral Tradition, the chain of audibility, generates connectivity by “transmission.” What is usually meant by “influence” is detectable by stylistic or conceptual carryover (or else the struggle against these) whereas “transmission” may occur effectively without analyzable trace of the kind we call stylistic or conceptual. What one critic calls the “anxiety of influence” may be debatable in terms of our literary history, but it’s absurd in the perspective of oral history. Transmission is involved with the way something is done, not with fixing the standard of its appearance; it communicates how the hands move with the clay or the feet with the dance. If many contemporary poets are fascinated by the oral, it's out of the urge to escape not influence per se, but the tyranny of the aesthetic object and the encumbrance of consensual judgements that surround that sort of objectification. From the perspective of the oral virtually the whole of aesthetics may appear like the last gasp of idolatry. And the art of reading poetry may seem to have dwindled to a methodology of reading shells, with even structuralism as a mechanical refinement stuck with reading “inner shells.” Structural analysis gives the illusion of getting on the inside, but from the eventual perspective of audibility it leaves out the inside of the inside.

Those poets who argue for the oral are really speaking for the Other Tradition, using the presence of the oral as an instrument for prying open the consensus. I know of none who are not at least in dialogue with the chain of literacy or who refuse to print their works. And Ethnopoetics, to the extent that it means poetic translation, effects the conversion of the oral into print — in which case it's the textification of the chain of audibility. To strict partisans of the oral this aspect of Ethnopoetics is suspect, even exploitative and at its worst a be-
trayal. But the Ethnopoetic (and the Metapoetic generally) takes this problematic of mediacy as a valence of its authentic work. And that work belongs neither to Literary nor to Oral Tradition, but to the Other that resides at the margins of both, and outside the consensus of either. (It may lie outside the Oral despite its own best efforts and with a tinge of sadness or political embarrassment, but it does.) What Castaneda is to the numinous in don Juan’s special consensus, textification and lexification are to the chain of audibility. Bridgework and transformation. The Ethnopoet deals with the force of influence from the literary consensus (poetry, anthropology) — he may use it, however anxiously, or he may reject it; and he deals with the force of transmission in an alien or special consensus (“nonordinary society,” “separate poetry”). The torsional spinoff of this encounter is the Ethnopoetic Opus, or a work of the Other Tradition. And that medial and heretical tradition, whether in visionary or experimental poetry or the more circumscribed tasks of Ethnopoetics, returns to the chain of literacy with the urge of transmission; and it maintains some version of the literary in order to evolve the chain of audibility. This is a rather energetic way of being at cross-purposes.

If I’ve had a worry about Ethnopoetics it’s in the area of wondering how to use that word and mean neither that the chain of literacy is being superficially broken nor that transmission is aestheticized or cleverly converted to “poetic uses.” The further life of the Other Tradition depends on the marriage of literacy and audibility, of influence and transmission, but it’s difficult to insure the preservation and furthering of genuine transmission. And it’s easy to fool oneself that it’s happening, simply because one uses the right words. And yet we have to resist the whole idea of consensual authority, which in our ethnosystem emanates from anxiety that is not being transformed in the work. Our work is the only authority, and authority is only the power to transmit an activity, it’s a “virtue” or virtuality. I’m doing what I do and if you stick around to notice it, that’s what you’re doing — says the poet. The poet seems to be able to deal with his anxiety of influence, but can the critic, academic, and theorist deal with the anxiety of judgement as judgement loses ground?

We may be entering the first period in modern Western history in which the poet appears to be the stable and durable force. It’s tempting to speculate about an evolution in consciousness, or to think about Blake’s Jerusalem as a text of the post-modern or a model for Ethnopoetics. (The last five and a half Jerusalem Plates, from “Time was Finished!”, as the Ur-Text of Projective Verse.) When Ethnopoetics holds up the mirror of tradition it sees itself in the eyes of the Other. It hears the syllables of a Siberian shaman and the voice of Gordon Wasson discoursing on Amanita muscaria. It admires The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz, the Rites of Tara, the Peyote Cult, Jaime de Angulo, Tales of Power. It’s adulterous, if not promiscuous. Complex, if not primitive. It’s moment of recognition comes when it hears its own voice as Other.

Ethnopoetic Virtuality: Interludus

I can imagine a new don Juan, call him Mister John for sake of context, traveling through Virtual History and calling our attention to the “powerful” techniques, not of seeing and dreaming alone, but of talking and thinking and reading and writing. He is speaking in that special way of “doing talking” and “doing reading.” We get the point from moment to moment but then it slips away and we resume our idiotic questions. But the questions are allowed to persist, teaching us as they do a sort of Ethnopoetic humility with respect to the special consensus of our own inventions. Mister John informs us that the Warrior’s Belief [“the secret of a warrior is that he believes without believing”] is in virtual collusion with Negative Capability. Why collusion, I ask. Collude, as in ludus, the game we play together, the game of Between. Oh, I see, poetics, or is it ’Patapoeitics? All of that. And doing typing and doing conversing and doing saying. I get it, you mean we can’t circumscribe this activity . . . But he had slipped back beyond even the reach of the virtual.

and DiaLogos

That leaves us with the task of remaking the world in his non-image, on the principle that the greatest Guru is the one who recedes into things as they are, the stove that burns you, the toilet that won’t flush, etc. And the Teachings of Mister John are definitely all around us. Heidegger, almost as widely read these days as Castaneda (!), offers us the challenge of doing thinking. In What
Is Called Thinking it is the conscious process of our coming into being that “releases” us into the open and literally marvelous world of a New Man. (George Oppen has acknowledged this path for poetry.) And I read in Heidegger the implication that to listen to the language as it shapes itself on our lips is to hear already a new direction of mind. A task for Ethnopoetics will be an archeology of conversation, a sharpened attention to the saying that moves between us, our “further conversations with,” on or off the “country path,” our DiaLogos.

Charles Olson’s Projective Verse and other “straightforward discourse,” still not widely understood after a quarter of a century, is a work in this direction. His view of the poem as “energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . , by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader” belongs to the world of direct transmission and expands the domain of “speaking with” — the between of verse, the “turning with” of conversation. In this sense poems are the seeds of our future discourse, they are the first halves of endless or open-ended conversations beginning already (like Heidegger’s “thinking”) in the logosphere. They stimulate the space between us to consider a sort of interior sociology. Ethnopoetics as social transformation begins somewhere “in here,” in amidst the talking. What some are now calling phenomenological anthropology is part of this event of “further conversation,” since it takes our “study of” a people (our Human Telling/AnthroposLogos) as a specific occasion of dialogue. What was once the superfluous dreck of the encounter is now a central concern. Our thinking and talking become conscious acts, shared transmissions, in the root sense of “conscious” as “knowing together,” “withknowing.”

“From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION — puts himself in the open — he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself.” So saying Olson opens a path of writing as a kin of processual thinking and talking that is a tekne not essentially different from that of the sorcerer. This thought will seem preposterous to many, but that’s only because as a culture we’ve strayed so far from our Ethnos. Gertrude Stein “composed” along this open track, and her mantric non-repetitions and “meditations” transmit a way of language. The fact that a monstrously important work like Stanzas in Meditation has fallen so easily out of print and received so little intelligent comment among the professional literati is an emblem of our own ethnic distraction; but it is also a result of the genuine difficulty of shaping discourse to open and processual poetries. A task of Ethnopoetics is to awaken our linguistic attention to these inherently shifting objects. (Ironically, while we still like to think there are too many critics, from the post-modern perspective we have to admit there are few; there are the custodians of the consensuses and those who struggle with varying degree of originality to break the consensus by sympathetic concern with the metaconsensual.) This awakening of attention aims not at enclosing the object in proudly “complete” descriptions, but at opening the object further, snatching it from certain death before the entropic backrush of our cultural inattentions.

Another problematic of Ethnopoetics is that we tend to presume that we have a “poetics” — an area of agreement — simply because we commit the magical act of naming it. But we have barely begun the work of poetics appropriate to the second half of the 20th century. With “ethnoastronomy” we know (or someone must) what is meant by “astronomy,” though there too I wonder about the meaning of Ethnos. I can imagine many innocent followers of our new word searching around for a text on poetics so he can begin his work on this or that tribal poetry. But what will he find? Mainly affirmations of longstanding conventions, consensual agreements, having little to do with changing articulations of the Ethnos. He’ll try awkwardly to make one thing fit with another, and in order to get his article published he’ll probably fake it. If he’s a bold spirit he’ll find his way to the growing pool of “avantgarde” efforts at a new poetics, which at least will force him to higher ingenuity, but he’ll still have to fake it unless he gets the point of Ethnopoetics as self-making. In that case he’ll try to do it himself, through himself. I mean he’ll expose himself to contemporary poetry and use his own experience as a gauge. He’ll see that there is no reliable procedure, that the price you pay for open discourse is that you live with your uncertainties. He’ll see that a minority of poets have noticed that we don’t have a poetics in the academic sense and have taken this fact as a challenge to account for the experience of working now. This will encourage him (and his work in turn will encourage us) to deal openly with the difficulties
For the person working in Ethnopoetics there is the companion problematic to multiple consensus, namely, multiple transmission: from how many directions can he get the juice? If he sees his work as dealing with tribal poetics, he will have to face the great difficulty of “getting it” in a separate society. Ethnopoets like Dennis and Barbara Tedlock, whose work on the Zuni greatly raises the ante in this area, will hopefully continue to send news from the front. Their work embodies an important refinement of multiple consensus, consisting of close contact with Zuni language and society, phenomenological anthropology, and the line of poetics laid out by Jerome Rothenberg and others. Any such confluence of transmissions and tekhe (poetics, upaya, skillful means) has its own sharp edge into the meta-consensual.

No less than in the case of “separate poetries,” the transmission from contemporary poetry needs to be direct, through the ears. And there are several “lineages” of contemporary poetics which can be talked about somewhat on the model of “oral transmissions” (like the distinct articulations of Tibetan Buddhism). I think there is a gain in doing so, if the model is not exaggerated, because it will make us sensitive to connections not strictly in the chain of literacy. To have heard Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, Paul Blackburn . . . — makes all the difference. I can recall the stages of my own slow initiation during a decade in New York, what it was like for instance to first hear Mac Low in the early '60s and wonder what the hell he was up to, and how that question slowly answered itself (often counter to the rulings of my offended Aesthetic Tribunal). To be age 19 in the early '60s at the Deux Mégots or Le Métro, fresh from my own poetic boondocks, is as special a consensus as I’ve known, and nothing that I’d been able to gain access to in the Far East or Middle East struck me more deeply. I imagine it was much the same for anyone wandering into San Francisco in the '50s or '60s, or for that matter Paris in the '20s. The Ethnopoetic archeology of the “live tradition” that went “on the air” in NYC in the '60s probably begins with Paul Blackburn’s taperecorder, which was constantly being used for “field work” in Paul's own backyard. Paul and Jackson Mac Low had the clearest sense at that moment just how important it is to register the vocal event, how much what was happening depended on specific timbres, shifts in the idiolect, discursive rumblings in a tribe with a membership of one.

Ethnopoetics should be grounded in what can be heard. I suppose academic distortion of the actual event can be minimized by making all those tapes available, to be used side by side with recordings of this or that tribal society; with field work in San Francisco or New York en route to Bali or San Cristobal de las Casas. Ethnopoetics will help fill the gaps in poetics only by taking accounts of the fine tunings of the ear in separate poetic events. How it is that we go by our ears is a mystery barely approached in the West (with the exception of Blake) before our time. Don Juan, the oral transmission of Tibet, and contemporary poetry and music all teach “doing listening.” All the process-traditions are running together.

This doesn’t mean that there’s widespread agreement. On the contrary, we have to be clear that Ethnopoetics, like all Meta-poetics, is based on disagreements. As the consensual falls away we are thrown back (or forward) on immediate perception of what is happening. The fact that there are multiple lines of transmission even within our own poetry is a sign of health and openness, especially for the Metapoetic which transmutes “anxiety of influence” into the energy of transformation. More and more our poetics is in the same boat with our poetry, it is the issue of (as Olson might say) the present moment of our being. We don’t have to agree on the findings of our own poetics, we only have to agree to have poetics, and the confluence of open and accurate attentions will handle the rest. Gary Snyder sees poetry as “song,” David Antin as “talking,” and Robert Kelly as “writing” (or perhaps “reading”), and this mental warfare, as Blake would say, keeps a higher peace. The academic or literary mind fantasizes a cultish conspiracy behind what it doesn’t understand, and it continues to demand critical data on its own terms. In doing so it tries to convert the open to the closed, because it doesn’t grasp the issues; it doesn’t see that open poetics is precise in a way that is fundamentally different from closed poetics. That a fullscale poetics is not forthcoming is not the sign of an inability but of a reluc-
tance, a positive will not to cede the day to the tremblings of Urizen.

It's premature, or perhaps unwise, to attempt at this point to set clear demarcations on the lines of transmission. And in any case they are multiple within any poetic idiolect. Robert Duncan picks up from both Stein and Pound, etc., etc. Because also we will have to notice that Theodore Enslin carries on from Mahler, Kelly from Bruckner, Antin from (warring with) Wittgenstein, blah, blah. These have to do with transmissions but also with strategies and personal predilections. But I see no harm in noticing these things, how it is for instance that a geographer, Carl Sauer, has transmitted a mode of attention that flourishes in the work of Olson and Kenneth Irby. So long as we don't hang the work on these observations. I don't work with the view of poetry as song, but I have a lasting affection for Snyder's work and for his way of characterizing the Other Tradition as the "Great Subculture" that "has taught that man's natural being is to be trusted and followed; that we need not look to a model or rule imposed from outside in searching for the center; and that in following the grain, one is being truly 'moral.' " And I choose to think with him that, by working directly with "powers" generally regarded as negative and threatening ("the Unconscious") by the consensus, "the Great Subculture destroys the one credible claim of Church and State to a necessary function." "All this is subversive to civilization: for civilization is based on hierarchy and specialization." I am uncomfortable with his notion of "Tribe," even as the "newest development in the Great Subculture," unless we can also recognize the primacy of a tribe of one. But I'm willing to think that "we have almost unintentionally linked ourselves to a transmission of gnosia, a potential social order, and techniques of enlightenment, surviving from prehistoric times." With a proviso: that whatever tribe it is, whose "signal is a bright and tender look; calmness and gentleness, freshness and ease of manner," it not get hung up in easy agreements. As a people of between we have to yield to uncertainty and even clumsiness, and as we enter the process of our emerging language, we disagree.

and an Art of Reading

At root to read also means to tell. And if you are listening and telling at the same time you are conversing, and so reading also is DiaLogos. And if you are William Blake and you are being "given" some twenty lines of Jerusalem a day, like it or not, you may think of "writing" too as a numinous "further conversation." Jack Spicer hooked into this line of transmission, poetry as doing dictation, poet therefore as mechanic operating the dials, poem as link with the invisible. And so we come to Ethnopoetics as part of a larger archeology of reading, initiated perhaps by Pound's insistence on "How to Read." Poetics mostly has to do with the art of reading, and if we keep in mind that reading is also listening and telling and writing, its importance for Ethnopoetics will come clear. As I write I am reading what I say, and if I am writing a poem this is especially so: I don't know what I am saying until I say it. When John Cage or David Antin or Franz Kamin do their "lecturing" and "talking" and "performing" they are essentially doing talking and listening at the same time. I suppose Antin would be loath to regard himself as a mouthpiece for Martians, but he's clearly hooked into his Ethnos whether he regards it as the Self, the People or the Other, and on the plane of poetics the radical of composition has kinship with Spicer and Blake. And Mac Low. And Kelly. And . . . The activity goes wide.

Ethnopoetics is an art of reading the oral and written "texts" of disparate locals, necessarily including ourselves. Armand Schwerner celebrates the fact in his Tablets where the holes in the archaic text appear to generate his own presence and the holes or rips in psychic texture let the primal show through. Tincture of Blake's "infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid." Scalpel of the Other Tradition. Heidegger's tactic is to do thinking as an act of hermeneutics, a sort of logo-shamanistic enterprise, the main gesture of which is to carve away at the veils covering the word. Pull back the covers of the word and She appears, naked and vibrant at the interstices of thought. Cut "logic" away from Logos and we hear it fresh from the lips of
Heraclitus, meaning (apparently like Chinese "Tao") something akin to "talking." Reading talking back to itself. I call this middle reading, what is only done in the process, in medias res ... auditorum rapid, plunging in, nel mezzo del camin, "between things" (as Heidegger glosses "interest") where "language plays with our speech."

There is a kind of agreeing that is not based on continuous agreement, that is an act committed in the middle of a text, bearing kinship with the Warrior's believing without belief. It is a way of attuning that implies a how to read. "By 'way,' or 'how,'" says Heidegger, "we mean something other than manner or mode. 'Way' here means melody, the ring and tone, which is not just a matter of how the saying sounds. The way or how of the saying is the tone from which and to which what is said is attuned." That's doubletalk, says a reader in dismay, and we can only agree. It's a very interesting sort of doubletalk, the species we always seem to return to in talking about contemporary poetics. Poetry is a kind of doubletalk or double valence, accurate according to the multiplicity of the mind, and so poetics tends to be double doubletalk. Particularly when it arises as an act of middle reading. Amphibious and irreducible participation.

Hence the "difficulty" of modern poetry, or more accurately its pervasive multiplicity. There's more than one school of thought on this, and the partisans of poetry as "song" tend to be impatient with "difficult" poetry. This difficulty is a function either of texture (complex syntax, structure, "esoteric" allusions), hard to read in detail, or of length, hard to hang in for such a long time. As to the latter, the long poem, the partisans of song forget to the former, textural difficulty, there is the sense of poetry as "obstacle" to "sleep," the consensus, the familiar. Gertrude Stein regarded art as disturbance. Duncan has said of his own and Olson's work that it consciously does not yield to reading except on the terms of its own poetics. Difficulty is a tekne for preserving the function of Otherness. Reading as Initiation.

Heidegger remarks that "it is as though man had to make an effort to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling were especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness... This floundering in a commonness which we have placed under the protection of so-called natural sense, is not accidental, nor are we free to deprecate it. This floundering in commonness is part of the high and dangerous game and gamble in which, by the nature of language, we are the stakes." By quoting this statement I am not implying that song or otherwise accessible poetry is necessarily in cahoots with this sense of "commonness"; the awakened state of language has many moods. I am suggesting a context for the "path of difficulty" as a way of the Warrior, for textual friction as the erotisation of reading. There is a sense of Text that rimes with Tantra, as "something woven" on the "loom" (= "instrument of expansion"), and as a way it is characterized by the journey through, rather than away from or around, complexity of mental life. Olson called himself a Tantrist because he understood Tantra as a way with a book. This is not the sense of sacred text as law or commandment but as connection, link, intermediary, what we read in the middle. Blake called his book a Chariot of Genius, and he attended it with all the care that is due such a vehicle. And he wrote the longest difficult and most difficult long text of his time. His response to Dr. Trusler's pursuit of simplification was not unclear: "You say I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act." Tincture of don Juan addressing Carlitos.

The call to participate in a "separate society," whether by going there or by struggling with a text (straining to overhear some trace of magical timbre still hovering around the word), bears kinship with the lure of difficulty in poetry. It responds to pothos, that yearning for a distant object, longing for the unattainable, the ungraspable, the incomprehensible, and which, as James Hillman discusses it, is a portion of Eros. There is a great deal of that kind of Eros in our poetry, in its urge to go ever beyond itself, and I acknowledge it in my own iterations of a Metapoetics. It is moved by the desire to stay close to the body of life while always traveling beyond it. (Perhaps Metapoetics is a
kind of poetic astral projection, but that would be one-upmanship on Projective Verse!) And middle reading, which we cannot but be doing when participating in any alien poetry, is the net effect of our experience of difference; it occurs in the gap between us and the text. Middle reading is an intensification of the space between reader and text, and it is the Eros of pothos that seems to spark us back across.

And this brings us to the sense of reading as ta'wil, reading as a way of the sacred. Henry Corbin in his great works, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* and *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, calls attention to this way of processual reading active in the 10th century world of Avicenna and later. Corbin defines ta'wil as the “exegesis that leads the soul back to its truth” and that “returns a thing to its origin and principle.” It is a How to Read as in “doing reading,” a poetics as in “self-making”; the reading that takes the self back to itself. Ethnopoetics, or the tekne — the logotekne — of returning to the primal. Late in his life Charles Olson spoke of ta'wil, which he had gotten from Corbin, and he spoke of it in a way that related it to his own core awareness, his “secret.” I want to cite the passage from his Beloit lecture, *Poetry and Truth* [of March 29, 1968], because like a poem it’s impossible to be just to it in paraphrase; and also it’s difficult, it barely gets said, it has the quality of a secret putting one of its antennae out in the open for the first time. And like so much of what Olson said it belongs to the archeology of telling and reading:

... I have the superstition that human beings have, that when they hear something that matters to them, it’s true. I — and again, if you’ll excuse me — I will keep my noun. I once was told this, by myself, to myself, by no body or thing that I could identify. I think I was asleep, and it was a dream. But what got said was, “Everything issues from — Everything issues from . . . . , and nothing is anything but itself, measured so.” Which I’m sure led me on the path to the door of this sentence, quite simply. Can you hear me? May I, would you like me to just repeat that? It’s easy. I mean, it’s like a prayer. Not really — a bead, something I carry in my pocket. I’ve never said this out loud, that’s how much I know [?]. Nobody ever heard me say this before. And still I have something for myself — by even telling you that much. “Everything issues from . . . . , and nothing is anything but itself, measured so.” I mean that’s what of course got me. Those things always read . . . I mean, that’s why I do believe in the reversible, because actually the thing cocks back. That’s why I’m talking . . .

Earlier in the week I stressed the whole Arabic or Ismaili Muslim concept of ta’wil — which I think is almost singularly the only place I know, actually, in the body of man’s accumulation, that you have this little — or you have, what we seem to me to be practically preparing from scratch, the acts of the future. “Measured so.” I mean, what a trick to pull on you, to give you the whole thing and then say, “measured so.” I mean, that’s a voice talking, literally. I mean, if you take thought, it’s simply seeking to be correct in the meter. It’s perfectly obvious that the statement is not indulging me; it’s supplying me with, like, the afterthought . . .

This is an oral text at its moment of supreme disclosure, hesitant, dancing with veils, giving everything and nothing away. It belongs as much to Ethnopoetics as anything on record. I mean what a trick to pull on you, to stick that in my own writing piece at the moment when I should be telling you what I really want to say. That’s the point, we never say what we really want to say; it happens by itself, when it does, and then it takes itself back. We lose it, and all the rest is . . . reading.

**dis Closure**

What does anyone know about social transformation but that it is? I suspect that anything we have ever thought about it is obsolescent from the moment before it is said, because we have to pull ourselves out of it to think it (unless we are “doing thinking”). Or else it is what we say. I don’t doubt that there are interesting and important things to say, but my point is that Ethnopoetics means that saying is the event, saying is social magic, saying it makes it so. And the danger is that we hide behind the word rather than stand revealed in it. That will happen, for instance, if we take Ethnopoetics to be the occasion to talk about and around the “heavy issues” we aren’t ready or able to behave to. We either are a new social order or we aren’t, and the real social transformation is something like the outer ripple of self-recognition. So “revolutions” occur when one person’s “I am this” resonates into “we are this, and you can’t stop us.” But revolution in society, as in poetry and thought, may also be obsole-
scent, and the "we are this" begins to recede back into the "I am this." And when that turns inside out... O Wish.

I am not opposed to Pound's notion that the poetic has a function in society having to do with "maintaining the very cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself," so long as we acknowledge that there is no standard of "cleanness" outside the continuous transformations of discourse. The conscious is a value in itself and transformation always involves personal risk. ("If a man have not order within him he can not spread order about him"; though the Confucian does have a way of leaning on the Tao.) The "social bond" is made new by any authentic speech act, and I have no doubt that we can learn from those "separate poetries" that function socially to affirm the psychic connective tissue. We can learn from any situation in which the individual knows simultaneously his relation to society and to himself, and performs his "duty" in and as self-true speech. Ethnopoetics as a study consistent with our conscious self-recognition could teach us something about processual responsibility; but that means giving up the academic myth that there is something "out there" that we need to acquire, master, judge, identify with, not identify with, or be judged by.

The Ethnos at the center of the triangle of Self, People, and Other implies a "shared knowing" that is implicitly social. To experience it is to "get with" the Otherness of being in the world, and that "ideally" involves both the highest degree of specific individuation and an openness or fluidity at the bounds of the personal self. Ethnopoetics permits a dialogue with the "Sacred" by way of societies that dialogue with the Gods. This situation can be used as a buffer between oneself and the numinous, in which case the "science" remains voyeuristic, or it can be used as a sort of metaconsensual "ritual mediation" via the poetic. The latter implies a noetic (the word I prefer is "gnoeitic") transference onto poetic discourse. This is difficult to say and not sound totally fanciful: the "Ethnopoetic act" — "doing Ethnopoetics" — involves a special communion with the Gods (in whom we do not believe) by way of a separate society (in whom we have taught ourselves to believe by "expansion" of the Human) and their sacred poetry (in which we claim to share consciousness, i.e., speechrights). You might call this approaching the Gods from behind, conscious duplicity, or the Ethnopoetic way of believing without belief. How far can we take it? I think I'd better stop here, or resort to the Heideggerian Gambit: "What is most Ethnopoetically thought-provoking in this Ethnopoetically thought-provoking age is that we are still not doing Ethnopoetics."

Or there is the Hillmanian Gambit, as in James Hillman's brilliant restoration of a sacred psychology, which may in fact be our best contemporary analogue for "doing Ethnopoetics" as sketched above. He takes "soul-making," as used by Blake and Keats, to be the central work of psychology, and offers a radical "re-visioning" of Jungian depth psychology and active imagination, "polytheistic" and transdisciplinary. He takes in Francis Yates (Hermeticism, Ficino, the Art of Memory), Owen Barfield (against literalism), the Romantics (Imagination), Corbin (ta'wil), etc., and works from the presumption of a "poetic basis of mind." He sets the ground for what might be called a "Psychopoetics," analogue of Soul-making and close companion to Ethnopoetics. But this is a long subject and we are at the end of this initial effort at following the tracks of a new word, a word with a secret Self.

We are now well into the Age of the Open Secret. We can expect to see the consensus crumbling under its own weight and the gradual emergence of its occulted multiplicity. Countercultures, secret societies, academies — the tribes and the anti-tribes — collide, mix, change, and move toward an optimum membership of one. The secrets are out, Initiation becomes Self-initiation or the verb "to initiate" grows steadily intransitive. On behalf of the Other Tradition Ethnopoetics becomes one more crowbar with which to pry open the sarcophagus (the "flesh-eating stone"). As an interior sociology and archeology of the processual it is also a tool for opening the secrets further, opening them into our lives. Real social transformation occurs from the inside out. Or if I may persist in my folly: from the interior of transforming discourse out, and back, inside the world.
Notes

Some of the sources referred to and some of those invisibly consulted include:

Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Bollingen Series LXVI: 1960) and *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Bollingen Series XCI: 1969). Both are crucial for "archeology of reading." Also on *ta'wil* see: the exercise in "dialogical criticism" [DiaLogos] which Charles Stein and I did with Robert Kelly: "Ta'wil or How to Read" (Vort 5, 1974). The concern is pervasive in Kelly's work, but note the recent "On Discourse" in *Biopoesis* (ed. Harvey Bialy, Io 20, 1974). So deeply consensual are the habits of reading that we've had precious little investigation of it. Blake's Marginalia tells us how he read, his "middle reading," dialogue with the text. Pound's *Cantos* internalize that process and his criticism is partly an effort to keep us from missing that point. Olson and Duncan carry on the line, as do Kelly, Enslin, etc. Duncan's *Truth and Life of Myth* and *H.D. Book* are complexly woven with *ta'wil*. A motive behind our DiaLogos or dialogical criticism is to provoke poets into "auto-*ta'wil* or the extension of the process of the text into further discourse. Note Robert Creeley's "The Creative" [Sparrow 6] as an instance of self-descriptive criticism, which makes much of Corbin's "himma" [the "power of the heart . . . imagining . . . mediating . . ."]. See also Jed Rasula's recent "The State Meant," *Wch Way 2*, 1975.

Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (Harbinger Book: New York, n.d.). A major study in the history of consciousness that sees it as moving from "original participation" through "idolatry" and toward "final participation." Of the latter: "... participation as an actual experience is only to be won today by special exertion; that is a matter, not of theorizing, but of imagination in the genial or creative sense. A systematic approach towards final participation may therefore be expected to be an attempt to use imagination systematically. This was the foundation of Goethe's scientific work." (137) It has to do with a higher reciprocity between man and nature in which man takes responsibility for his "figuration" and assumes a "directionally creator relation." Barfield offers a corrective to simplistic pursuits of the "primitive," suggesting that consciousness has created a unique possibility for itself, an unprecedented "participation" in our own world-creation.


Ezra Pound: it's easy to forget that Pound's awareness of matters "visionary," "oral," and "magical" was rich and deeply sympathetic. In his notes to Harry Crosby's *Torchbearer* (Black Sun Press: Paris, 1931) he says: "The flavors of the peach and the apricot are not lost from generation to generation, neither are they transmitted by booklearning. The mystic tradition, any mystic tradition, is of a similar nature, that is, it is dependent on direct perception, a 'knowledge' as permanent as the faculty for receiving it." (Reprinted in *Alcheringa* Old Series 5)

Addendum on Metapoetics: I have used the word rather freely, knowing it can't be defined. I made an effort to state the impossible in a rash moment in 1970 ("Metapoetry: The Poetry of Changes," *Open Poetry*, Simon & Shuster: New York, 1973), but the best effort remains the whole text of the book Rothenberg and I did, *America a Prophecy* (Random House: New York, 1973). I spell it and Ethnopoetics with capitals, as in names, to keep the sense of them as persons, independent and growing. I am happiest to think of the Metapoetic as a conscious transformation of discourse that yields "discursive feedback" into the transformation of consciousness.
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 heal themselves and keep themselves whole. They know who they are.”

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 ethnikoi and Septuagint and New Testament ta ethne render Hebrew (ha-) goyim as Gentiles, pagans.” 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 ethnesin... “among the rest of the Gentiles...”

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, in religious terms, be 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." Earlier in the same century another writer speaks of "a kind of mule, that's half Ethnic, and half a Christian."

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."

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." Carlyle, also writing in the nineteenth century, saw truth as the status quo, and wrote dismissingly of "a mind . . . occupied . . . with mere Ethnicism, radicalism, and revolutionary tumult."

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. 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.'

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 labor 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 multi-layered 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 multi-layered complexity provided the possibility of multi-layered identification."13

This multi-layered 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 refined.

The world economy at this time had various kinds 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 multi-layered 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, share-cropping 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 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 BOURGEOSIE, UNTIL THEN MERELY AN ELEMENT OF EUROPEAN LIFE, IS DISREGARDED AS 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 labor” 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.” 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 transition 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. 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.

Then he retotaled 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 juncture, that with the shifts in the bases and areas of power, 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.

If the Sun was now recognized as being the centre of the natural universe, the West and its countries, 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 adynaton 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. 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. 

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 Sepúlveda syndrome takes on a central significance. Gines de Sepúlveda 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 (homunculi) 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 Sepúlveda 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 Sepúlveda made his definition. As I wrote before:

... what I shall label as the Sepúlveda 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 Sepúlveda 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.

Sepúlveda 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 Sepúlveda 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 "culture-less 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.3
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 Sepúlveda 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 Sepúlveda 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 fulfill 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 Sepúlveda 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 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 SUB-HUMAN.

In the emergent world economic system, a Market system which increasingly made a man's labour, of 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 re-invent 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 desti-
tute 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 connotations and acceptance and that it has no 'natural' fitness in and of itself.59

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 overseen 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 slight 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, express 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, corralled 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.)


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).


10. In an interesting article, Fernández Retamar of Cuba argues that revolutionary Latin Americans must assume the identity of Caliban as against the identity of Prospero or Airel. Massachusetts Review, Winter-Spring, 1974, pp. 7-72.


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 1560's, '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).


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 peonías 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 *peonías*, and among the cavalry, *caballerías*, 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).


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."

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 up side 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).


33. This cultural imperialism was therefore central to the whole process.


35. The being of modern man is more and more defined and graded according to his consumption patterns. Cf. B. 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 accelerée 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 acceleré des objets compense souvent une aspiration décue 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 colonizer been studied. Yet the consequences must have been and still must be enormous.

40 Cf. the technological power too (i.e., spells, charms) that Prospero is able to exercise over Caliban.


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 defense 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: Compañía 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 Lévi-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. Ethno-poetics 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. Ethno-poetics 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, an 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 still 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. The 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, of the 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 Seneghor'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 had 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 as that of the Cartesian and Kantian doctrines 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. Lévi Strauss' *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), has been epochmaking 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.
Edouard Glissant

Free And Forced Poetics

(This paper deals with the Creole folk tale of Martinique, by no means the Caribbean basin. Martinique, one of the Antilles, has been French since 1635. Until recently, its main products were sugar cane, supplemented by bananas and pineapple. These products are now dying out. Slavery was the rule until 1848. The population, numbering 400,000, has two languages: a mother tongue, Creole, and an official language, French, which is tending to become the natural language. Other territories in the region with the same status as French Departments are Guadeloupe and Guyana. Creole is also spoken in Haiti (4 million inhabitants), in Guadeloupe (350,000), Guyana (100,000), Dominca (100,000) and St. Lucia (150,000), the latter being autonomous under the British Commonwealth. But Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as Guyana, present a problem of political status, and overtly yearn for autonomy and independence. The same conditions also prevail in the islands of Reunion (500,000) and Mauritius (300,000). Thus, French Creole is spoken by six or seven million people in the world, including some linguistic minorities I have not mentioned. Creole is an idiom based on a French-derived vocabulary and an original syntax mixing African structures from the Sudanese with speech habits from 16th and 17th century Norman sailors.)

Introduction

It has been claimed that Creole was created by the master in his dealings with his slaves, in the world of plantations. Today, we claim rather that Creole was an original creation by the uprooted African, who, faced with the limited linguistic implements imposed on him, chose to limit it further, to warp it, to untune it, in order to make it into an idiom of his own.

Such a creation points out the difference between what I call free and forced poetics. In its formative process, Creole bears the stamp of coercion. It has not yet succeeded in becoming the natural language of the Creole-speaking countries, although it should have done so many years ago. There are socio-political reasons for this which I shall discuss later.

I call free or natural poetics any collective drive toward expression when it is unthwarted either in what it wants to express or in the language it is using.

I call language a common practice of confidence or mistrust toward the idiom or idioms which a collective group uses.

I call forced or constrained poetics any collective drive toward expression when it recognizes in itself some lack which makes it impossible, not as a drive but as an expression.

Natural Poetics: These are the poetics resulting directly from some tension within society, however destitute or threatened the life of the community might be. The most daring or artificial experiments, the most radical questions concerning language maintain, reform, or violate a given poetics. There is no incompatibility here between the drive for speech and its expression. Violent contest of established order may proceed from such a natural poetics: there is no break in continuity from the contested order to the contesting disorder.

Forced Poetics: By this I do not mean wild, arbitrary, or artificial experiments. Forced poetics occur whenever a drive for expression confronts something impossible to express. Such a confrontation may occur between the expressive contents and the idiom which is suggested or imposed historically.

Such is the case today in the French Antilles where the mother-tongue, Creole, and the official French share the same unrevealed torment.

If a French-speaking Antillean were to feel no awkwardness in using French today he would resemble someone swimming motionless in the air, unaware that with the same gestures he could move in water. What must be found through French is a way to a language which is perhaps at odds with the logic.
of the French idiom. Forced poetics is the consciousness of the opposition between an idiom which is used and a language which is needed.

But in the meantime Creole could have broken through to a natural poetics, since it could have found a happy correspondence between idiom and language. Instead, it is getting weaker. In daily use it becomes less Creole and more French. When written it becomes banal. Yet it has never ceased to resist both of these curses, and forced poetics results from such curses and resistance to them.

Forced poetics, in short, seldom exists in a traditional culture, however threatened it may be. In any traditional culture the idiom (or means of expression) and the language (or attitude of the community toward its idiom) coincide. Since there is no fundamental lack, there is no need for a counter-poetics.

Forced poetics, or counter poetics, is practiced by a community which cannot express itself directly through an autonomous activity of its members. In order to pinpoint this lack of autonomy, the speaker condemns himself to a kind of non-power and to the impossibility of expression. This phenomenon is complicated by orality. The transition from oral to written expression, which in western civilization has always been considered as a necessary rung in climbing the social ladder, further disconcerts.

Creole, an unstandardized idiom, illustrates this problem in its traditional production. For this reason I shall first speak of the foundation of Creole, by which I mean the basis of its orality.

**The basis of the spoken word**

1

What is written is based on non-movement: when I write, my body does not move in unison with the flow of words. My body must be at rest; then my hand wielding the pen (or typewriter) does not move as body but as an appendage of the page.

What is oral, on the contrary, cannot be separated from body motion. The spoken word writes itself not only in body postures (for instance crouching for palavers or stamping feet rhythmically in the music circle) but also in the almost semaphoric gestures of the speech act. Body posture is the beginning of speech; it is also its end.

Now for the specifics of this general relationship between body and speech. In the Americas, at the time of slavery, the slave's body was alienated. His body was also deprived, voided, emptied, of the dimension of the spoken. Not only was expression forbidden, since slaves were not allowed to speak, but impossible, so that their bodies as well as voices were suppressed. Even performing his reproductive function the slave was outside himself, since he reproduced for the master's benefit. His own pleasure was mute, that is to say, tricked, bypassed, negated. In such a context it is understandable that expression was cautious, reticent, whispered at night.

When day came, his body freed itself, burst out into a shout. In the Antilles, the spoken word is always overcharged, pauseless, without softness or sentiment. The body follows suit. The Antillean body is neither capable of rest nor of a languid continuity. It moves in jolts and jerks.

The change from an oral to a written civilization means immobilizing the [slave's] body, subjugating it, possessing it. Once dispossessed of his body, the slave cannot manage the immobility of writing. He moves constantly and only manages a shout. His speech and body pursue some undefinable lack.

Possibly, in the future — soon — we shall enter a civilization of the non-written, and changing from oral to written will not appear a transcendent step, a step up the ladder. However, for us, now, writing transcends orality, and our body and speech call rhythmically for something lacking. Until this finds expression, Antillean speech will not continue as such into writing.

2

At the beginning was the shout — the beginning is, for us, the time when Creole was created as a means of communication between the master and his slaves. It was then that the peculiar syntax of the shout took hold. To the Antillean the word is first and foremost a sound. Noise is a speech. Din is a discourse. We must first understand that.

It seems that in the implacable mute universe of the uprooted slave, intent and tone went together. The noise-level had meaning. The pitch of each sound had meaning. Concepts were bracketed, set aside. Slaves understood each other by means of a subtle noise system in which the master, however skillfully he spoke "basic creole," was totally lost. The caste of
masters, the Béke, never managed Creole at the top of their lungs. The slaves, because speech was forbidden, camouflaged their speech as shouts, correctly assuming that no master could translate what was, to him, an evidently paroxysmic provocation, the call of the beasts of the jungle without any meaning at all. Thus did the dispossessed man organize his speech, weaving it into the apparently meaningless warp of noise.

From then on a peculiar syntax developed, the syntax of shouting. Creole organizes sentences on the mode of machinegun bursts. I do not know if this practice is common to threatened languages, moribund dialects or idioms losing their vitality. But all over the Creole world, the people speak like that: not only is it the spoken style of tales and songs, but often that of daily utterance. This introduces a new factor in Creole sentences: speed. Not speed, perhaps, so much as staccato. Another feature is also the fast unrolling of a sentence into a single indivisible word. The sound is the signifier, its noise-level is the signified. Similarly, the staccato or unrolling rate of the sounds often organizes the meaning of the discourse. Here again, there is a specific purpose: while the Béke masters know Creole much better than the mulattoes, they are unable to understand the blacks’ wild usage of Creole.

In the Creole delivery the very syncopation of drums is heard again. It is not the semantic structure of the sentence which orders the scansion, but rather it is the speaker’s breath: it is poetic scansion par excellence.

Thus the meaning of a sentence is sometimes concealed, as it were, in accelerated nonsense rumbling with sounds. But this nonsense ferries the true meaning while keeping it from the master’s ear. Originally, then, Creole was a secret pact sealed under the very publicity of its shout. Creole may be whispered (for the whisper is a shout laminated until almost imperceptible in the height of night), but it cannot be murmured. The true meaning is hidden from the master’s ear by the non-meaning of the noise and staccato, which is the true meaning. This non-meaning hides and reveals a hidden meaning.

But if the speech act in Creole originally involved a secret pact in a hidden meaning, it is necessary to know that its initiation value is slowly disappearing. It is bound, however, to disappear so that the shout of the pact may continue in open language. A language does not rely on initiation but on learning by all. Any secret language makes the practice of syntax useless, replacing “constitutive syntax” with a “substitute syntax.” To graduate to the status of full language, the “substitute syntax” of the secret pact must return to the norms of a constitutive syntax. In the traditional culture there is a slow, smooth transition from a secret pact to a type of communication open to all, even “foreigners.” Speech thus gradually becomes an idiom. There is no need for forced poetics since the new idiom with its constituted syntax is also a language with its consented syntax.

The trouble with Creole is that the “pact” is being phased out, but the language is not appearing. Its function as a secret community is running down, its function as an open community is not arising.

As in any popular and oral literature, what strikes us first about the traditional Creole text, whether song or tale, is the suddenness of its imagery. That is what knowledgable people mean when they speak of concrete languages in opposition to conceptual languages. This supposes a stark transcendence of the concept which can be achieved only by leaving (out-growing) the sensual immanence of the image.

What is generally called folk wisdom expresses itself in terms of the image, and the image is a stratagem, that is to say, above all, a self-conscious device. Any imaged (concrete) language signals that it has implicitly conceived the concept and tacitly renounced its discursiveness (“déroulé”). For a so-called concrete language, the image is the means of a deliberate (although collectively unconscious) focalization of what is linguistically possible at a given moment. Being an operation as complete, as subtle, as accomplished as the conceptual outline, the image is secreted in the night of a people. The concept, on the other hand, is reputed to have been thought by a god or a spirit in the twilight which Hegel mentions.

But what complicates the Creole situation is that it harbors the French within itself, as the pulse and pain of the concept (“lancinement du concept”), as internal transcendence. Among the historical conditions under which Creole appeared, we can perceive forced poetics, which is an awareness of French as the constraining background, and at the same time the deliberate decision to give up French, that is to say, the concept, as the locus of expression. Hence, the image, that is to say, concrete expression and all the metaphorical derivatives, cannot be taken for granted in the Creole language. The image is a forced detour.
It is not an implicit prank, but a well-planned scheme. The imaged detour of Creole folk wisdom has something pathetic about it, something like the mark of immobility.

It is possible to conceive of a time now looming, I think, nearly everywhere in the world, when the oral languages will take their revenge on the written ones in the context of a planetary civilization based on the non-written. Writing is tied, it seems, to a transcendental philosophy of Being which might give way to a system of human relations. Such a context may then give rise to overall systems of images, non-conceptualizing processes, languages which would flash and flicker instead of simply “reflecting.” No matter what we think of such a possibility, which present circumstances indicate might well come about, as of now we must study what requirements must be fulfilled by the Creole language to meet the challenge.

3

For all the Islands, Creole is the language of the Plantation system, on which the sugar cane culture depended. The system has disappeared, but in Martinique it has not been replaced by another system of production, it has degenerated into a transaction circuit. Martinique is a country where products made elsewhere are exchanged. This then is a land which may increasingly become a transit area. In such a country, where the present organization aims at suppressing all kinds of production, the system of the mother tongue, deprived of a dynamic hinterland, cannot draw on such a hinterland for support. Nor can Creole be the language of big shopping centers, or Hilton hotels. Sugar cane, bananas, pineapples, these are ultimately the last pawns on the Creole chessboard. When they are wiped out the language will be wiped out, unless it wins other practical uses for itself.

Just as it ceased to be the language of the secret pact, without ever succeeding in achieving a standard form and an “open” character, Creole gradually ceased to resort to a detour through the image, by which in the world of Plantations it achieved its practical purposes, without reaching its development as a conceptual tool. These conditions dramatically threaten the language with paralysis.

What Creole transmitted, in the world of Plantations, was above all a refusal. From there, we could define a mode of linguistic structuration which would be “negative” or “reactive,” differing from the “natural” structuring of traditional languages. In this, Creole appears as if organically linked to the worldwide experience of cultural relationship. It is literally a consequence of cultural interface, and did not exist prior to this interface. It is not a language of Being, but a language of Relatedness.

As long as the system of production, as iniquitous as it was for the majority of the population, maintained itself as an “autonomous” exercise, it allowed a symbolic activity, binding together the community, through which the determinant class, first the slaves and then the agricultural workers, imposed its own expression through language, belief and custom, as opposed to the written word, religion and law, which are imposed by a dominating class.

The Creole tale is the symbolic, roundabout way through which the bulk of the Martiniquans elaborated, in the world of the Plantations, a forced poetics (which could also be called a counter-poetics). It pointed to the impossibility of achieving overall liberation together with a desperate attempt to attain it.

If the Plantation system had been followed by another system of production, Creole would probably have become structured, that is to say, it would have come to grips with the writing process, it would have switched from the secret pact to an elaborated syntax, perhaps even from detour to fluidity, from the image to the concept.

Instead of this, what we see in Martinique, even today, is one of the most extreme consequences of social irresponsibility, a kind of verbal delirium that I shall call habitual, to distinguish it from pathological delirium. As the backbone of communication, verbal delirium is one of the most frequent avatars of the counter-poetics enacted by Creole. The choppiness, drumming, acceleration, lusty repetitions, slurring of syllables, nonsense, allegories and hidden meaning, all the aspects of this habitual verbal delirium condense, phase by phase, the history of this dramatic language. Moreover, observing this technical non-functionality which guts Creole, we can say positively that with daily usage this language becomes more and more a language of neurosis. The shouted language knots itself into a contorted language, a language of frustration. We could also ask if such frenzied use has not helped to maintain Creole, in spite of the absolutely unfavorable conditions in which it is practiced. We
know that delirious discourse is a survival technique.

But it is in the folktale itself, the echo of the Plantation, that we can catch unawares the pathetic lucidity of the Creole speaker. The analysis of the tale shows the deficiencies from which the community suffers: the absence of a cultural hinterland, the loss of technical responsibility, the isolation in the Caribbean, etc., are overdetermined in the popular imagery. What is remarkable is that this overdetermination is always elliptic, fast moving, and camouflaged in dirision. This is what we will observe in the analysis of the tale.

It truly proceeds, then, from a forced poetics; it is the tension within a language which, using the very deficiency from which it suffers, condemns itself, so as to better negate writing's claims at superiority, never to perfect its own written expression.

Creole and landscape

1

It is not my purpose to study the Creole folktale as the signified system, nor to isolate the signifying elements. A synthesis of African and European bestiaries, the precious testimony of transplanted tales, the slave's penetrating look at the master's world, a refusal of work "value," a cycle of fear, hunger and misery, or a repository of hope constantly dashed to pieces: many are the interpretations. I shall content myself here to establishing a relationship between the tale and its environment.

A striking feature of the Creole tale is the acuteness of its landscape. The countryside is a diagram, a map of various places one walks across; the forest and its darkness, the grassland and its sunshine, the hill and its weariness, are precisely places of transit. Walking acquires an astonishing importance: "J'ai tellement marché, que j'ai chéri et que mes talons sont venus par-devant,"1 says the tale in one way or another. One can retrace one's steps. Vegetation abounds in the landscape, animal life teems on its limits. The important thing is, however, that the site, although indicated, is never described. Landscape description is not part of the tale. Descriptive enjoyment or delight never takes place. The reason is that the landscape is never meant to be lived in; it is a transiting place and not yet a homeland.

Thus this land is not owned. No one ever lays any claim to it. There are two "dominating" characters in the Creole folktale: the King (symbolizing the European, we might say) and Brother Tiger (symbolizing the Bébé colonist). Both are always fooled, often beaten up by a "determining" character, "Brer" Rabbit (symbolizing the people's cunning). But their right to the land is never questioned. The tale symbolism is never pushed to the point of eradicating the colonial right to the land; its moral never entails a final call for the clear suppression of these rights. In this I do not see a resignation, but rather this extreme cunning which I have explained, this pathetic fixity, here in the themes, which is the way in which the Creole tale signals that it has indeed recognized the system and its structure.

In such an environment, man (or the animal which is his emblem), has only fragmentary relationships with things and trees, animals and people. The intense "panting" of the Creole tale leaves no room for repose. No one has time to let his gaze roam over the scene. The relationship to the environment is constantly dramatic and questioning. The tale pants, because it has chosen not to tarry. In the same way as it eschews description, it avoids appreciation. There are no propitious shadows or sweet languor. Ceaseless running is the rule, from a disavowed past to a paltry present. The land suffered is not yet the land offered. In the Creole tale national consciousness is budding, but never blooms.

A constant feature of the tale is also to record the nature of the "riches" that man recognizes here as his own. Whether it is a question of the pleasure of living or of the happiness of owning, the Creole tale has only two responses, either deficiency or excess. It is a pathetic lucidity. Riches are either paltry or excessive. They are quantitatively excessive, for example, as when the tale enumerates things to eat; qualitatively, as when it assesses the extravagant price of goods. A "castle" is described at one stroke (its ostentation, luxury, comfort, prestige), when it is bluntly stated, with no other detail, that it has two hundred and ten toilets. These riches are meaningless, for the true ones are absent from the closed world of the Plantations. Excess and lack combine in pointing out the same impossibility. Thus the tale is set in a non-existing land, evinced by excess or insubstantiality, which has
nothing to do with the real country and yet delineates its structure most exactly.

At the same time, it will be noted that the Creole tale offers no description of ordinary craftsmanship or creative techniques. A distance separates the tool from its wielder. Although an instrument of man’s domination over nature, the implement is totally impossible to acquire. The equipment or machinery depicted in the tale is always ascribed to an owner whose prestige, that is to say whose different status, is implicit. It is “Mr. So-and-so’s truck” or “Mr. So-and-so’s mill.” The implement belongs admittedly to someone else, the technique has not become one’s own. Man has not undertaken to transform the landscape (for he cannot). He does not even have time to praise its beauty, which may even appear insulting to him.

Convergences

1

Where, then, does the effort to “hold on” come in? What is the importance of such a forced poetics, a counter-poetics, which does not spring forth as a healthy growth from the ancestral land, but on the contrary erects its “rampart of twigs” against the impossible task: waste, negation, reduction?

1) This counter-poetics is called upon to achieve a synthesis of diversified, sometimes opposite, cultural elements.

2) One part at least of these elements does not exist before the synthesizing function, which makes the synthesis all the more necessary, yet all the more threatened.

3) This constrained character is what causes the force (sharpness, harshness, drama) of such a forced poetics.

4) This forced poetics will most certainly dry up unless it is allowed to flow into a natural, free, open poetics of relatedness.

Detour is therefore the first effort of this counter-poetics. It is an unself-conscious knowledge by which popular consciousness asserts both its vagaries and its consistency. However, it must move on from unself-conscious to deliberate self-knowledge. At this point some final remarks may be appropriate about the relationship between such a situation and the field of ethnopoetics.

In the first place, regarding the clash between these two languages, Creole and French, where until now one has been dramatically dominated by the other, it can be stated that the only workable solution is to make them opaque to one another. In opposition to a universalizing and reductive humanism, we must develop widely a theory of particular opacities. In the world of Relatedness (which takes over after the unifying system of Being), we must consent to the opacity, that is to the irreducible mystery of the other. This is, as I see it, the only way to realize genuinely, through diversity, the human.

In the second place, poetics cannot be separated from the operational modes of the language. In order to save Creole, it would not be sufficient constantly to strive to speak it or write it. What is needed for a genuine development is to reestablish adequate conditions of productivity and to make the Martiniquan aware of his moral and technical responsibilities in his homeland. In other words, every ethnopoetics is bound, at one time or another, to come to grips with politics.

Finally, my exposé has sufficiently demonstrated that if certain communities, oppressed by the historical weight of dominant ideologies, long to convert their speech into a shout, rediscovering thereby the innocence of primitive ethnos, our task is rather to transform the shout we once uttered into a speech which continues it, thus discovering, albeit intellectually, the expression of a finally liberated poetics. I believe that ethnopoetics can go both ways.

The counter-poetics carried out by the inhabitants of Martinique (whether in French-written works, in the practice of Creole, or in the escape through verbal delirium) acknowledges both the necessity for collective expression and the impossibility of achieving this expression. This contradiction will probably disappear when the Martiniquan community is able to express itself, that is, when it can choose for itself. Ethnopoetics is ever in the future. Then, there will be no more conflict between the drive for expression and expression itself. Creole will no longer be the
language of neurosis. The French then spoken will no longer determine from the outside the linguistic levels to be used. One language, shared by the community, will take form. The time will come of a natural poetics, spontaneous and alive. The time will come of a subterranean joy, the joy which, underneath all the woes of the world, is the sign of peoples rediscovering their identity.

(tr. by Michel Benamou)

Translator’s note

1. “Chémär” is the humorous inversion of the two syllables in “marché” (walked) and as such is untranslatable.
Jacques Howlett

The Stolen Word

The black African who attempts to speak and to write a language which an economically, politically and culturally strong foreign power has forced him to utilize is a man barred from his authentic cultural identity. Heavy with the arbitrariness of history, the word ‘utilize’ fittingly shows why English in Nigeria and French in Senegal, for example, are used like imported goods, bearing the stamp of a dominant power and body of knowledge, tools whose handling is imitated, learned, and sometimes mastered by speakers and writers of Yoruba, Ibo, Wolof, or Toucouleur. Thus for these peoples there exists the intimacy of the native language in which they dwell, and the estrangement of the foreign language they utilize. And they have to continue being in this linguistic heterogeneity.

In Holzwege, Heidegger says: “When we go to the well, when we walk in the forest, we do so first through the word ‘well’ and the word ‘forest,’ and this even when we aren’t pronouncing the words and aren’t thinking of language.” The little Senegalese boy going to the woods with his father, the little Senegalese girl carrying a canari jug on her head on her way to fetch water at the well, do so with Wolof words, but later, at school, if they need to speak of the woods or the well, they have to use French, going from the language natural to them to a foreign one: that is, from a world where words are attached to things to a linguistic universe devoid of the intimately experienced reality of their world. This passage from the native language to the master’s language corresponds to a shift from the meaning inherent in daily activities to the manipulation of a code, from the organic to the mechanical.

To comprehend the seriousness of this schism and its possible consequences, we must stress the extent to which we are embedded in our native languages. “Der Mensch ist nur Mensch durch Sprache,” as Von Humboldt said, and we are, indeed, in language like fish in water. There is nothing in our apprehension of ourselves, of the exterior world, of the internal and the external, that is not mediated by language, and primarily by our own, that of our own culture: our mother tongue. The acquisition of native language is an opening into self-awareness — it is the growth of this awareness of self — and in a way, our first step towards knowledge of the world.

The sense of belonging and of individuality, the first emotive and cognitive experiences, stems from this acquisition of language, from the prattle of the child within his environment and with his family. Long before going to school, the means of apprehension of self and of the world, of the real and of the imaginary, which are specific to an individual in a given social group are formed by this childish prattle. Any native language endows those who dwell within it with significations fixing presence and absence, reality and dream, constituting the speaker’s very mode of being within the world. Language is this mode of being, and it dwells in the world just as the individual dwells in language. Native language is “like a vital region inside which we perform, it is like our body, like the flesh of our flesh. Not a set of conventional and modifiable signs, but an organic environment, a living atmosphere, the air we breathe.”

Furthermore, as Sartre says, native language forms a “corps verbal” containing the cultural signifiers that speak within us.

We should reread, from this point of view, the texts of W. Von Humboldt which strongly and penetratingly show how man, through language, “simultaneously shapes himself and the world, or rather becomes conscious of himself while projecting a world outside of himself,” and how a people (the Basques), “thanks to the purity and authenticity of their language,” manifest “the community of ‘belonging’ that exists between the character, the language and the land of a people.” Linguistics today pays more attention to the far-echoing of such lessons without neglecting anything brought out by the structure of language. It is more sensitive to the dialectical unity of language and speech (code/message, competence/performance) than to the dichotomy Saussure set up between these terms. Jacobson, in his 1970 article for the Unesco volume: Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences, shows
what he considers the fecundity of research in socio-and ethno-linguistics, and espouses Dell Hymes's concern for incorporating these disciplines into linguistics "because the science of language can't be separated and isolated from the questions posed by the functioning of language and the role it plays in man's life." This field has been heavily cultivated since Humboldt's inaugural theses, and thanks to the work of Sapir, Lee Whorf, Mauss and Leenhardt, among others, we know that the convergence of language and culture produces a semantic wealth of enunciations and specific significations embedded in the language.

The cultural burden that characterizes the erotic, social, and religious life of a community is profoundly experienced in "so-called" traditional societies, to such an extent that for the Dogons, for example, whose "word of the world" is deciphered and interpreted by Genevieve Calame-Griaule, "changing their language is to change the 'four basic elements' that they received from their birthplace, and thus to change their own constituent elements and to deny themselves, their family, their origins and their culture in one fell swoop." Consequently, the man who moves away from his birthplace and forgets the dialect of his village is scorned, and causes his family sorrow.

If, as so many voices coming from all horizons of research give us to understand, our language is indeed the expanse of what we are and what our innermost selves are, and if we were to imagine now that some weighty incident forces the subject, still a small child, to express himself in a language other than his own and that this other prestige-laden language — the language of the Other — be imposed on him by ad hoc institutions as the language, whose mastery signifies promotion, wealth and esteem, then we may foresee the dysfunctions, the perturbations apt to intervene in the child's psychological development, in the establishment of his identity.

And countries where the colonizer has imposed a foreign language on the population are cursed with the worst form of cultural alienation: that of always having to translate one's thought, to think oneself and the world through a lexicon and a syntax carrying the burden of a foreign culture.

To completely fulfill its mission, it is not enough that any system of domination master the infrastructures of a people, it must also rule its conscience, govern it in its intimacy, in its language. Schools are the ideological instrument best (or rather, worst) suited to carry out the linguistic invasion of the subjects. Supposedly, there is no better long-term investment. Let us measure, nonetheless, the "fall-out" of this kind of policy on the conscience of a people. "One of the cornerstones of the 'depersonalization' of educated Africans," says A. Moumouni, "was the relegation of African languages to the back seat and their more or less complete elimination from the educational process. It (colonial education)," he further notes, "corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and filled him with abnormal complexes ... and because of its assimilation policy and its negation of national culture, resulted in a real alienation among Africans."

Dragoljub Najman, an observer as objectively aware of these problems as is possible, writes, in his work devoted to education in Africa, that the problem is very serious "if we consider that the schools transmit knowledge that is an imposition or that is drawn from a foreign curriculum. Thus, the school is not only a foreign institution established in the community, it tries, moreover, to educate children in a spirit completely foreign to that of the community, which, more often than not, is rural. African schoolchildren learn nothing from their elders ... which contributes to their widespread belief that schools are foreign inventions and that all they do is prepare children to serve foreigners."

Despite timid reforms, the "instrument of cultural domination" continues to function (except in a few rare cases, like Tanzania), perpetuating "de"-culturation, bringing about divisions within formerly collective societies, which are in fact class divisions between an occidentalized elite broken into the techniques and the language of the Other, and the great bulk of people, silent even in their native language. These facts have incalculable consequences. Let us note immediately, although we may have to come back to it later, that even for the African intellectual the knowledge of a foreign language is no guarantee of success. If he is a writer, for instance, his books won't be known by those to whom they should be addressed; a popular public is nonexistent and these texts can't break out of the circle confined to those people privileged by the imported culture. For whom, then, does he write? Is it for the white man (l'autre)? Is he still the judge, albeit unconsciously appealed to?
Is he still the depository of all values? The one who, by his *satisfectit*, by his *imprimatur*, elevates the black text to a literary existence? But how can the African writer, in all consciousness, accept such a state of dependence? Heedful of the white verdict, the African writer maintains his effort to escape it, for how could it be otherwise? He must seek his truth within this ambiguity.

The language of the master cannot be peaceably imposed; like a subtle disease it insinuates itself into the conscience, permeates the difficult acquisition of the foreign language whose irruption in the natural language has produced not a few humiliating practices. One of the worst of these practices, well known during the colonial period and not yet forgotten in Black Africa, is recounted by B. Dadjé in his book *Climbié*: it is the use of a "symbol." The "symbol" can be anything: a small cube, a piece of wood, or a box of matches carried by a pupil, which is to be immediately foisted off on a schoolmate unfortunate enough to speak his own dialect at school. The superior administration has decided to forbid the speaking of dialects at school; here there is only one language: the French one. Nevertheless, the true shame is not borne by the terrible object marking the Black child with ridicule — as in certain times and countries delinquents, madmen and Jews were marked — but by his language. His language is an indelible stain; it denies him the right of speech in his language as well as within himself. From the beginning, he must know that he can exist only by and through the Other. At school, around Climbié, who is carrying the symbol, the other children sing:

"You speak Agni, I give you the symbol,
Ah! Ah! I give you the symbol...
You speak Baoulé, I give you the symbol,
Ah! Ah! I give you the symbol."

They pass the symbol. Like the "hot potato," it leaps from one child to the next, only to "burn" the first child again, just as in a game. But in the Master's linguistic circle, the game is cruel: "It's a nightmare," writes Dadjé, "It makes it impossible to laugh, to live at school, because we are always thinking of it. Where is it? Who has it, him — or him? The symbol seems to be under the loin-cloth, in the pocket of each student. We look at each other with suspicious eyes. The symbol has poisoned the place, corrupted the air, frozen our hearts!" Already, the master's language blocks communication, it creates violence, instead of uniting, it divides, it atomizes the community, and introduces a break within the subject: the foreign father's severity wounds the maternal presence. African language still bears the mark of this deep wound.

Leaving school, the pupils scream, "Ah! Ah! I give you the symbol, while the principal, standing on the porch, smiles paternaly." For he knows, doesn't he, that if these children are to become men, they must, according to the system of domination, return to learn the law of the Master. And that's the trap: you merit my language or you accept your insignificance. My voice decides what is "sense" and "non-sense."

Let us admire, by way of conclusion, the sinister and, furthermore, inane humor of the schoolteacher who, distorting the word "symbol" from its beautiful original sense (the *symbolon* was a pledge of recognition between two persons), makes it emblematic of contempt and the contemptuous, and thus, of rejection and separation.

[Here the editors have reluctantly omitted five pages dealing with an autobiographic account of schooling in Dakar. The full French text will appear in *Présence Africaine* #98.]

We have examined the language of an African particularly vulnerable, fragile, and deeply torn between *their* Occident and *his* Africa, similar to the author's home on the outskirts of Dakar where traditional Africa coexists with the echo and tinsel of the westernized life of the city. We can, of course, contest generalizations drawn from such an example. We should keep in mind that, despite some known literary successes, disasters, less well-known, are legion. What we maintain is that, even in the most fortunate cases, the traumatic consequences are ever present, both on the level of the person and of his language (we are speaking of people who write): a system of domination obliging the writer to place himself under the law of a foreign language and the culture borne by it.

To illustrate this with greater force, we shall examine an entirely different discourse, that of black writers whose mastery of French is brilliant, and who, even more than their African brothers, are condemned to using it: the contemporary Antillean writers.

What then is the fate of the Antillean who writes?
He is a person called into question, problematic. A person dispossessed of his essence by the white Other and whose process of identification passes through this Other, fascinating and repulsive at the same time. The white man signifies the ambiguous otherness. I attack him or I imitate him. In imitating him, I fall short of him and of myself because, desiring only to look like him, I fall short of his being and I renounce mine. In attacking him I widen the distance and I wound myself. In any case, there is neither reconciliation, nor authenticity. The subject, like the Rebel of Césaire, can say: “I recognize no man’s right to inhabit me... I protest, I want no guest inside me, it's horrible.” Horrible, indeed, because the Other still fills the stage. Imaginary refuges, delusions, if not neurotic evasion, proliferate in this form of awareness of a self under maximum security, which sharpens the desire to be oneself and only oneself, closed and lonely: “Let me cry my full measure the good drunken shout of revolt, I want to be alone in my skin,” the Rebel demands.

The subject can also resign himself to misunderstandings, to ambiguity: disappointing results, without existential stability, which leave the subject filled with anxiety, wandering in search of his identity. Who am I? And what am I when this advent is realized by another who, as the imaginary father, is the only one to possess “the word and the formula?” This question, said to rule the fate of everyman, develops great importance when it concerns men taken from their own “word” and their own “formula” by a strong and prestigious foreign obtrusion. The identification process, as the mirror image of being and appearance, is obliterated by the image of the white man (l’ Autre blanc). We follow the passionate commentary and revindicated attainment of this chiaroscuro process in Antillean texts, which means that they never unfold to plenitude, they never sing a fulfilled desire, but the fever and the need; therefore the majority of their texts are always deep, for they are rooted in the depths themselves, and always serious, even when they laugh or are ironical, for they are using genuine speech wrenched from the authoritative and dominant language of the Other.

“Africa I have kept your memory
You are in me
like a guardian fetish in the center of the village
make of me the stone of your slingshot

of my mouth the lips of your wound
of my knees the broken columns of your abasement”

Another cultural signifier structuring this region where the subject shapes himself is Africa — the great, the generous, the prolific, the maternal black presence. Near and far, gratifying and frustrating, Africa functions as a lost, inaccessible object of desire. “I don’t love Africa,” writes Paul Niger. He doesn’t love her as she is — fallen, humiliated, forsaken by God — but tells us that she “will speak” at last, that “it is her turn to require.” Note, however, that “I don’t love Africa” can be misleading; it is an evident antiphrasis, but is this rhetorical process as innocent as it appears? Doesn’t it pertain to what psychoanalysis calls denegation (Verneinung), a form for expressing a repressed feeling? It is a contestable reference? We must admit, at least, that this love is unfulfilled. Moreover, it’s not certain that the reference to Africa is welcome in West Indian society. If we believe Franz Fanon the contrary would be more likely, yet the intellectual, the West Indian writer searching for his deep roots, the foundations of his memory, magnifies mother Africa as a symbolic representation: her near and stimulating bidding, her strength, fecundity and black authenticity are contrasted with the white usurper. The reality of Africa doesn’t measure up to the symbol, and the exalting, reassuring image of African proximity can’t exorcise the real separation, the diaspora or the exile. The secure shelter of the vast continent is far removed from the anxiety of insular solitude. What does it matter? Africa is black. The myth lives on this reality. The Antillean subjects suffers from this contradiction: he negates and symbolically distances the compelling proximity of the white man (l’Autre blanc), whereas he symbolically experiences the separation from Africa as a maternal proximity. Africa puts an essential question to the Antillean subject, her mythification is the answer to this interpellation.

All self-awareness is mediated by others. We have seen that the Antillean subject, doomed to the dialectic of fascination-exclusion and understanding-misapprehension, is a person endangered, trapped, whose identity is unsure. Aimé Césaire, in his poem “Hors des jours étrangers,” has, among other, recorded this torment:
“My people
when
out of alien days
will you grow a head all yours on your shoulders
knotted anew
and your speech
...when
when at last will you cease to be the dark bauble
at the others’ carnival”
(tr. by ed.)

Here the poet summons the word before the tribunal
of alienation. Isn’t the word essential? As we have
said, being present or absent to oneself, true or imagi-

cinary, results from language. The subject is language.
Therefore, the Antillean subject is present to himself
and the world through the French language, he speaks
himself in French, “le francais de France — le francais
du Francais — le francais-francais,” as Damas bitterly
remarks, he gives himself meaning in the Other’s
language, the Other qualifies him, haunts him.11 The
West Indian writer, then, has no maternal language —
he doesn’t express himself in Creole — he has, if we
may play on words, a “paternal” language, the
master’s language. The subject must authenticate,
identify himself through another’s language —
language that he violates in that he can’t fully possess
it — the language of the master. Consequently, at this
level the conflict is manifested as a seizure of speech,
a convulsive use of language, a will to “de”-construct.
Subversive in its terms, this language denounces, ac-
cuses; its very form is a political and social revindica-
tion. To introduce revolution in language, to become
an autonomous person while studying the language of
the Other, is a total act of liberation because it acts
on the signifiers themselves. The Rebel becomes him-
self in this appropriation of language, he celebrates
the murder of the Father and takes his place as
master of the law of the text. It is curious that Antil-
lean literature, anterior to the text we are referring
to, was a literature of consent, a literature of imitation,
of representation, of approbation, which could
only be approbation of the Other. Antillean specific-
ity appeared only in the realistic descriptions of the
islands, in the languid evocation of Creole charm. In
opposition to this attitude, specificity in modern
literature is no longer sought in complacent descrip-
tions of nature, or in the servile imitation of metro-
politan culture; self-awareness has destroyed the com-
placency and has liberated literary activity. The sub-
ject’s claim to existence as a person is the productive
solicitation of this modernity, giving birth to a litera-
ture of freedom. Indeed, how could the Antillean
writer avoid the master’s knowledge inscribed in the
language? Yet this knowledge is precisely that sub-
verting the language of the Other: surrealism destroy-
ing bourgeois discourse, Marxism as a criticism of the
capitalist system, psychoanalysis in that it inflicts a
third narcissistic wound on the glorious person of
western humanism, or, as Freud says, disaligning him
with the Unconscious. The Antillean writer, more
than any other, has been encouraged to cling to such
destructive knowledge. He speaks in favor of death
and kills himself, or remains silent, and with such
words! Speak and die!

From my stolen word to the rape of his word.
This process is the process of cultural violence, itself a
major result of the domination of the black world. At
stake is the future of its discourse, in terms of its
closure and even its magnificent transgressions. No
one can predict the outcome. Between two utopias —
between the technocratic dream of a universal
language and a finally peaceful Babel of human com-
unities forging the speech of their difference in
mutual respect, we can at least prefer the latter.

(Translated by Strass & Mathieu Howlett)
Notes


6. In philosophy, besides the findings of Cassirer, for whom the *Weltanschauung* of an individual and his way of life are already determined in and by language, the path of hermeneutic inspiration, from Schleiermacher and Dilthey to Ricoeur and Gadamer, should be traced, with a special emphasis on Heidegger, for whom it is weighted down by a deep prejudice (*Vorurteil*): embedded in the language in which philosophy constitutes itself.


11. This heart that haunts me and that never quite Fits with the things I say, the clothes I wear, That knows deep in itself the crampon-bite Of feelings not my own, of mannered air Borrowed from Europe, can you feel that pain And that despair — the most intense of all — Of using words from France to tame and train This heart of mine that came from Senegal?

Fredric Jameson

Collective Art in the Age of Cultural Imperialism

I'd like to inscribe my remarks under Sylvia's original title, "Ethnopoetics versus Sociopoetics?", because it really seems to me to contain in a nutshell all the basic issues. Now, of course, in one sense, Ethnopoetics is a sociopoetics, that's what's exciting about it, and perhaps it is with that that we should begin. The older, and I guess the newer, modernisms also were or tried to be subversive in the sense in which Stanley Diamond followed Plato's thinking on the matter the other day. The trouble with the older modernism was that it refused and condemned a whole culture — in other words, essentially a collective and social form — in the name of individual experience and individual protest; and when that happens, clearly, the cards are all stacked the other way. It is not merely that the individual has to lose, that there is a basic disproportion in the power of the collective status quo as against the individual dissatisfaction. History is indeed nothing but just such defeats, of which the supreme mission of language is to keep alive the memory and to memorialize those similarly crushed by blind and mindless power.

So it is not the defeat of the individual that is decisive, but rather simply the fact that if he conceives of his critique and of his protest in individual terms, ultimately he is going to find himself thinking of that against which he protests in individual categories also — as local ills, or worse yet, as mere cultural or intellectual deficiencies, and not as the properties of a total socio-economic system in its own right.

So it is important, that after all of that individualistic lyricism there should finally emerge a lyric production that reasserts its links to the mainstream of art in human societies, and attempts to reinvent that social and collective function which poetry and the chanted or spoken or sung word have had over all but the most recent centuries of human history.

This attempt comes at a particularly strategic moment in our own social development: it reflects, of course, the historic protests — both on the level of political struggles and on that of experimentation with new and more liberated life forms — of the nineteen sixties, and can be said, perhaps, in some way to represent one of the emergent cultural currents in which the sixties — far from dead — live among us with a fructifying subterranean power.

But it also comes at a time — paradoxically if you like, but the development is no doubt in another way intimately linked to the new life-style tolerance as well as to political configurations around the world — it comes at a time at the very height of the development of that brand-new thing the consumer society or société de consommation (others have called it post-industrial society or the affluent society) when the very possibility of imagining how other people live and that other qualitatively different societies exist has seemed to be more and more remote from the dweller in the American suburb. I would want to argue indeed — but that is not the point of my remarks today, except incidentally — that no society has ever lost the possibility of imagining otherness, sheer difference, to the degree to which ours has done so. Even the older industrial society, that of the thirties, say, had through the sheer labor and toil visible in it much in common with the older exploitative social systems. Today all those realities are covered in cellophane, nature has finally been abolished, and all we can really see anywhere on the globe are the faces, not of other people, but only of potential Americans, Americans manqués, as yet imperfect but still trying Americans, or else rival Americans with red stars on their caps and the desire to produce similar floods of consumer goods in their hearts. That other societies might not wish to reproduce the consumer system, the commodity system, is quite incomprehensible to us, and indeed, apparently, to many of them as well.

Now under these circumstances, I must take ethnopoetics as a powerful instrument designed to reawaken the sense of difference within this society, and to revive that feeble, almost extinct, sense that it is really not necessary to live in this particular way, and that people have been able to live otherwise — in the past (in the societies which preceded history), in the present (in the various social experiments in
course all around us on the globe), and in the future, in some new and as yet unimagined collective forms which it is our task to invent.

Indeed, from the point of view of literary criticism, it seems to me axiomatic that the use of other poetic forms — borrowed or reinvented from the chants, myths, lyrical fragments or epics, of other societies — is always an implied commentary on our own society. I would want to go so far as to say that — implicitly, mind you, and this is the qualification to which we will want to return — implicitly an individual in our culture reading an ethnopoem written by another individual, is in reality mediating a contact between two cultures. Through that individual reading and writing, it is our whole society which makes a fitful contact with a completely different social form: the poetic structure, in other words, above and beyond its individual content and the words themselves, is in itself a symbolic act which is critical of our society and which — implicitly again — calls it back into question and passes judgement on it.

Now the trouble begins, as I've suggested, with this word "implicitly." When indeed the critique is implicit, how can you be sure that it really gets made? And how, even if you wanted to, could you turn this implicit commentary of the form upon the shoddiness of capitalism into an explicit sociopoetics? Now obviously, I don't intend to answer these questions, because they must be answered by the movement of history and by the poetic practice of the poets and writers themselves. But nothing like a solution to them will emerge unless we keep them in sight at all times. Let me, as a kind of contribution to that insistence, offer three different kinds of remarks on ethnopoetics and on its potential or actual negativity.

The first has to do with the very concept of negativity itself, the idea of the critical and subversive, negating, refusing, function of great culture — indeed of any genuine culture altogether. This concept, as you know, it was the historic merit of the Frankfurt School to have developed, and it did so in a situation in which the very difficulties of concrete negation of critique seemed to have increased with something like a qualitative leap. Their reflexions on the negativity of culture go hand in hand with an appreciation of the heightened capacities of what they come to call the total system of capitalism to absorb elements of negativity and protest; and in retrospect we can see that what they thus described is in reality none other than the immense seamless web of the consumer society itself linked together by the media and the multinational corporations. This identification is then confirmed by Marcuse's crucial insight into repressive tolerance or repressive desublimation, which makes it plain that the new consumer system is perfectly capable of absorbing and coopting and neutralizing many of the forces — sexual, political, artistic — which older societies would have felt to be explosive and subversive enough to merit outright repression by force. Indeed, in the light of this development, it has become clear that the older modernism — which once was subversive and loathed by any self-respecting businessman — has now become the very mainstay of modern commercial commodity production, in the wealth of styling changes and the storehouse of streamlined forms it holds forth. Nothing less subversive than than that older modernistic "revolution."

So the question poses itself: what is there in ethnopoetics, in its very structure, which can prevent it from being coopted by the system and absorbed into it? And it is a question I would rather hear you try to answer than to venture a reply of my own. I would simply add, though, that were I a hostile critic of this poetic movement — which I'm not — I could very well see a completely different reading of it, the very possibility of which even I myself find distressing. It is this: what if our capacity to use and to reinvent the forms, say, of native American poetry were — quite the opposite of a breakthrough — simply the reflex of the increasing vocation of the system to absorb and to integrate the last of its most hitherto irreducible ethnic minorities? What if the real power of Indian poetry — to dramatize otherness and to bring us into electrifying contact with social forms wholly different from our own — were operative only when it remained absolutely strange and foreign, scandalous for our white Western written tradition, and the property of a few eccentrics among us when not of the Indian people themselves? What if — far from being negative and subversive — the very existence of ethnopoetics were simply a sign that the system is now ready to absorb those hitherto dangerous elements, and indeed that the very reminder of the existence, among us or before us, of alternate social forms has itself lost all power to threaten and to subvert? I'm not sure, mind you, that this is really the case, but I'm certain that we are deceiving ourselves if it should turn out that we would rather not entertain
that possibility.

My second remark has to do with the history lesson Professor Diamond offers us in In Search of the Primitive — or rather, if you like, the anthropology lesson, from which my whole point would be that history is somehow conspicuous by its absence. The crucial importance of the new anthropology — of something like an economic anthropology, among whose advocates, besides Mr. Diamond himself, I would certainly want to mention Marshall Sahlins’ Stone Age Economics, and the parallel developments in France, notably by the incidentally conflicting work of Pierre Clastres and of Maurice Godelier — the importance of these anthropological developments lies in the way in which they force us to reflect again on the primacy of social forms themselves, in the way in which they correct an otherwise purely politically and economically oriented vision of historical development. By reviving the vision of societies before history, before accumulation, before writing, above all, before political power, they serve as a correction to those of us who might tend to forget what the political struggle is really all about, and to remind us that the point of making a revolution — the ultimate point, and there can be no other — is to create some qualitatively different social form from this one, as much to abolish power as to seize it. The new anthropology, in other words, takes seriously the call of Herbert Marcuse to reinvent a dead or extinct Utopian imagination; it confirms the remark of the ageing Lukács that we are once again in the situation of the Utopian socialists, in the ferment of visionary glimpses of other social forms beyond which some future 1848 or 1871 is only distantly visible.

But such a visionary reawakening — of which ethnopoetics is surely the concrete praxis — is not to be achieved by leaving history out! Mr. Diamond gave us a view in which all of Western rationalization is opposed to some type of primitive wisdom, in which the state and state power, Plato’s “totalitarian” city, is opposed to the life of the primitive Gemeinschaft. Yet the fact is that even after history begins, after political power appears, there are many, many different forms of society which run their course before the appearance of what we now know as capitalism — and it serves no purpose at all to assimilate all of those various social power structures to our own ultimately unique and total one. To do so simply leaves one in the grip of a purely idealistic critique of our own society: it identifies what is wrong with social life today with what is essentially a form of thinking — rationalization, quantification, and so forth. But if you do that, then unfortunately, you find yourself irresistibly drawn to the — equally idealistic — conclusion that the solution lies in changing . . . not our form of society, but merely precisely that form of thinking, and in being anti-rational, anti-quantifying, and the like. It is not the result one would have hoped for from that initial identification of ethnopoetics with other social forms, rather than with sheer individual experience.

And in the case this should seem to you an issue only distantly related to the poems themselves, let me observe that the question there revolves around a very fundamental poetic issue, which is that of the sacred. Let me quote a few sentences from Jerry Rothenberg’s Boundary 2 interview, which, apparently dealing with the question of written versus oral literatures, in fact quite clearly raises this problem, which is one of the succession of the social forms themselves in history: “Speaking for myself,” he says, “I would like to desanctify and demystify the written word, because I think the danger of frozen thought, of authoritarian thought, has been closely tied in with it. I don’t have any use for the ‘sacred’ in that sense — for the idea of book or text as the authoritative, coercive version of some absolute truth, changeless because written down and visible.” We applaud this position, of course, but it is vital to point out that capitalism has just as little use for the sacred as do the newer poets; and that this particular type of authority and of power — the sacred, the primacy of the written text and of a priesthood of guardians and interpreters — is, on the contrary, characteristic of a social form which is precisely precapitalist but equally precisely no longer primitive, since it is in this social form — the feudal, or that of oriental despotism if you like — in which power first emerges most starkly. Thus, unless we are willing to make historical distinctions between the various types of power systems in the post-primitive historical societies, we are not going to know what to do with a phenomenon like the sacred, which seems indeed to hold out the possibility of a critique of our own system, but in fact ends up projecting values and a social nostalgia which are equally regressive and surely not “primitive” at all in the sense in which Stanley Diamond and others have valorized the word. From both ends
of history therefore, from that of an adequate critique of our own type of capitalism, as well as from that of a meaningful clarification as to what the primitive really is, we can transform an ethnopoetics into a genuine sociopoetics only at the price of the old Poundian injunction to “include history.”

My final remark — very brief — will be about the ecological thrust of ethnopoetics. There is, no doubt, a kind of popular front strategy involved in a slogan like this, to which liberals can also rally without discomfort. It has the added merit of reminding us that genuinely primitive social life is a complete system which organizes nature rather than destroying it. Nor would anyone want to discount the immense Western will to power inherent in the Faustian technological longing to master nature: it is rightly a kind of original sin, at one with the whole ideal of progress and of the production of surplus and consumer goods of which ethnopoetics, among other things, stands as a critique. But I confess I am troubled again by the possibility that what is implicit in this slogan need not become explicit, and that it is always possible for the reader or listener to forget that the ecological program — the attack on the exploitation of nature — is in reality but a powerful symbol for the more fundamental attack on the exploitation of human beings. A poetry which is associated with American Indian culture can scarcely forget this relationship between a politics of nature and a politics which aims at the basic imperializing mechanisms of our own socioeconomic system. Yet it is a question of making certain — once and for all — that the ecological imagery can never be used as a substitute for that more fundamental social-revolutionary impulse.

Notes


I came to Milwaukee prepared to suggest that what is central to all language is discourse, and that there are, if you will permit the solecism, “natural discourse genres” that are common to all cultures using language — and that are not only common but fundamental to the structure of language and to our humanness, our mental capacities and dispositions and the traffic problems of a semiotic. Genres, perhaps, of the sort Dell Hymes has called for an inventory and investigation of in his suggested ethnography of speaking. To paraphrase Hymes, all over the world in a great variety of languages people announce, greet, take leave, invoke, introduce, inquire, request, demand, command, coax, entreat, encourage, beg, answer, name, report, describe, narrate, interpret, analyze, instruct, advise, defer, refuse, apologize, reproof, joke, taunt, insult, praise, discuss, gossip. Among this grab-bag of human language activities are a number of more or less well-defined universal discourse genres, whose expectation structures are the source of all poetic activity. If there is any place that we should look for an ETHNOPOETICS it is here, among these universal genres, where all linguistic invention begins. For by an ETHNOPOETICS I mean Human Poetics. I suppose ethnos = people and therefore ETHNOPOETICS = People’s Poetics or the poetics of natural language. So I think it is trivial for a structuralist like Todorov, for one example, to begin to look for the laws underlying narration in the socially dislocated literary tales of Boccaccio, though they should certainly be reflected there, when with Labov we can find them more completely articulated, with about equal elegance and greater clarity, in the street talk of the children of the black ghettos of the United States, where story can be seen in the social and discourse context in which narrative normally occurs. I think it is also a mistake to begin an analysis of metaphor or the figures of rhetoric from Elizabethan or Roman examples, when there are virtually no known figures of speech, no idiosyncratic ways of talking that are not displayed more fully in some natural discourse setting, of which the literary examples are often merely atrophied specializations.

For what I take the “poetics” part of ETHNOPOETICS to be is the structure of those linguistic acts of invention and discovery through which the mind explores the transformational power of language and discovers and invents the world and itself. What I was afraid of in the term ETHNOPOETICS was the historical legacy of the term ethnos, a kind of anthropological commitment to exoticism, to whatever is remote from us and somehow different — tribal if we are not tribal, religious if we are secular, dark if we are light, etc. Here ethnos = other, so not Human Poetics but the Poetics of the Other. Trying to avoid this I took a number of examples, fairly casually from several studies of black vernacular discourse in English, three of which I am including here. The first of these is reported by Claudia Mitchell Kerman and involves an exchange between the author, a young black woman, and a young black man. The author was sitting on a park bench when the young man came up with a couple of friends and, finding her attractive, says approvingly

: Mama, you sho is fine!
She: That ain no way to talk to your mother.
(there is a laugh and his friends walk off while he sits down)
He: You married?
She: Uh huh.
He: Your husband married?
(they both laugh)

The second described by Thomas Kochman is also a dialogue, this time between a young black woman seated with her friends in a bar in which a black man happens to come out of the men’s room with his pants still unzipped. This produces some laughter by the women, and the man, feeling somewhat put down and wanting to turn the tables says

: Hey baby, did you see the big Cadillac with the full tires waiting to roll into action for you?
She: No motherfuck, but I saw a little gray Volkswagon with two flat tires.
The third is a fight story told by a fifteen-year-old black kid and reported in a study by William Labov.

An then three weeks ago I had a fight with this other dude outside. He got mad 'cause I wouldn't give him a cigarette. Ain't that a bitch? (Oh yeah?)

Yeah, you know I was sitting on the corner and shit, smoking my cigarette, you know. I was high an shit. He walked over to me "Can I have a cigarette?" He was a little taller than me, but not that much. I said "I ain't got no more man" 'cause I ain gon give up my last cigarette unless I got some more. So I said "I don't have no more man." So he, you know, dug on the pack, 'cause the pack was in my pocket. So he said "Eh man, I can't get a cigarette, man? I mean, I mean we supposed to be brothers an shit." So I say "Yeah, well, you know man, all I got is one. You dig it? An I won't give up my las one to nobody." So, you know, the dude he looks at me an he .. I don know .. he just thought he gon rough that motherfucker up.

So he, you know, dug on the pack, 'cause the pack was in my pocket. So he said "I can't get a cigarette." I said "That's what I said, my man," you know. So he said "What you supposed to be bad an shit?" So I said:

"Look here, my man, I don't think I'm bad, You understan But I mean, you know, If I had it you could git it I like to see you with it, you dig it? But the sad part about it You got to do without it That's all, my man."

So the dude, he on to pushin me, man. (Oh, he pushed you?) An why he do that? Every time somebody fuck with me, why they do it. I put that cigarette down, an boy, let me tell you, I beat the shit out that motherfucker. I tried to kill im — over one cigarette! I tried to kill im. Square business! After I got through stompin him in the face, man, you know all of a sudden I went crazy! I jus went crazy. An I jus wouldn't stop hittin the motherfucker. Dig it, I couldn't stop hittin im, man, till the teacher pulled me off o him. An guess what? After all that I gave the dude the cigarette, after all that. Ain't that a bitch? (How come you gave im a cigarette?) I don know. I jus gave it to him. An he smoked it too!

And I selected examples like these not because they were the best or because I thought that they were somehow "art" and therefore "poetry," but because they were convenient and vernacular, and exhibited all of the symmetrical and structural niceties conventionally associated with poetry, occurring here in rapid improvisational speech.

The first example is a pair of quibbles with precise parallels in Elizabethan drama, but here the quibbles have a quite clear social discourse function. A lone attractive woman is sitting on a bench and the young man is trying to make her acquaintance. He has to get past a social barrier that suggests it is perhaps not polite for a presumably "proper" young woman to strike up a flirty conversation with any passerby, and there is the danger, to his rep, that he might be rejected. So he begins with whimsical admiration placed firmly in Black Vernacular.

"Mama you sho is fine!"

She doesn’t want to reject or offend him, but she parries his move by deliberately insisting on the supposedly literal meaning of "mama" as a kinship term instead of a term signifying "woman." She does this by shifting out of the vernacular to the more formal term "mother," but she keeps the whole transaction within the range of friendly rapping by keeping the rest of her return in the vernacular.

"That ain no way to talk to your mother!"

Which signifies that there is enough friendliness in her response for him to continue, and he does. He asks her a question that is an attempt to determine her reason for being (apparently) reluctant to engage.

"You married?"

It would constitute at least a formal excuse for unwillingness to play. Her answer seems minimal, but it constitutes a cautious acceptance of the line of reasoning he suggests.

"Uh huh."

He is asking "is it because you’re married that you don’t want to play" and she is responding to the effect that "you could say that." This sets up his decisive and comic counterargument.
“Your husband married?”

Which puts the question sharply and wittily of whether or not the term “married” is more than linguistically “symmetrical.” Which is to say that it is a commonplace of the respectable culture to own this piece of linguistic and social knowledge: that if A is “married” to B, B is “married” to A. While his question suggests the socially verifiable argument: not necessarily. And perhaps: not usually, if B is male. Covertly it also proposes that what’s sauce for the gander should also be sauce for the goose. Now this particular kind of linguistic compression and inventiveness has often been considered a distinguishing feature of poetry. And the second example is even stereo-typical of traditional poetic analysis in that the entire exchange is based on the manipulation of a single extended metaphor, that serves as the basis of a sexual brag.

... the big Cadillac with the full tires waiting to roll into action for you.

Here the woman accepts the automotive sexual metaphor as the basis for discourse and returns a point for point rejection of the car model, its value, size, color and condition, declaring it to be:

... a little gray Volkswagen with two flat tires.

In which the word “gray” is an explicit answer to the unexpressed but probably well-understood (black) color of the Cadillac, which has considerably greater value — “black” is “beautiful” and the typical color of a limousine — than the drab or faded “gray” of the refutation. It is a devastating putdown within a well-defined verbal insult genre with literary equivalents in formal “flytings” and “tenzone” as well as African insult poetry. In fact, both “brag” and “insult” are well-defined genres in speech as well as in literary tradition. What is true of these genres is also true of narrative. The story I’ve quoted is an elaborate self-congratulating heroic tale, complete with a chivalric comic twist at the end.

And guess what? After all that I gave the dude the cigarette, after all that... And he smoked it, too!

Which is the finishing touch in a representation of how just, how fierce, how noble the storyteller was, accomplished with a great array of details that never impede the forward course of the story. For all of the details are incorporated into the story’s propulsive force. Larry is asked for a cigarette because he is smoking and the pack of cigarettes is visible in his shirt pocket. This allows the other boy to ask for one and expect to receive it, given the neighborhood code of manners. Larry’s first answer is sufficient to himself, as a reason for not giving the cigarette — “I don’t have no more, man.” Which, if his story is to be believed, is honest but seems like a lie and a deliberate provocation. Since the pack is visible in his shirt pocket, while what Larry represents himself as meaning is that having one left leaves him not enough to share. But he is, in his depiction, too dignified, too cool to go into that much detail. The other boy ignores what he takes to be the lying response and looking at the pack, calls on “the street code that requires sharing... I mean we supposed to be brothers, an shit.” At this point Larry goes as far as his cool will allow toward explanation, the verbal response “... you know man, all I got is one, dig it?” Which at this point may no longer be convincing. Because if the first statement was a lie, this explanation is possibly also a lie. But it is as far as he can go without losing rep by say showing the nearly empty pack. Moreover, for these two kids the cigarette may only be a lightly-weighted issue, because they both have to be equally willing to enter a quarrel without too many reservations. So in the story both are represented as having a sense of their own rightness, with Larry being more in the right, and furthermore not the aggressor. At the end Larry gives him the cigarette, which is a gesture of magnanimity in the traditional sense of the term. For it shows how small a thing it is compared to his own dignity, which he has just so violently maintained. This is a didactic point of a truly heroic story — that the cause of a quarrel may be disproportionately small in comparison to the quarrel itself, as all material things are small to heroes in comparison with their own rep. Polonius’s advice to Laertes is a good commentary on this system of values. Now throughout this skillful manipulation of the story, the teller never loses sight of the ostensible justification for telling the story:

... He was a little taller than me...

For in discourse, stories, like all other elaborate genres that require extended speech by one of the
partners, need either a stated or understood justification for the interruption of the normal "tit-for-tat" form of dialogue. And Larry never loses sight of the fact that this story was an answer to a question "Did you ever have a fight with a guy bigger than you?" and then "What happened?" Though in this case there is every reason to suppose that this justification, which is offered rather weakly ("... he was a little taller than me, but not that much"), serves more as pretext or a "formal justification" for telling the story, which Larry's listener will accept because of the inherent colorfulness of the narrative. But this "formal pressure" is felt by the teller sufficiently to make him suspend the narration long enough to offer his formal justification and receive silent permission to continue. For this "formal pressure" is really the social pressure of the discourse genre, that demands satisfaction of a socially-shared expectation: that when you are asked a question requiring some kind of explanation, that your explanation will be relevant to the question or at least contain a response to the unspoken but well-understood relevancy requirement. Many features that are requirements of extended speech genres in a real discourse context and that color the whole genre are often obscured in their literary equivalents, because literature has become, for many, its own justification and has pretty much lost its sense of address. And it may be difficult to remember now that even in a fully-literary novel like *Anna Karenina* the story is a powerful example that satisfies, though poorly, the relevancy requirements that would be imposed by a discourse about the value of certain types of family life, and that Tolstoy felt obliged to insert an explicit justification in the opening epigram: "All happy families are happy in the same way, all unhappy families are unhappy in different ways."

My attempt to discuss these and a number of other examples of vernacular genres drew me and a number of other discussants into frequently rather abstract analyses which led someone at the conference to challenge the "naturalness" of the discussion. And this in turn led to something of a discussion of the "naturalness" or "unnaturalness," or more precisely, the degree of self-consciousness of language acts, in which various special disciplines, among which linguistics and phenomenology, were invoked. It was this that formed the background for the following discussion.

(Participants include: Nathaniel Tarn, David Antin, Richard Scheckner, William Spanos, and Gary Snyder.)

_Tarn:_ There are two things, the monologue effect and the dialogue effect. Then there's the third thing of the monologue, telling a story dialogue. There's the true dialogue and there's the monologue about dialogue, and so on. Now if that's what you mean by phenomenology, that's O.K.

_Antin:_ What you're talking about is the very considerable problem of the "naturalness" of describing something that presents itself in the course of events and is normally taken for granted and then one chooses to observe it. It's the observer problem. The question of whether an observer's understanding of something, formulated as a description, does not in fact change whatever is observed. Which summarizes in the aphorism that all observation is some kind of manipulation or transformation. But suppose it is. To begin with, there is a matter of degree in the deformation caused by any particular observation; and even if you can't easily determine that, the observation will be justified by the need for it and the usefulness of the description. The reason we're choosing to observe these speech acts here is that they have been very neglected and I want to restore the idea of the centrality of speech genres or discourse genres to any human poetics. I'm willing to put up with the fact that in order to talk about anything I can't deal with the taken-for-granted at the level that we take it for granted, because I've got to move something from here to there, from the periphery to center of attention, say. In doing this you can use different kinds of tools, but it's most convenient to use the tools that are ready to hand; like Lévi-Strauss' "handyman" you reach for the tools that are "handy." Now we might not have to mention Chomsky or William Labov or even grammatical analysis. But somehow we do have to be able to see the structure of the representation, that something like this narrative makes use of. What distinctions the storyteller makes, because he has to make them — to meet the intelligibility criteria of the genre. For the story to meet these requirements, given the nature of the events, the way they unfolded, and what Larry wants to communicate, you may have to observe with some precision the neat grammatical distinctions he makes in some parts of
the story — like the aspects of the verb or something horribly technical like that and how the tense system and the aspect system are related in the story and how if we knew what was generally required by the genre we might find out how much he could screw around with requirements — the expectations set up by the system — and at what cost.

Schechner: Then what you’re saying relates exactly to what was said earlier. It is that the dialectic between process and structure is probably biologically rooted. In other words, that evolution can only occur, in other words, structural changes can only occur as a process within a structural field but you can reverse it; structure can only occur within a professional field. And that’s exactly what we’re talking about, this balance between formalism and free play. That’s also what happens in a lot of behavior both in animals and people as in rehearsals, we do a lot of rehearsing and animals do a lot of rehearsing. In other words, pre-playing and post-playing events and get a great deal of delight out of that.

Spanos: If we pay attention to the phenomenologists who have been referred to over and over again, I think one of the things that has to be brought into this whole discussion is the question of origins, especially since the stories that you repeated are formulaic, that is to say, they’re teleological or logocentric. They’re preconceived so that the process is more or less predictable. So when we equate this with orality, with the kind of oral expression we’re talking about and have been talking about, a kind of oral expression which, in my understanding of it, is a second stage to a kind of orality that is even prior — ontologically prior — to that. In other words, the kind of thing that you were doing in speaking this more or less improvised and particular talk. If we’re going to recover the oral impulse in poetry, and the new, the phenomenological way of looking at the lived world that this oral impulse implies, it seems to me that we have got to return to that kind of beginning. Not the beginning which is the logocentric beginning of an existential situation, the open beginning that is generating this talk, out of which emerges my response to you or your response to me. It seems to me that that’s where real poetry has got to begin, and that’s a poetry that is not teleological. It’s a poetry which involves discovering or, as a Heideggerian phenomenologist would put it, a dis-covering. There’s no discovery, no periplus, in those oral poems that Parry and Lord record in The Singer of Tales from the Yugoslavian guslar poets. Their subject matter is known from the end and their mode of telling is rigidly formulaic. It’s a conservative logocentric poetry, a poetry of closed forms. There’s room, of course, for explorative variation, but these stories are not being told, they’re being re-cited, re-told. So I don’t think we learn a hell of a lot about the origin of poetry in these poems. What we need, I think, is an orality of dis-covering.

Antin: I think probably there is something that you would call talking to discover and I think it exists in all societies, in all cultures, and I can’t prove it. All I can say is that I think the invention of the self is an outcome of talking to discover, the outcome of a discourse genre. So is this discussion, we’re doing it now, talking to discover. I think all cultures do it. But I would like to say that I think that what happens in some of the situations I was describing, where there were more or less ritualized settings, is that invention takes place in different domain of the discourse. And although these inventions may be somewhat restricted and local, all invention is subject to some restriction. It seems to me for example that “soundings,” these Black ritual insults, involve inventions within a particular arena in which it is conventionally insulting to be “thin” or “poor” or “small,” and then there is a range of Pop culture products like Gainesburgers, Bosco, Apple Jack, or Cheerioats whose properties can be used to bring these insults home. So you get a game of invention with these counters and you get something like “Your mama’s so skinny she can get in a Cheerio and say, ‘Hula hoop! Hula, hoop!!’” or “Your mama so skinny she can play Chinese handball off the curb!” Which is pretty unexpected in its detail and virtuosly of selection.

Snyder: Right. Well, it seems to me that this whole discussion, David, as interesting as it is, only applies to poetry insofar as written rhetoric enters into poetics.

Antin: What do you mean by that, by “rhetoric” as opposed to what?

Snyder: All the other varieties of expression and concern that are involved in poetry.
Antin: But what are they? I mean, in what sense would you define this kid's narrative as "merely" rhetoric. Using the implied "merely" to characterize rhetoric as a pejorative term. To me the word "rhetoric" is not a pejorative term.

Snyder: Well, I don't mean it pejoratively. I mean it simply as the study of semi-formulaic ways of using language.

Antin: Well, I think the notion of discovery, the notion of invention, of combination and transformation that I was suggesting is central to poetry, though for me the notion of poetry is still open and I don't want to close it myself. I thought I was offering the notion that discourse, that thinking that was transformative in a valuable way was central to poetry. Now I suppose there are other things that are also valuable.

Snyder: I object to the "central." Much of poetry has no meaning as discourse at all.

Antin: I don't know how you can say that. Though it depends on what you define as discourse, I suppose. And what you define as poetry.

Snyder: There's a useful definition of poetry as we all know, in the largest sense of it. Not definition, but the thing to remember about it is: that it's song.

Antin: I don't think so. Not only don't I think so, but I won't even argue the point. Personally, in poetry I have an intense dislike for song. Though I don't see why that should matter so much, because I don't think "taste" is all that important. And I suppose I could conceive of song as a type of discourse — the way I normally think of discourse. Because discourse is a very broad term for me. And it seems to me that if what we mean by song is the invention of song, improvisational song, like say Eskimo song...

Snyder: Well, it's curious to me that you said, yes, it may be possible that there is some self-discovering mode of discourse but we can't prove it when it seems to me that it is as obvious as the nose on my face that that's what poetry's been about for the last 50,000 years.

Antin: I point to the great corpus of poetry and most of that would deny that instantly. I mean most things that are called poetry certainly don't discover much at all, least of all self. And they're among the deadest artifacts in the world.

Schechner: I really would like you to explain more of what you said about song because that's a fundamental disagreement. It seems that discourse is a larger category that includes everything you think of as song and therefore what's the argument about?

Snyder: No, it doesn't include everything you think of as song. There are lots of songs which come as monologues, as chants, as ongoing self-contained chants, that unless your definition of discourse includes every possible variety of human behavior... Just take for example mantra chanting.

Antin: In a monologue, or what seems like a monologue, because the term is the result of a shallow linguistic analysis, you're conducting a discourse. But the discourse is not with another person. And it seems to me if there is not some auditor at some point in mantra chanting, you're not chanting mantra. I mean chanting is not an instantaneous act. It covers a perceivable duration. There is a before and after and during utterance, and you're listening, and you hear yourself either internally or externally, don't you, in mantra chanting? Ok? And if you hear yourself, during uttering and after, you're listening and uttering and remembering other uttering and uttering again maybe slightly differently, you are probably adjusting and tuning. So in some sense, through tuning, you're seeking some kind of agreement with some previous utterance, some image of previous utterance or some image of intended utterance, and to this degree you're making use of language-discourse habits and patterns. At least in the sense of seeking tuning, which requires seeking of agreement or concord and perception of failure of agreement (misting) and attempts at adjustment, which have a meaning for you. I don't want to make a big issue of this, because these utterances don't seem to have a specific meaning, but the form of meaning. Nevertheless such meaning as they have is language meaning. But you see, I don't tend to use meaning in such a restrictive way.

Snyder: They have no meaning in the sense of natural language.
Antin: Oh, well, I don’t know about that. Even a cry is usually paralinguistic. That is, it functions, is uttered and understood, in a systematic way closely related to the rest of the language system. It seems to me that what is called song lies perhaps close to the intonation grammar of the language, and that if it doesn’t, it’s not anything at all except reflex. And it seems to me that it operates off a number of assumptions that come from particular forms of speaking and the discourse contexts within which they are appropriate, which these forms then evoke along with their contexts. Or at least they evoke the values associated with these contexts.

Schechner: Are you saying that all these things must be in terms . . . must be a dialogue, in other words there must be an other, assumed or actual, a Berkeilian view . . .

Antin: I assume that in all language acts there is always an other, even when it is only the self alone, which takes at least two stances, before and after. I don’t think there is any such thing as a true monologue. Somebody is always listening and somebody is always being talked to. Unless you yourself are deaf at some very profound level. For you to produce an utterance that you know is an utterance requires a dialogue, which is at least produced by you and addressed to yourself.

Schechner: Now let me ask you a Berkeilian question. In your sleep you make a sound. The next morning somebody said, “Gee, that was a horrible sound. It scared me. What were you dreaming?” You say, I don’t remember a thing, I don’t even know I made a sound. Did you make the sound?

Antin: I’m perfectly willing to concede that there are discontinuous parts of the self. That I addressed myself at that time, in that sound or in that song, and I forgot. Besides, a sound is not a song. That is, a grunt may or may not be a part of a song, as it may or may not be a part of an utterance.

Schechner: You’re saying the gregariousness of a species is fundamental, it’s not divisible. And you’re (Snyder) saying that it is not necessarily fundamental.

Snyder: I guess, in the midst of all this I would make a rough working distinction for purposes of discussion about poetry, between dialogues with oneself and dialogues with others.

In reading through this discussion I realize how tempted I was to respond to Gary’s remark that “I wouldn’t make such a distinction between discourse with others and discourse with oneself, or if I did, I wouldn’t put a particularly high value on it.” And as I thought this, I realized it would have corresponded more to the course of that conversation at the symposium than to what I believe. Because I do believe that there is a distinction between discourse conducted with the self and discourse conducted with others. That discourse conducted with the self is something of a special case and makes up only a small part of the great world of discourse, not because it’s less or more valuable, but because it’s more eccentric — a special case — like playing chess with yourself. But I also realize I went a long way in the discourse — as did almost everyone else — out of fellow feeling — in an attempt to come together. So much so, that perhaps we obscured our disagreements. For one, I don’t think the notion of song is specially valuable in poetry, and I surely don’t think it represents a self-discovering mode — certainly not what poets have commonly called song, which I think has very little in common with mantra chanting. About which I do not pretend to have any great fund of knowledge and in which I would like to say — if for no reason other than to clarify our disagreements — I am nearly totally uninterested. And I think I failed to answer Bill Spanos’ pointed question about talking to discover, as I also failed in my own talking piece to avoid what some readers might consider exoticism. Since most of the examples I gave of discourse genres happened to be chosen from Black Vernacular English, and there are probably many people who regard this dialect and its speakers as exotic or specially colorful or gifted, which I do not. So I’d like to correct both of these faults by including a less-colorful story told by a fairly colorless man — a white Middle Western retired Post Office employee — a story that is nevertheless a clearer example of how a man can tell a story that he doesn’t fully understand in advance, and can come to understand it as he talks, which is talking to discover.
DF: How did the work in the Post Office change over all those years?

PM: Huhh. We went ... I went to the Post Office in thirty-six. And it was down on the corner of Main and Catherine — where it still is. And in 1950 they built the substation up on East University and they had that open for 10 years. Then they built the new Post Office out on West Stadium and we moved out there. And in about 1968 they moved a bunch of us right back down to the old Post Office again. So in 56 years, why, we made a full circle — from a dilapidated Post Office to a new Post Office to another new Post Office and then back to the original old dump. And that's all it is — an old dump down on Main and Catherine. And that was one reason — I could have worked a couple more years — but — I didn't want to work at that place a couple more years. It's nothing but — it was built for horse and buggy days and — it's unfit for present days. Docks are built for high trucks, not for the low trucks as they are now. And it was a pain in the neck to work there any more. So I just retired. I had a year. So to hell with it.

DF: Yeah.

PM: I made a full circle. From a dump to a new Post Office up there to a new Post Office out here and then back to the dump again. That's the story of the Post Office.

Toward A Restoration Of The Word In The Modern World

An intonational shift occurring without any pause is marked by a comma (,); a brief pause occurring as a gap within an intonational period is marked by a raised point (‘); the end of an intonational period, marked by a lowering of the voice and a brief pause, is marked with a period (.)

Speaker [walking up to Jerome Rothenberg, at the front of the room]: My father, my child how have you been passing the days?
  J.R. [to the speaker]: Happily, my father, my child.
  Now, for what reason have you entered upon our roads?
  You must have come because you have something to say you would not come for no reason.
  You must make this known to us so that we may think about it as we pass the days.
  Speaker [to J.R. and the audience]: Yes, in truth my elders, my children I have come because there is something to say.

When I was eighteen months old my parents moved west and for some reason they ended up in New Mexico.
  And it was there that I met an Indian for the first time in Albuquerque in front of a tourist court.
  But the main way that I started off on this road was through archaeology. Reading about the prehistoric past of New Mexico visiting the ruins going out and copying rock drawings those sorts of things.
  And having no idea really at that point at all about how to deal with living Indians in high school it just so happened that for one whole year in my art class the instructor was Joe Herrera from the Pueblo of Cochiti near Santa Fe.
  He looked at my drawings of the rock drawings and very casually told me what they meant.
  The rock drawings that had been made at least five centuries ago.
  The man standing here was telling me about them.
  The two things I remember most were a spiral just a spiral and a set of concentric circles.
  The spiral is the universe and the concentric circles are the earth.
  When I got to college I was still focused on archaeology spent every summer on digs sometimes as an unpaid laborer this came to a climax at a 15th century site near Albuquerque called Pottery Mound where there are kivas, underground ceremonial chambers covered with murals.
  I was hired as a draftsman and photographer to make accurate copies of these murals.
  One day we were coming back from the field and there at the door to the anthropology department was Ed Ladd a Zuni and so far as I know the only Zuni who has a degree in anthropology and Ed wanted to see the drawings.
One of the drawings showed an old lady sitting down on the ground with a big black [cupping hands] round-bottomed pot in front of her over a fire she was stirring it [hand as if grasping something] with a handful of something or other he looked at it and said Oh she's parching corn, she's holding a bundle of willow sticks, parched corn has to be made in a black round-bottomed pot or it'll stick, and you have to stir it all the time, you put sand in there too with it you stir it around.

Something like popcorn [as if holding a kernel at the fingertips] but it doesn't open up [opening the fingers] quite as far you can do it with any kind of hard corn, not just popcorn.

She's holding a bundle of willow sticks, he saw the whole picture.

The picture he was looking at was five centuries old, or a copy rather of one five centuries old.

Later on still talking about being at the University of New Mexico one of my classmates there was Alfonso Ortiz who's a Tewa who's now a Ph.D. in anthropology he's now back at the University of New Mexico we used to get away from the campus by driving about fifteen miles north of town to a place on the Rio Grande where you're beyond all the light pollution from the city of Albuquerque and where you can get right down through the alfalfa fields and right up to the edge of the river and the bosques, the cottonwood groves that grow up and down the bottomlands.

We went there with several quarts of beer it was a very clear night Alfonso looked up at the stars [looking up and pointing], he said, You see that star there that one that's steady and bright and right next to it there's one that's flickering constantly there's a story about those stars, and he told what we would call an Orpheus story about those two stars.

One of them following the other, the steady star following the flickering, the decaying star.

That's a different kind of literacy than I had been accustomed to.

To read everything that's around you.

In graduate school I was still doing archaeology [raps head with knuckles, audience laughs] I got a job for one of those summers as a dig foreman, I'd had so much archaeology experience by now I could tell other people where to [as if showing someone where to dig] and reduce myself to a trowel and whisk broom, that's the way archaeology works as you rise [raising hand and arm] up.

Lucky for me the assignment was to the Glen Canyon Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona rescuing ruins that were going to be spoiled by Glen Canyon Dam what was lucky about it is that it was in a very remote part of the Navajo Reservation.

Sixty miles of four-wheel drive.

From the nearest pavement and the field hands were all Navajos.

And at every opportunity I went walking all over that country up there and met Navajos in the path visited their gardens stood with them while they herded sheep and so on and so forth and it was at this time I first had to confront the business of putting my tongue around an Indian language.

Never did learn much Navajo, but enough to get around on those trails and to talk to people.

If you're walking down a path up in that country, and you meet a gentleman coming in the opposite direction you simply have to speak something of Navajo.
If only a few words, then the rest can be gestures whatever.
Whatever passes in that kind of a that kind of a meeting.
Sometime during that summer, I don’t know exactly when I decided that there were other things in this world than to dig up bones.
Or at least, at least literal bones and announced that fall that I was not going to be an archaeologist.
And what happened gradually too is that I decided not only to try to be with living Indians but to listen to what they had to say to me.
By the medium of traditional stories especially.
Now unfortunately for me in a way anthropology prepares one rather elaborately for this field experience a kind of preparation that I think is designed with consummate skill to prevent one from learning anything whatsoever.
From the people one is supposed to be with.
Because they can tell you exactly what to expect in advance, and sure enough [audience laughs] if you are really completely back there, back there in your books and the classrooms instead of here[pointing to the spot he is standing on] in the field that’s the way it’ll turn out.
It’s very tricky getting your ears opened up after, after being told in elaborate detail exactly what you are going to expect.
In the case of the stories themselves one is told that, Well, there are several ways to look at stories and people tend to do just one of these, one of them is to say, Well, there must be some clues to history in here.
We know that oral tradition is inaccurate history, but if we compared it with some other information and really looked at it really hard, we could figure out what was real history in there.
And fill in the past in greater detail than we now know.
Forget about the rest of the story let’s see if we can extract the true history from it.
It’s, it’s bad history, it’s mistaken history, this story another way of going about it is to focus in on the social dimension of the story.
This story is some kind of an operating manual for this society, you tell yourself.
It’s telling people exactly how they should do things, there’s a certain amount of truth in that too of course.
Or, This story is kind of like their constitution.
Instead of a written one.
Then there’s a third way this is the psychological approach, used to be called Culture and Personality now it’s called Psychological Anthropology.
You decide here that what you’ve really got here is like a projective test for the whole society.
Or a collective dream.
This is very Freudian stuff, it’s very voyeuristic.
Let’s, let’s see if we can see the bottom side of their lives by spying on them by means of these stories.
These stories are going to expose to us their dreams and their private lives.
That’s the psychological approach, If only I could get inside there.

And people’s guards are down when they’re telling stories it’s a good, a good opportunity to go in there and find out what a person’s dreams are.
There are some other approaches too, I’m just giving you the main sort of respectable ones.
A fourth one, a more recent one, called structuralism, is where you discover that the story is really an exercise in symbolic logic. This is what they have instead of mathematics textbooks and logic textbooks.

Now if I had gone in there, really focused on the idea of translating stories and making them real to other audiences, I could’ve been stopped right there by by getting confused by the wonders of structuralism. Claude Lévi-Strauss says in an article before I ever went to the field that [reading] The mythical value of the myth remains preserved even through the worst translation.

And he goes on, this is a sort of paraphrase now, to say that it’s not the music, it’s not the poetry or anything like that, it’s the story, he says by which he means the structure, the logical exercise. That’s the essence of the thing you can forget about the rest.

In other words he’s saying that given that somebody had already done the work of making a transcription of some sort, that myths could just as well be studied by blind deaf-mutes who knew how to read braille.

There was nothing at all in what I’d been taught that would have pointed me to really thinking of in terms of the art of storytelling.

Anthropologists always have some ulterior motive they’re doing this because it’s going to mean something else to them.

It’s going to, this is going to provide a clue about something else.

That’s true of all those methods, all those four methods think about it in terms of my hand here [holds up the right hand showing four fingers] there are four separate paths leading away from the story [traces a path along each of the four fingers] and the story is down here [outlines the body of the hand].

So, off I went to Zuni [walks a few steps] it took me a couple of months to find [returns to the center] to set things up with Andrew Peynetsa and Walter Sanchez some other people too, but those were the main two gentlemen who told me most of what I know right away Andrew caught me up with a remark [walks away again] that really didn’t fit into the program of the field work, he said [returns to the center] You don’t know the time when you’re telling stories, it’s not like working at a desk.

You don’t know the time when you’re telling stories then, things like this happen to you all the time in the field if you’re got your ears open.

One of the next things that happened is I was laboriously working on a transcription and translation with Joseph Peynetsa, who helped me with those things it’s a very tedious process, sentence by sentence tapes aren’t good enough, you have to have somebody there to to repeat the words to you, at least at first so you both sit there listening to the tape you write down the Zuni then you work on work out a translation of that and then you move on to the next line.

Joe had a capacity even with all that tediousness for listening to the story and staying right with it, once in the middle of all this laborious work where I was madly scribbling down what he had just said Joe said When I tell these stories do you picture it or do you just write it down.
At the moment he caught me he was asking just the right question. I was writing it down, that’s all. Writing it down to read it later [sniffs].

Some other kinds of things that happen you’re going by in a car, going by a mesa [faces west and gestures to the right] with pink and yellow stripes of sandstone and about 300 feet up the side of it there’s a cave up there.

You’re going along with a Zuni and the Zuni says That’s the cave, you remember that story about the Aatoshle ogress that’s the cave where she lived when that little girl wandered into her cave to spend the night. Right there.

Or going by another mesa a little farther down the road on the left side [faces west and gestures to the left] the one where the people went during the world flood, it’s about oh, five, 600 feet above the surrounding countryside.

That’s where the people went during the world flood those stripes on the side of the mesa are the rings the water left as it went down.

Those two rocks in front of the mesa those are the two kids the two little kids, the son and daughter of the priest, who were sacrificed to the flood to make it go down they turned into stone as the water went down. Right there that’s the place.

And sense of being in place also exists at the same moment the story is actually being told.

Even if you’re telling it in Milwaukee you’re at least got the directions.

And you always have to know before you can tell one of these stories which way east is.

It’s over there [gestures toward the east].

So that you can at least say He went over to the east, He went over to the south, and so on.

And set up the story right around there where you’re standing.

So that begins to give you a sense of what place means in stories as you discover it in the field time works very much the same way.

The narrator says It was a morning very much like this one.

This one [indicates the spot where he is standing].

It was a night like this one, It was about this time of the winter, there was just a little bit of snow left on the ground.

Somebody came in the door [looks toward the door] and so on.

Somebody came in the door [indicates the door] and went up to the altar [swinging around to indicate the stage behind him] right there

A good storyteller can even make use of complete accident.

In the story of The Beginning in Finding the Center that is the story of The Beginning there’s a passage in there where most of the people have already emerged from the earth, they’ve gone some distance from the Place of Emergence and they have made a settlement and they hear a sound like an earthquake.

Which means that somebody else has emerged from the earth after them and they wonder about who it is and it’s going to turn out that it’s the emergence of the first witches, it’s the entrance of evil into this world.
That’s being announced by that earthquake. Evil is sort of an afterthought of creation. It comes, it comes out after.

They send the twin war gods back there to investigate.

And the twin war gods bring the first witch to them and they have to decide what to do about that.

Now, when Andrew was telling this story on his farmstead about twenty miles from Zuni, it was late at night in a very lonely hamlet. The dogs are always outside. That’s how you can always know whether something is going on outside or not. When dogs bark, it means that there’s probably somebody or something out there and sometimes they wonder whether it’s a witch.

It’s a person out there going around late at night trying to do harm to someone perhaps. Well, Andrew arrives at this point in the story. The noise of the earthquake. The two Ahayuuta are going toward the Place of Emergence and in the distance they see somebody standing there and at the moment they come to that point of finding the first witch the dogs start barking outside this house here now.

The audience freezes for a minute everyone looking over toward the door [looks toward the door] the narrator sips this perfect pause to the full and then proceeds with his story.

So that’s how you can even use just incidental things that happened.

Even those can be can be pulled into the story if you’re quick enough to do it.

They pull people into the story too. What the book doesn’t show is that I could tell one of those stories and give the people in it names of people in this audience.

I’d try to do it in a very appropriate way too, telling you that you’re something like that person and [looking in a different direction] you’re something like that other one.

Coming back to everyday life outside the event of the storytelling itself you even come to this kind of point and this is where you really begin to get the message of what stories are all about.

One summer, a time when people are not allowed to tell most of these stories there are other things to do in the summer. Snakes don’t like stories, that’s one reason you can’t tell them in the summer or, in another way, I guess you might say they do like stories, it sends them right to you if they hear you doing it but they bite you for it but it’s summer, we’ve got stories way at the back of our minds somewhere one day instead of driving to the farmstead from where I was staying I decided to walk over the hill to it, it’s about nine miles, and I was going to see a lot of country by doing that that I was very curious about.

Make a direct on-the-ground connection between where I was and the farmstead in Upper Nutria or To’ya and I walked over the hill, I saw all kinds of things on the way including several deer and it turned out they were all watching for me too, on the other side and they spotted me before I spotted them. I must have been an incredible speck when they started calling out to me.

When I got there Andrew’s eldest son was so taken with the whole crazy thing of walking over all that ground that he said You’re the Ahayuuta.

The Ahayuuta is there are two of them they’re the twin sons of the Sun Father. And they play a big part in a lot of the stories and they’re spending all the time going over the ground just like that, step by step just looking around and seeing
everything.
   Only unlike myself, carrying bows with quivers on their backs.

Now it becomes you me right here now.
Ahayuuta.
The first way that remark struck my Western mind was that he'd almost been blasphemous to use the name of a god on me.
It was not intended as a compliment either by the way, the Ahayuuta are rather unreliable characters who among other things have nits in their hair [audience laughs].

Unreliable in the sense that you can't trust them to do exactly what you tell them to do.
   They just do what they're doing.

So I hope you begin to get the picture here that myth is coming to the surface all the time whenever you happen to look for it.
   They're looking for it all the time it's a whole habit of life.
   It's what it means to be continuously and every day and in this moment always connected up with the whole past.

But I suppose the best single awakening as to the nature of storytelling itself came really rather late in my main stay out there I finally got around to the business of saying, Okay, what makes a good story, what is a story really all about, what do you think about that?
   One of Andrew's sons-in-law said If you're really true to a story you make it like it's right in front of you.
   Now if Zunis were into making statements that would fit into dialectical arguments which they are definitely not they might say in reply to Lévi-Strauss, The essential quality of myth is that you be able to see it right in front of you [moves hand up and down in front of himself].
   Right in front of you.

The paradox is that you're also forbidden to talk about anything modern in stories. There are no cars in stories horses sometimes sneak in no sheep except in a few cases no machinery, no electricity no Bureau of Indian Affairs no taxes it takes place in something called the inoote.
Which I've translated long ago what I like about long ago is, that doesn't fix it somewhere gets a proper notion of a kind of distance and because that's true of stories that's why you have to keep the modern things out of them the picture you have in front of you has to be true to some kind of vision of the long ago at the same time you're seeing it right in front of you here and now.

It took me a long time to understand this, I understood it from such remarks as these trying to explain inoote Andrew said Well, you know, it's back before 1800, before 1700.
   What he means is it's before all those numbers.
   It's not datable.
   In traditional Zuni culture you would never have a Bishop Usher trying to figure out that it was 4,000 and four B.C. on October the whatever it was supposed to be,
at 9:00 A.M. Central Standard Time.
It’s before all of that.
Or something other than that kind of way of looking at the world.

There are other ways you can see this going on, that greeting that Jerry and I were doing My father, my child what does that mean, how can I call the same person both my father and my child.
What do I do when I say that? [baby makes sounds in audience].
It’s a timeless statement.
You could be if we remove this kind of time that’s called 1700 and 1800 you could be my father or my child.

It’s an eternal statement.
Or you say more broadly, My elders, Hom aalhasshinaawe, just means exactly that, the ones who are older than I.
Hom aalhasshinaawe hom chawe, My children, the ones who are younger than I.
By which is meant everybody, including everybody who ever lived.
There’s no word for ancestor here, aalhasshinaawe, sometimes people think that means ancestor there are no ancestors in the sense that we know them, ancestor, that means the ones who are dead, right?
Aalhasshinaawe means everyone who is older than I am no matter how old they are and no matter whether they’re living or dead.

So, when I walk into a room and greet all of you as, Hom aalhasshinaawe, hom chawe I am addressing all of you who are either older or younger than I and everybody else in a way, who has ever lived.
Or who will.
They don’t just wait around for stories to remind them of this kind of way of thinking and it’s not only when stories happen to occur to them as in those examples I gave that they think in this way that they look up and there’s the cave that the Aatoshle lived in and so on.
One thing they do to keep them constantly reminded of this is that every time they eat they take a little bit of the meat, a little bit of the bread they sacrifice it to the fire they say Nanaakwe itonaawe which means, Grandfatherly people, eat, again meaning all those who are old enough to be my grandfathers.
You might remember that line from a story [chuckles] those people are all there, once you’ve done that, they’re present at the meal.
You fed them, now you can sit down and eat yourself and they’re in a sense present there with you.
They use the fire in the fireplace in another way to remind them if a fire makes a lot of noise in your fireplace, now remember this I’m serious.
Remember this when the fire makes a lot of moise in your fireplace, it means that you have forgotten to feed the ancestors.
Or rather, the elders and you’d better take care of that that’s their voice, that loud noise that the fire makes sometimes.
So in one way or another they manage to live constantly in the presence of the past.
We all do that, but they’re aware of it that they’re doing that.
This doesn’t mean that in a traditional culture that lives always in the presence of the past that you can’t do anything new, it doesn’t mean that you can’t, absolutely can’t
have electricity doesn’t mean that you can’t have a car; it just means that none of those things had better make you forget that you’re also living with all of the past.

You are responsible for being conscious of the whole history of mankind as often as you can as you go about your daily life.

It’s a responsibility.

It’s a responsibility that we trick ourselves out of with history books, with archives with museums thinking we can file away the past and appoint certain experts to worry about it.

Historians, anthropologists, archaeologists but we haven’t escaped it at all.

Just made it into an angry ghost.

So, we’ve got a mystery here the story has to be connected up with the past and it has to be right here in front of us.

And it is precisely the oral medium which makes this possible.

An oral story is not an object [as if holding an object in the hand] an object of art or any other kind of object it is an action, it is something I do.

It’s an action that’s now and that speaks of ancient things.

If we get into storing that in a book we’ve begun to forget.

We begin to attribute the past to that book which if we please we can put up on the shelf and forget.

A book that was published in 1789, that was published in 1801, that was published in 1902.

Those are like tombstones.

The story is what I’m telling now with my own breath.

With my own body.

Once you come to that realization then you’ve got to figure out if you want to bring this experience back from the field if you’re going to translate, if you’re going to tell that story to other people who can’t speak Zuni you’ve got to figure out how to turn that same trick in English.

That means that the work of translation isn’t done when you’ve finished getting it all on the page.

It means you also have to figure out how what’s on that page should be spoken aloud by someone reading it.

The end point of the translation becomes not this that I hold in my hand [as if holding a book] but something that I might say sometime on a particular occasion.

This means that when you listen to those stories figuring out how to translate them how to tell them in English you have to notice that when a person speaks as opposed to writing he can [whispering] whisper or SHOUT he can build up to a crescendo he can insert a long silence.

He can stretch out a word very long he can go up like this he can go [continuously raising the voice] aaaaaAAA! when something in the story is going up he can go [continuously lowering the voice] AAAaaaaaaaah when somebody’s going down a ladder in the story.
You can [muttering] mutter while you tell a story · and you can [speaking distinctly] speak very distinctly.
You can change your whole mode of delivery · you can make one of the characters speak a different dialect as the · Paiute do, and especially the peoples in the · Plateau.
You can give him a foreign accent · Coyote always speaks in another dialect or in a foreign accent or · sometimes · you make him, uh, have a speech defect of some sort.
Coyote, he might even have a harelip · [barely intelligible] and talk like this.

There are other ways of changing your whole mode of delivery.
[chanting] You may deliver a line like this · or else you may deliver a line that goes like this · you may even start singing · you may start to speak very · [uncertainly] weakly.
[hoarsely] You can speak hoarsely.
You can [low and gravelly] get low and gravelly.
You can speak [with strain] with pain, you can speak [expansively] with pleasure.
You can sigh · you can yawn · [smiling] smile · [scowling] scowl · suddenly look at someone [looking at someone] in the audience.
Say someone went that way [indicates east] · toward the east.
Show how big something is · It was about that high [indicates something about chest height].
You can rap [rapping three times] on the table.
You can blow cigarette smoke.

If you can take account of all those sorts of things in translation · working up a kind of performable script · you still haven’t done your job, because now you’ve got to · tell that story · with your breath · you have to do it · more than once, too · to really begin, even begin to understand what it’s all about · this is if you really finally want to understand what a story is.
[seriously] You have to tell it.

Put that another way, you must be · while you’re telling it · everyone in that story, and you must be right there in the story.
If you’re successful you make it like it’s right in front of you, and if you’re really successful · it’s like it’s right in front of the audience too.
Right in front of them.
And it’s talking about ancient things.

Now we’ve begun to do our job.
Right there.
We’ve begun to do the real job.

Now, whether they’re expecting it or not, that story · will act upon the audience · in ways that they don’t even suspect.
Might even make them just a tiny little bit · like a Zuni · in a way they didn’t even suspect.
There are two ways of doing that, the other way is to eat Indian food.
There are two ways, eat the food · listen to the words.

Well · now · if we come right along until · just this past fall · I became aware for
the first time that this kind of stance toward the matter of storytelling had a kind of ready-made philosophical argument.

To go with it I feel all the surer about adopting this particular stance, if that's the word for it because I arrived at it without having it explained to me in the classroom.

The important things one learns are the things one realizes.

Not the things one takes on faith.

And that is hermeneutic phenomenology which is quite a mouthful all it really means in the end probably is learning to tell the story, it means reducing your distance reducing the distance between you and that story in the words of Paul Ricoeur living in the aura of the meaning of the story really opening up your ears to that text.

Not asking yourself all sorts of irrelevant questions that would attempt to pin that story down to a specific historical and cultural context.

Now what I haven’t seen any of the phenomenologists really explore is the fact that once you’ve done that you can’t really re-establish the distance that you gave up for a moment.

If you’ve gone that far into a story you then have an obligation to that story if you like to think about it this way it’s now become a part of your past too and the past of all the people that you’ve ever told it also and like everything else about the past that’s something we have to keep constantly in mind as the meaning is revealed to us constantly every day as we live.

I think I can sum up that point better though by using the words of a Santo Domingo named Larry Bird who once put it this way [clearing throat] When you grow up you don’t ask a lot of questions you listen. You wait and as you live your life the answers to all the questions that you had will come to you as you live.

Now I’ll tell you one of those stories.

[opening a book] My apologies for relying on the script this is the story of the Shumeekuli.

Shumeekuli is something like a kachina, one of these beings that wears a mask whenever you see him when they’re among themselves they don’t wear masks, when they come to visit people they do.

Kachinas live over there [indicates west] but the Shumeekuli live over here, to the east [indicates east].

It’s a flat [hand as if pressing on a vertical surface] kind of mask they come in six colors they come in yellow [indicates north] and in blue [indicates west] and in red [south] and in white [east] and in multicolored [motions upward] and in black [motions downward].

And this is a story mostly about the Shumeekuli who has to do with the east the white one.

I’ve chosen this particular story because this is one that can be told at any time of year, it’s getting a little late to tell stories, and they really shouldn’t be told in the day like this either.

This is a story, though, that can be told at any time of day or night and whether there are snakes around or not.
The thing about that - that's another good point too - a book you can take down off the shelf any time you please, 24 hours a day - twelve months a year.

Or any year.

In an oral culture - there are some kinds of words that you allow yourself to hear only maybe - at certain seasons.

Or at certain times of day - maybe even only once a year - and other things that you hear only every fourth year, and other things that you hear only every eighth year.

And that's part of the whole secret of making a story really fit here now in this place.

It's got to fit the calendar, too.

Well then - there were villagers at Hawikku - there were villagers at Gypsum Place - there were villagers at Wind Place - there were villagers all around - and the priest - there at Gypsum Place spoke of having a Yaaya, a Yaaya dance.

When the word went out, people from all the villages started gathering.

The date had been set and they lived on for four nights - they practiced the Yaaya.

The Yaaya practice went on, and they were gathering for four nights they kept gathering - on it went, until the day came and the Spiral Society went into session, and on the eve of the ceremony their Shumeekuli dancers came in.

The Shumeekuli came.

And the next day was to be the day for dancing the Yaaya.

Then it was the morning of the dance.

On the morning of the dance the villagers gathered and then they were going to get up to dance.

On they went until at noon they stopped to eat, and when they had eaten they got up again - they got up in the afternoon and when they had done about two sets there were four rings of dancers.

Then the Spiral Society brought in their Shumeekuli.

And when these were brought in, the Horned Ones were also brought in.

They kept on dancing this way until their White Shumeekuli came, he was brought in when there were four rings of dancers - and all the villagers had gathered - there was a big crowd, a big crowd and the dance kept on their White Shumeekuli kept going around the tree, he danced around it, and for some reason [softly] he went crazy.

The people held on tight, but somehow he broke through their rings and ran away.

He ran and ran - and they ran after him.

They ran after him, but they couldn't catch him and still they kept after him shouting as they went - he was far ahead, the White Shumeekuli was far ahead of them.

They kept on going until they came near Shuminnkya.

Someone was herding out there.

He was herding, his sheep were spread out [sweeping gesture toward the east] when they came along there shouting.

[chanting] There goes our White Shumeekuli running away whoever is out there please help us CATCH HIM FOR US.
That's what they were shouting as they kept after him. [in a low voice] Ah yes, *there's a Yaaya dance today, something must've happened.*

That's what the herder was thinking about.

They were coming closer.

After a time their Shumeekuli [looking westward] came into view.

He was still running.

The herder stood [indicates an imaginary tree in front of him] where he was going to pass [indicates a path from the west past the tree] and waited for him there [stands beside the tree facing west].

Then going straight on the Shumeekuli headed for the place [indicates the path again] where the herder stood.

Sure enough, just as he came up past the tree the herder caught him [grabbing with both arms] for them.

[facing the audience again] There he caught him.

The White Shumeekuli who had run away from the Yaaya dance.

The others came to get him and took him back.

They brought him back, and when they tried to unmask him the mask was stuck to his face.

Some of his flesh peeled off [pulls at his cheek].

He was changing over.

Then the one who had come as the White Shumeekuli lived only four days before he died.

They lived o—n until, at Zuni when the Middle Place had become known the date was again set for the Yaaya and when the date had been set they gathered for four nights.

They gathered for practice, that is the way they lived and when the day of the Yaaya arrived the villagers came together on the morning of the dance.

Again the *Yaaya* dance began and again the Shumeekuli dancers were brought in they were brought in and they danced properly, but then there came one who costumed himself as the [slowly] White Shumeekuli, and he went around until it happened again.

He went crazy.

He struggled then, but this time they held onto him.

It happens when ever somebody impersonates that one because of the flesh that got inside *that mask in former times* when someone comes into the Yaaya dance as the White Shumeekuli [with precision] something will inevitably happen to his mind.

This is what happened and because this happened the White Shumeekuli came to be feared.

That's all.
Michel Benamou

Postface: In Praise Of Marginality

What kind of study is ethnopoetics anyway? I have asked myself the question often enough to find it irksome. I am tempted to evade it by a flight into an epistemological utopia.

If the historical evolution of poetry moves from a *sacred* art fusing words, dance, and music, whose performance is the object of ethno-semiotic approaches combining three codes, to a *folkloric* poetry characterized by a loss of meaning at the levels of gestures as well as language, and finally a *modern* poetry, hermetic and separated from the other arts, a "personalized sacrality" inviting a socio-semiotic approach (Greimas, 1976: 181), then the recovery of the archaic word by the modern American poet seems to call for an ethno-sociological semiotics which would, if it existed, account for the effect of an ethnopoetic performance on a modern audience. As Greimas observed, "semiotic activity is never a make-see, but a make-do" (1976: 185): the mythic act requires participation and efficacy. Instead of a mere rhetoric of words on a page, as modern poetics has become, ethnopoetics would submit the communication act of words on a stage to analysis. A major difference between oral and written codes comes from the absence, in oral literature, of an explicit meaning at least partially integrated as a semantic code in written literature. Ethnopoetics would thus give primacy to the explicitation of cultural contexts which the archaic singer of tales knew while he ignored or feigned not to know the deeper meaning of his song. But here I have a mental footnote about telling apart ethnopoetics from folklore studies: the latter would reconstruct the lost culture from clues (signs) for the purpose of making historical sense out of apparent nonsense. Ethnopoetics has no such ambition. Finally, I am led away from epistemological reflexions by the urgency of setting up sights, goals, targets; away from epistemology to cultural politics.

The United States and Canada are the only post-industrial nations, Australia and South Africa excepted, still possessing significant enclaves of tribal life. It is no wonder to me, as a European, that seekers of alternatives to civilization have ranged the North American continent. Artaud among the Tarahumaras of Mexico, Breton in Hopi reservations, Olson in Yucatan, come readily to mind, but it was in the late sixties mainly that tribal societies appealed to imaginations on a grand scale. Leslie Fielder, commenting on sartorial marginality, observed that in the sixties American youth went Indian, as it had gone Jewish in the forties and Black in the fifties. But the language barrier and other cultural limitations confined this compensatory cult to long hair, head bands, and beaded skin jackets. Unlike rock and black speech, tribal ways are pretty hermetically closed. But poetry was welcome contraband. No one has done as much as Jerome Rothenberg in the last ten years to smuggle into the custom houses of American education a measure of interest in non-Western poems and narratives from tribal societies. His anthologies, *Technicians of the Sacred, Shaking the Pumpkin, America a Prophecy*, have provided poetic alternatives at a time when students also desired political alternatives. His introductions and notes built bridges over perilous cultural gaps. How difficult is literary ethnology! Richard and Nora Dauenhauer, who live in Alaska, told the Translation workshop of the Symposium that the clan ownership of Tlingit songs prohibits unauthorized transmission and translation. An experience of the totality of a Tlingit song would thus demand that the hearer belong to the society from which or to which the song was first composed. Clearly, then, ethnopoetics would place such cultural constraints upon the adepts of tribal literature that they would be required either to gain re-tribalization — by what pedagogy or initiation prior to performing the song? — or else to wade through what the authors called the "ubiquitous footnotes," such explanations of tribal images as complex scholarship provides:

Thus far we have been discussing the problem of translating the clan references we have called "tribal images." There is a second major (and probably more universal) problem — that of tribal context. Tlingit songs tend to be laconic. That is, they assume that the listener knows the circumstances surrounding the event described and the motives...
for composition. Also, the listener is of the same cultural background as the composer. (Richard and Nora Dauenhauer, 1975: 28)

Obviously, even though as the authors pleaded, "ethnopoetics is concerned with the total experience of the poem," it is not within tribal literature that seekers of alternative behavior will feel at home. A conventional translation can yield some of the tribal experience (the authors say 40%), while the individual Tlingit listener of a performance provides the rest (the supplementary 60%). More than two thirds of the poem, therefore, require an anthropological lesson at the bottom of each page. So much for the marginality of alternative cultures, unless we take marginality literally, as a space split between the text and its outer marches.

Yet a nostalgia for tribal unity characterizes the ethnopoetic definition of man. We recognize it in the support to Rousseauism among anthropologists, in search — as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Stanley Diamond openly owned — of the primitive. But we also find it in the thinking of futurists, such as William Irwin Thompson, who projects Jung's spiritual quaterno and Weber's duality of routine and charisma onto an original tribal cell now cancerously proliferated by postindustrial civilization. These anthropologists and historians are telling us how the mainstream of human culture went awry and when. Both Diamond and Thompson would date the disaster by the appearance of the first state powerful enough to specialize its labor, Gary Snyder would even go back a few thousand years, while Wynter and Jameson blame Western capitalism and its destruction of tribal culture via colonization. Basically it was this dating process that opposed the Surrealists to the Communists, when Breton denied that any Marxist solution could change man's condition, because the causes of his present condition went much farther back than the rise of capitalist exploitation. Ethnopoetics expresses serious doubts about civilization itself. A consciousness about history, Western history and its consequences for non-western cultures, but also earlier encroachments on "primitive" culture, is therefore what gives the modern poet his importance as a marginal observer/critic/deranger of senses. The word primitive has been redefined. A misunderstanding of primitivism, based on an ethnologically untenable assumption, held that it was "something 'simple' and basic... and that the further one goes back — historically, psychologically, or aesthetically — the simpler things become" (Robert Goldwater, 1967: 251). Confusing unity and simplicity is tantamount to equating a complicated mandala with the art of a "naive" painter. In fact the division of labor was both a simplifying and disuniting process. The more complex social unit was the tribal cell uniting charismatic and operational functions, shaman, headman, hunter and clown often conjoined, exchanging roles. A knowledge of the complexity of wholeness, of a time when hunt and dance, poetry and life interpenetrated, such knowledge the poets have brought up from the underground where the mainstream of human culture was forced down. Whatever the dissension between ethnopoetics and socio-poetics, between a neo-paleolithic and a Renaissance cut-off point in dating the social and psychological fragmentation of man's wholeness, the desire for wholeness and the denunciation of fragmentation form the two borders of a marginality essential to ethnopoetics. It is a critique of the present stage in our history by means of intuition and study. The intuition: kept alive by what I would like to call the inside savages of our literature, Rimbaud the nigger, Breton the Celt, Artaud the Taharumara. The Study: a few books revaluating the primitive from the early Boas and Lévi-Strauss to Paul Radin's Primitive Religion, Marshall Sahlin's Stone Age Economics, and Stanley Diamond's In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization. But parallel to and partly unaware of recent anthropology, a strong movement toward marginality has also been developing in philosophy, especially among France's "deconstructivists," Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, Derrida and Lyotard, who criticize western civilization from inside. Ethnopoetics finds unexpected allies in their midst, as I shall try to show.

I. Language

"Being low is a way to be free": thus ends Richard Schechner's analysis of the trance among the Balinese (Supra p.42). Lower than infantile behavior is the identification with animals, found in many tribal traditions, and of which Howard Norman gave us some humorous Cree examples at the Symposium (Alcheringa, new series, Vol. II, Number 1). The counterpoetics of the low also exists, however, in European literature. Kafka's metamorphoses, his fascination with servants and underlings, and most of all
his attitude toward language make him a model, I suppose. Deleuze and Guattari in a recent study (1975: 48) represent him as hating the literature of masters enough to behave as an alien in his own language. His solution to the problem of writing as a marginal man, i.e. an inside-outsider, was to make “minor” usage of a “major” language. Prague German, at an irreducible distance from the territorial Czech, was then a major language used as it happened by an oppressive minority. So Kafka made minor literature in German. According to Deleuze-Guattari “minor” literature has three characteristics:

i. the language, even major, is strongly de-territorialized

ii. everything is political (downplaying the individual)

iii. everything therefore assumes collective significance.

In their words, minor literature is always revolutionary. Minor takes on political rather than aesthetic sense; marginal would perhaps better describe the condition of any literature operating within the major (or established) canon, and against it. But marginal may not significantly stress the voluntariness of “minor literature” as Deleuze-Guattari define it. Ionesco once remarked that all playwrights want to write propaganda, the great ones are those who fail. In the deconstructivist’s eyes, greatness means little. The rejection of oppressive literary establishments, of a literature of masters in both senses of the word, involves a conscious and deliberate search. It is a search for “one’s own underdevelopment, one’s own third world” and it seeks an answer to the question: “How to become the nomad and the immigrant and the gypsy of one’s own language?” (Deleuze 1975: 33). Nomadic in a ghetto half imposed half chosen, the French Carribean Aimé Césaire, the Judeo-American and ironical Pole Jerome Rothenberg, or the Afro-American David Henderson have a choice between four varieties of speech: the vernacular language of the land (rural, territorial, maternal); the vehicular language of commerce and bureaucracy (urban becoming planetary); the language of a cultural minority (jive or creole or East-Sidese); the language of myth on the horizon of cultures past and present (tribal poetries). To use English in a “major” way would amount to offering one’s services to the State, as did Robert Frost (vernacular English) and Henry Kissinger (vehicular English). De-territorialized as to the vernacular and by the vehicular languages of his or her day, the marginal poet aspires to use English as Kafka used his German, to write like a dog, or Michaux his French, or Beckett his nomanslandish, to reach voluntary underdevelopment, the syntax of a shout, or the grammar of a volcano (“Moi qui Krakatoa” says Césaire = moi qui crache à toi, I spit on you). The weakness chosen, the lowness itself, becomes through the re-territorialization by minor culture and myth a superb strength. By opposing the oppressed characteristics of language to its oppressive characteristics the marginal poet opts for the strength of the weak. Watch Gary Snyder’s hand motion as he reads, loosening up the dominant American male: a precious hand, precise, aspiring to smallness, yet so powerful.

Stanley Diamond struck home when he opposed Plato and the poet as primitive trickster. This dates the rise of ethnopoetics or the counterpoetics of the non-established from the very beginning of the Western concept of the State. Diamond relates Plato’s banishment of poets to a conscious assertion of the social, conceptual, and pedagogical needs of the State. For instance the binary pairs of abstraction/concreteness, dialectic/metaphoric, etc. result from Plato’s description of the language necessary to his republic’s survival. Incidentally, they are the very categories in which Edouard Glissant presents the opposition between Martinique Creole and French discourse (Supra, p.95). They are categories based on Plato’s ethnocentrism:

between our clearness of separation of what is in the mind and what is out of it, and the mental confusion of the lowest savages of our day, there is a vast interval... (quoted by Diamond, 1967: 196)

That there are different types of abstractions from Western thought completes Diamond’s argument. He calls Platonic abstractions the “politico-conceptual divisions generic to the state.” The hierarchies of power evoke the hierarchies of language: subordination, government, syntactical trees. Abstract categories serve to prevent connection between all sorts of semiotic chains (linguistic acts, but also perceptions, gestures, cogitations). In that sense, Deleuze-Guattari are right to accuse Platonic abstraction of not being abstract enough. They want to substitute a rhizome for the tree as a connection model in language and society. Arborescent thinking, generative
logic, fail to connect what the rhizomatic "warren" interrelates. Without a center, a rhizome connects any point of its network to any other point directly: "The chief property of a rhizome is a relationship with sexuality, but also with animals, plants, things of nature and artifice, quite different from the arborescent relationship: all sorts of things in becoming" (Deleuze, 1976: 62). It is a model, in other words, of the "mental confusion of the lowest savages of our day." (Plato, *sic*).

Unconsciously, Diamond tells us, Plato's attack on poets was motivated by the repression of the primitive. It is not merely an opposition of the hierarchized modern state growing out of a submerged community against the archaic society of kinship represented by the poet-trickster, but also a territorial opposition: tree against warren, center against margins. Territory also enters into a consideration of ethnopoetics. Who were Plato's opponents? The Sophists, nomadic professors from the margins of the Athenian empire, the Cynics, almost all from Asia Minor and Sicily. They had accents. If rich, like Gorgias and Protagoras, it was from a shady commerce of words, not from the land. In a sense, Lyotard writes, they were artists (Lyotard, 1976: 8). Sophistry is the logic of marginal people denying that there are margins. Protagoras claimed his fee from a student before debating him: the money was his if the student lost the debate, but also if he won, thanks to his master. The University, reflecting the state, refutes such "logic" by saying that one victory is exterior to the other, but sophistry, Lyotard insists, denies the very notion of interior/exterior. All is marginal, all is minor: there is no Empire. Another thing the University could not accept, still according to Lyotard speaking of Greece obliquely, was the intrusion of the body into the discourse of reason. Not the athletic body, but the sick, weak, obscene body. The Cynics broke wind in public. How they transformed the weak body into a force, escaping the law of masters, was demonstrated by Diogenes who was taken by pirates to a slave market in Crete. Asked what he could do, he answered: I can give orders, sell me to someone in need of a master. Poor strength, weak force, the logic of the underdog, are upsetting to masters "who believe that the body can be dominated" (Lyotard, 1976: 10). I do not mean to infer that farting subverts the Poetics of Aristotle, or that he would have condemned the oral delivery of texts.

But watching Rothenberg read with the clicks and belches, obscene allusions, over the protest of the more puritanical tribal censors, makes me think of the cynical body gesturing. The subversive function of oral poetry resembles the cynic's synthesis of body and word in the teeth of Aristotelian separation. An art which admits body noises presents serious problems to some English teachers, I suppose, because of the "tree structure" of our educational system. Most often drama classes are separate from theatre classes. Texts and bodies do not connect. That linguistic elements in texts may have biological functions is a pedagogical demand pretty hard to satisfy. Yet all of tribal poetry, much of modern ethnopoetry, require total performance.

II. Myth

That Plato's poets were dramatists complicates the question not a little. "Group identification with myth" Jerzy Grotowski writes, "is virtually impossible today" (Grotowski, 1968: p. 23). To return to "a concrete mythical situation," to "a common sky of belief," he chose the path of poverty. Poor theatre dispenses with stage and sets because it cannot compete with television and cinema, and also because Grotowski thinks that through poverty he can recover the inner riches of the body. Ethnopoetics performance does not entirely resign from the page as poor theatre resigns from the stage, but in its representation of myth it calls for the same actor to spector relationship: "poor" performance as one now speaks of "poor" theatre. It links itself not with bicentennial folklore revivals but with "third world" performances, the street games of Afro-American dozens and toasts (*Alcheringa*, new series, Volume II, number 1, pp. 27-40) or El Teatro Campesino of Luis Valdez.

The marginality of myth itself is a problem. Was not myth at some remote time the central resource of human culture? How then can it enter a marginal poetry? The question suggests the need for a self-conscious approach to myth, not necessarily on structuralist terms, perhaps rather by way of a dual stance of being both inside and outside. To start with, myth is not always the official version of things. Pushed underground by new social arrangements, it can be studied as counterculture or what Victor Turner calls "anti-structure" (Turner, 1974: 270): not an opposition or reflection of social structure but reference to
another type of organization altogether. Charles Doria, in a paper read at the Symposium, reminded the Workshop on Translation that

... Orphism in the 5th century B.C. and after was the religion of the oppressed, occupying an analogous but not identical position to that which Christianity is supposed to have enjoyed for the first few centuries of its existence. The kinds of questions the oppressed seek to have answered are not those people who are looking to justify their public lives in war, business and supremacy of one sort or another would ask. (Doria, 1975: 13)

The Sacred Stories tell us of a liberation through pain. The central analogy to the orphic sacrifice is the swallowing of Phænes by Zeus which the mystery of swallowing Dionyso and communitas parallels. The god within is experienced by this sparagmos and communion, after which the oppressed — tyranized by a powerful state — are returned to a tension between “the god as liberator and man as enforcer of limit.” (Doria: 9). The point of studying myth in this manner is that it accounts for the marginality of the worshipper. In Victor Turner’s terms, “marginality” is not “outsiderhood.” On the one hand, outsiderhood refers to “the condition of being either permanently or by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system.” (Turner, 1976: 233). Marginals, on the other hand, belong to two or more groups: a “structure” of the dominant social system, and a “communitas” which is often the vestige of a former association. Myth reflects the tension between communitas and structure in that it often accounts for “the fall,” in which an originally undivided ‘Human Form Divine’ became divided into conflicting functions, each incompletely human and dominated by a single propensity, ‘intellect,’ ‘desire,’ ‘craftsmanship,’ and so on, no longer in orderly harmonious balance with the other.” (Turner, 234). If communitas is wholeness, structure is fragmentation through specialization. What a “poor” theatre or “minor” literature achieves, then, is a temporary marginality from which the structure of society can undergo critiques inspired by a richer reality, lost communitas or the inside savagery of a poetic language in tension between the simultaneous presences of communal metaphor, structural discourse, and the body.

III. Oral and Written Forms

Another large question raised by the Symposium, and debated inconclusively, was the relationship of oral to written forms. First of all the problem changes in proportion to the degree of art or elaboration in the speech or the writing. Oral poetry is not just spoken language any more than written poetry resembles the Pharaoh’s bridal lists. There are eight or nine pages in L’Anti-Oedipe and nine pages in the Workshop on Translation that makes beautiful sense out of the mess MacLuhan’s Gutemberg Galaxy has left us. The authors interpret Leroi-Gourhan’s history of writing in paradoxical terms:

Primitive societies are oral, not because they lack graphic expression, but on the contrary because their graphic expression is independent from the voice, marking signs on human bodies in answer to voice, responding to voice, but autonomously, and not aligned on voice; conversely, barbarian civilizations are scriptural, not for loss of voice, but because the graphic system has lost its independence and proper dimensions, has aligned itself on voice, subordinated itself to it, while at the same time... extracting its linearity and keeping it prisoner in the linear writing code. (Deleuze-Guattari, 1972: 240-241)

Surely, writing has been used to subjugate, as Lévi-Strauss tells us in Tristes Tropiques. But writing has also been used to liberate, even from the constraints of language itself. Marshall MacLuhan and his interpretation of Cadmus and the dragon’s teeth — the letters of the first alphabet as sowing discord and division among men — has been part of the occidental myth itself. Since Plato, we have kept hearing of the primacy of divine speech and the perverse secondariness of writing; Plato thought writing destroyed memory, Rousseau sincerity, and MacLuhan the balance of senses. The logocentric myth, with its judeo-christian confiscation of original speech by one god, equates speech with an archaic state of innocence and writing with the intrusion of a system of government. In his Grammatologie Jacques Derrida (1967 a) has written the history of this prejudice against writing in the West, showing how the Greek Logos was the foundation of European metaphysics. In his L’Ecriture et la différence he linked the critique of ethnocentrism — which made ethnology possible — to the dislocation of metaphysics (Derrida 1967 b, p. 414). Yet, Derrida writes on about Lévi-Strauss,
“one perceives in him a sort of ethics of presence, a nostalgia for origin, for archaic and natural innocence, for a pureness of presence and self-presence in speech; an ethics, a nostalgia and even a remorse which he often presents as the motivation of the ethnomological project.” (Derrida, 1967 b: 427). Then comes a statement which I think capital for the future development of ethnopoetics:

Therefore there exist two interpretations of interpretation, structure, sign, and free play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or origin that would escape play and the order of signs, and feels exiled in the necessity of interpretation. The other, no longer turning toward an origin, affirms free play and tries to go beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of this being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or onto-theology, i.e. his whole history, has been dreaming of full presence, reassuring foundation, origin and an end to play. (Derrida, 1967 b, 427)

We are dealing here with two marginalities: the marginality of speech recalling the oral tradition and its supposed mysteries of innocent presence, and a marginality of writing found today in the poetics of free play and chance operation: from Mallarmé to Oulipo, from John Cage to Jackson Mac Low. Derrida’s critique of ethnology raises a question about mantras, formulaic poetry, and the respect for the oral tradition. But the question is not simply whether tribal authority refers us to an original Logos as Law and Creation. There is a large distinction to make between Greek Logos and the African Nommo, an instance of divinity shared by all who have the power of the word (John, 1961: 148). The question — surely not instantly soluble now — is how to recover the word, in Dennis Tedlock’s formulation (Supra, p. 120), or in William Spanos’:

It seems to me that everything that I’ve heard in this symposium so far hasn’t addressed itself to this Heideggerian notion of speech (Rede) or has confused a logocentrist notion of orality, which is grounded in an abiding presence or in a telos, an orality, that is to say, which begins meta-physically, begins, in other words, from the end, with an existential notion of orality that is committed to a process beginning not far from something but from nothing, from zero. And this more primordial — and temporal — orality is the one I think

A cross-over has taken place for the American poet who, grounding his secondary (re-learned) orality on the tribal communitas, is reaching back to primitive graphism; beyond the barbarian order of writing, beyond the civilized order of print, beyond justified margins and typographical conformities, to a non-alignment of voice and writing which is a dialectic essential to marginality; recovering the voice and the sign. The new communitas of performance, as in Antin’s semi-improvised chamber sessions and the dadaist act of exploding the print culture now connect in the rhizome of ethnopoetics. A look at Alcheringa confirms this cross-over.

IV. Third World Poetics

Freely chosen marginality may be the necessary path if one wishes to meet half way the peoples whose marginality results from historical force. I submit it is not sufficient, and that ethnopoetics encompases more than tribal and neo-tribal poetries. It was among the Paris surrealists that Aime Césaire found a language capable of describing that ancient slaveship run aground, his hungry island. But Jacques Howlett in a very fine essay warns us not to gloat over this apparent triumph of poetic justice: the mastery of French by insurgent blacks (See supra; 102). O marvel, Caliban has not spurned his “miraculous weapons,” he has aimed them at Prospero! But Caliban’s name may as well be Malcolm X, as Césaire’s adaptation from The Tempest clearly suggests. Those who lost their names over the Ocean have acquired a painful linguistic marginality, which it is a task for ethnopoetics to understand. Former slaves are not easily turned into revolutionaries, for in what language except Prospero’s would that demiurgic act fashion them? Césaire’s four plays, published between 1956 and 1970, explain the resistance of a colonized people to the demiurgic imagery of their poet-leader (See Benamou 1975: 165). The marginality of a black culture elite cannot be shared by the Antillean masses whose marginality is quite different: it is not a rever-
beration of surrealism French tearing down colonial language from inside, but a dialectical opposition of the only natural language they use, Creole, and the discourse of domination, French, which also happens to be the instrument of analysis and liberation. It was in French that Edouard Glissant, Césaire's compatriot, delivered his brilliantly argued plea for the marginality of a de-territorialized speech (Supra: p. 95). By "natural" language and "free" poetics, he implicitly referred to the oneness of the African vernacular with a beloved territory and a tribal culture, even a troubled and contested one. Glissant's distinction between free and forced poetics was axiological, not necessarily historical. It dealt with the racial and social poetics of the oppressed: how Creole became a secret language in defiance of masters, how its rhythms and tone system express the conditions of past slavery, how the dying out of its economic base affected it. It is pointless to object that slaves did not invent creole, shipped over with them from West African coasts. The fact is that ethnopoetics includes the memory of "marronage culturel" (survival of African culture despite a policy of assimilation): memory differentiates ethnopoetics from social anthropology.

One of the liveliest controversies of the Symposium centered on the question of justice; Sylvia Wynter and Fredric Jameson asked whether an ethnopoetic approach was enough, whether it would not be a better idea to replace ethnopoetics by sociopoetics. Perhaps the notion of marginality may serve to situate an ethno-sociological poetics coping with both the tribal origin and the proletarian condition of folk expression in the Antilles. Sylvia Wynter, who is Jamaican, concludes part III of the book-length study she sent us (of which Part I only found a space (Supra: p. 78) by quoting a Reggae song by Bob Marley:

Why won't you let us be
To live in harmony
We'd like to be free like birds in a tree...

This demand supports her contention that "the cultural consciousness of the Lumpen condition has been expressed by the black oral tradition, in the blues and jazz, in the calypso of Trinidad, and today explosively in the Reggae of Jamaica." Lumpen, she reminds us, means "marginal." Because it has a longer memory, ethnopoetics can perhaps deal with marginality better than short-term historical analyses of capitalist exploitation. Forced marginality and ethnocentrism were not results of capitalism (which is neutral, interested in money under any political regime) but existed in barbarian as well as civilized states. The cultural contribution of ethnopoetics as a field of study is, like the poetry itself, affirmative as well as critical. What characterized the negritude movement from Guillen to Césaire was not so much a critique of "blanchitude" — the would-be universal definition of civilized man calculated to exclude blacks — as the affirmation of African values.

As Professor Wynter remarkably clarified, the basic African rhythm and revolutionary consciousness are inseparable in the Jamaican song: "It is this concrete relation to the life-motion of the body, the flesh, this articulated response and immediacy of response that cuts through the abstraction central to prevailing dominant forms of reality." Ethnopoetics cannot eschew the study of Antillean rhythm as a demand for "being with no abstraction between the idea and the act;... it is that kind of freedom that the lumpen poetics postulates as its imperative." In other words, a humanity reaffirmed through a traditional form and performed as a part of it, is "the ultimate revolutionary demand." (Wynter, 1975: 120).

Affirmation appears again in the poetry of black poets such as Lucille Clifton whom Sherley Williams linked to the oral tradition of statement and response that patterns the Afro-American blues. She proved in her address that the ethno- in ethnopoetics can mean the cultural identity of North American minorities, recovered in their songs and poetry, as well as the tribal unity of the not-yet colonized. But what people on earth is not marginalized? It is therefore important to make keen demarcations disengaging the specific excellencies of tribal cultures from the literate forms which are part of the western heritage. Nicolas Kanellos' communication on New York Puerto Rican poetry traced its relation to the Latin jazz movement and to the "plena," a form of communal performance found in the coastal regions of Puerto Rico and probably of African origin. Other bilinguals, the Quebec French, have recently entered the purview of ethnopoetics. It was a discovery to hear a Haitian, Maximilien Laroche, speak about the poets of Montreal in terms usually reserved for the alienation of Antilleans writing in French. The debate about the perspective of ethnopoetics — whether the metaphori-
cal terms "white nigger" really applied to writers of French descent in Canada — opened again the question of method. Does the notion of marginality — operative as a relationship of the "inside savage" to civilization — also belong to a people who refuse marginalization and vindicate their birthright as equals in colonization to their Anglo-American colonizers? As with most of the questions I have raised, more study and a willingness to suspend judgement seem the appropriate answer.

Temporary marginality is, in Victor Turner's formulation, appropriate to the educational process. He defines liminality as "a fruitful alienation of the total individual from the partial persona," that is the roles one plays in the social structure, in order to attain "a total rather than a partial perspective on the life of society." (Turner, 1974: 259). It is difficult to maintain liminality in the face of demands for "relevance" or "job-relatedness." Some return to the liminal depths of myth, ritual, and the powers of language remains the most basic reason for the study of literature. As Jerome Rothenberg maintains, there has always been a distance between poetry and western civilization. In that sense ethnopoetics is only an extension of the liminality of the English curriculum. Another way to look at the problem was suggested by Paul Zolbrod:

The gap between art and ordinary existence closes when we watch what oral cultures do with poetry; and the possibilities that arise by our being human find articulate expression in what we would otherwise take for granted or never see at all. As for myself, I do not foresee the English Department overlooking the opportunity to learn how such a gap can be made to vanish. (Zolbrod 1975: 10)

It is true that in tribal societies the oral tradition is part of daily existence. The history of their cultural heritage, as well as ours, belongs to literary history. But speech and writing are not always spontaneous and free. Sometimes forced, or stolen, they require much study of the particulars of their being in the world. As a discipline ethnopoetics differs radically from general poetics, negates the Empire, asserts that everything is marginal, and that consequently there are no margins.

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