

NO HUMANS INVOLVED

A collective exhibition of
HOWDOYOU SAY YAMINAFRICAN?

*This exhibition guide has been conceived, written,
and designed by*
HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?

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Exhibition Guide

NO HUMANS INVOLVED

An Exhibition by HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?

Witte de With: Center for Contemporary Art, 2015

Nana Adusei-Poku, Christa Bell

NO HUMANS INVOLVED (N.H.I.), an exhibition of new work by HOWDOYOUSAYYAMINAFRICAN?, is a meditative interrogation of the philosophical, social and institutional conditions that have outlined the parameters for the category “human” within Western discourses. In N.H.I., the collective deeply investigates the non-representability of the black body, the possibility of knowledge production outside of the canon of Modernity and the potential of collectivity as a vehicle through which an unencumbered aesthetics of Blackness might be explored.

The exhibition’s title is a reference to the 1994 essay *No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to my Colleagues*, by feminist philosopher and writer Sylvia Wynter. Wynter cites the N.H.I. designation, discovered in the aftermath of the Rodney King Riots, as one used in reports made by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to refer to cases involving young Black males who were unemployed, urban dwelling and victims of gang violence, as well as cases involving the unsolved murders of primarily black, queer folk and human beings who were not imagined as worthy of personhood. Today, Wynter’s letter, which takes her colleagues to task for ‘the making of the inner eye’ that sees Black people as “outside of the sanctified social order”, couldn’t be more relevant. Drawing further urgency given the recent slayings of Trayvon Martin, Ferguson, Missouri; Michael Brown from Sanford, Florida; Eric Garner Staten Island, NY; and Walter Scott, North Charleston, South Carolina as well as the much less publicized but equally horrific killings of Rekeia Boyd, Chicago, Illinois and Tanisha Anderson, Cleveland, Ohio, by U.S. state authorities. The designation, N.H.I. goes straight to the heart of the collective’s ruminations around the precedence that the “inner eye”, the one formed by centuries of

white supremacist discourses, takes over the physical eye. This “inner eye” bears witness to the real-time brutal and dehumanizing treatment of Black bodies.

State sanctioned violence against unarmed Black bodies is no novelty nor is the attending outrage. This violence is also not a concern exclusive to the U.S., but can be found all over the Black Diaspora. For example one can reconsider the London Riots from 2011. The riot erupted due to the death of Mark Duggan by a white police officer. Eighteen years after the killing of Stephen Lawrence, an investigation exposed the racial prejudice in the UK Police Force as well as initiating procedural changes in the criminal justice system. All these transformations were catalyzed through the activism of Lawrence’s family. We can further highlight these forms of police brutality from a German context with the death of Oury Jalloh, a refugee from Sierra Leon, who was burned in his cell in Dessau in (2005). The list of deaths through police violence are constantly rising with names such as Laye Alama Konde (2004), Christy Omordion Schwundek (2013), yet, we are not seeing a condemnation of these abuses of power. In none of these cases have the authorities followed up on the investigation to a point of justice, they merely turned a blind eye, dismissing any charges. These examples also show that not only male Bodies are exposed to police scrutiny but also female Bodies. It additionally stresses that the violence performed in the US is not limited to that particular context. The estimated number of unreported cases around the globe remain undisclosed or become altered in a way that they become casualties - collateral damage - rather than race related crimes.

Sylvia Wynter calls attention to the dehumanization of these Bodies and reconnects it with themes that have been addressed by Black intellectuals for the past 150 years. She writes in her last sentences of the already mentioned letter, “This is the same case, of course, with the N.H.I. acronym. For the social affects of this acronym, while not overtly genocidal, are clearly serving to achieve parallel results: the incarceration and elimination of young black males by ostensibly normal and everyday means. Statistics with respect to this phenomenon have been cited over and over again... The starving ‘fella,’ (or the jobless inner city N.H.I., the global new poor, or les damnés) Fanon pointed out, does not have to inquire into the truth. They are the truth.

It is we who institute this “truth.” We must now undo their narratively condemned status.” (Wynter, 1992)

In light of so much ritualistic violence against Black bodies by representatives of the state, the collective enters the designation *NO HUMANS INVOLVED* as a point of departure on a quest for an epistemology of being/existence. It then takes as a starting point *the nothingness* of the historically produced dilemma of the philosophical and factual position of Blackness. As the critical theorist Fred Moten outlines, the position of nothingness is connected to a para-ontological quest. *NO HUMANS INVOLVED* is a celebration of the parousia of the para-ontological beauty of that no-place-no-space and no-life called Blackness. Deriving neither from an Afro-Pessimist, Afro-optimist nor from an Afro-Futurist position, but from the *now*. Acknowledging this no-place the collective questions and challenges the notion of subjectivity and self. The notions are further investigated through what Edouard Glissant calls, ‘the consent not be a single being and instead many beings at the same time’ or “every diaspora is the passage from unity to multiplicity.” (Glissant in Manthia Diawara 2009,2)

The exhibition features collaborative and individual works that can be read not only as an articulation of the aforementioned multiplicity, but also through the lens of materiality and sound. The exhibition draws on queer feminist theorist Karan Barad’s agential realism, stating that, “‘individuals’ do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. That is, intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of ‘individuals’, rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. Rather, ‘individuals’ only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring.” (Barad in Kleinman 2012, 77) Barad’s agential realism, the dependence of phenomena and the interplay/action of matter, shows precisely what Sylvia Wynter (vis-a-vis Fanon) called the sociogenic principle. This can also be understood as a result of processes of social conditioning and a culturally prescribed “sense of the self”(Wynter 1999). Therefore, one of the key aims in this show is to invite the visitor to immerse themselves into the material/meta-physical encounters. Activating the space through an exploration of somatic experience or in other words a corporeal understanding through one’s flesh.

The collective continues with adding, paraphrasing and citing the canon of Black Studies and Literature and artworks that have informed many of the installations along side of popular culture, though without casually assuming that the visitors are familiar with any of them. This is an assumption drawn from experience. It is a result of the ongoing legacy of white supremacy in our contemporary societies. “It’s nothing personal”- as James Baldwin would say so elegantly, it is a result of the systematic exclusion of the institutional production of threatening knowledge. Postcolonial, Critical Race, Black Studies, Black Feminist Thought and Queer of Color Critique are all fields that are not represented in the majority of college and university curricula, although its scholarship has existed for centuries. The collective is one place, of many other non-institutional spaces, in which this knowledge is shared discussed and distributed and now shared and materialized throughout the exhibition. A point that has to be emphasized because the exclusion of Black Studies and Artists of Color from the dominant canon is systemic, as it constantly dismantles the classificatory system of and challenges the dispositions of power to paraphrase the critical theorist Stuart Hall.

The visitors might, however, be able to recognize musical genres that have found their way into the soundscapes, which the YAM musicians and aural technicians have sculpted. This familiarity as Cornel West stressed is the field of popular culture where Black thought and aesthetics are allowed to find expression much too often subsumed and appropriated due to their economic potential as emphasized by Greg Tate. Or as Paul Gilroy says, “It is my belief that capitalism’s original commodity-fetish was the Africans auctioned here as slaves, whose reduction from subjects to abstracted objects has made them seem larger than life and less than human at the same time. It is for this reason that the Black body, and subsequently Black culture, has become a hungered-after taboo item and a nightmarish bugbear in the badlands of the American racial imagination. Something to be possessed and something to be erased....”(Gilroy 1993, 4)

Sound was one of the entry points for NO HUMANS INVOLVED. In February of this year, a core group of musicians, composers, songwriters and vocalists in the collective gathered at Bear Creek Studios in Woodinville, Washington for a residency in which they were able

to experiment and map out sonic landscapes for the show. While in residency, collective members explored themes parallel to critical theorist Karan Barad, who asked, at a Chicago conference in the previous year, “What is the sound of nothingness?”

The exhibition provides affective encounters with eight multi-media installations that reflect a historical quest. Each comprises video vignettes, sculptural installations, printed matter and soundscapes. The concept of the show moves in and out of different modes of perception as a form of aesthetic conceptual protest and disobedience to normative orders, with sculptural installations, sonic experiments, as well as performative modes of engagement with the audiences and spatial alterations.

One of the aims of the exhibition is to conflate a physical and sensorial experience informed by ongoing debate in Black Critical Studies including: How do we create spaces that facilitate an understanding of the multiplicity of our existence in a non-representational form?; When time meets identity and space meets history, what are the means of understanding these encounters in an embodied way?; What are the means to elaborate these questions in a museum space and make time perceivable?

The following essays, poems, and literary excerpts are for the viewer to read as further context for *NO HUMANS INVOLVED*. The installations themselves are not named or described in this guide as the artists would like to invite the viewer to, instead, steep herself in texts that have informed and inspired them. For information specific to each installation, please refer to the wall tags.

What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. [...] the belly of this boat dissolves you into a non-world from which you cry out. This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death.

(Glissant 1997)

I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribe for me the humility of the cripple. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but eviscerated silence surged toward me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep.

(Fanon 1967)

Wo Kum Apem A,
Apem Beba!

(Nana Yaa Asantewaa, circa1900)

Is it possible to desire the something other than transcendental subjectivity that is called nothing? What if blackness is the name that has been given to the social field and social life of an illicit alternative capacity to desire?

(Fred Moten, 2013)

When imagined moral credibility of black now translates into an enablement of the most repressive practices among the world democracies today? In a sense, if there is no black culture, or no longer black culture (because it has “succeeded”), then we need it now; and if that is true, then perhaps black culture– has the reclamation of the critical edge, as one of those vantages from which it might be spied, and no longer predicated on “race” – has yet to come.

(Hortense J. Spillers, 2006)

This is what I mean: “race,” on the one hand, speaks through multiple discourses that inhabit intersecting axes of relations that banish once and for all the illusion of a split between “public” and “private.” The individual in the collective traversed by “race” – and there are no known exceptions, as far as I can tell – is covered by it before language and its differential laws take hold. [...] What is this thing called “race”? Our deadliest abstraction? Our most nonmaterial actuality? Not fact, but our deadliest fiction that gives the lie to doubt about ghosts? In a word, “race” haunts the air where women and men in social organization are most reasonable.

(Hortense Spillers, 1996)

Nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have.

(Baldwin, 1964)

As such, black collectivity now is not so much a static formation as a state of being, a mode of becoming-together whose temporal unfolding is contingent, provisional, and always under threat of erasure but not without voice.

(Copeland&Beckwith 2014)

The problem with identity politics is that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences.

(Kimberley Crenshaw, 1991)

“This formulation of affect and affectivity is important to my project here because it underscores the extent to which our efforts to assimilate that which moves us are bound to the ethico-political context of our times and available to capital and its normative structures of command, as well as to the related yet distinct operations we know as racism, homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia, among others. At the same time, it points toward the ways that whatever escapes recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation, exists as an impossible possibility within our shared reality, however that reality is described theoretically, and therefore threatens to unsettle, if not destroy, the common senses on which that reality relies for its coherence as such.”

(Kara Keeling, 2009)

“NO HUMANS INVOLVED”: AN OPEN LETTER TO MY COLLEAGUES

Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century. vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 1994.

Dear Colleagues:

You may have heard a radio news report which aired briefly during the days after the jury’s acquittal of the policemen in the Rodney King beating case. The report stated that public officials of the judicial system of Los Angeles routinely used the acronym N.H.I. to refer to any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos. N. H. I. means “no humans involved.”

Stephen Jay Gould argues that “systems of classification direct our thinking and order our behaviors.” [Gould, 1983] By classifying this category as N.H.I. these public officials would have given the police of Los Angeles the green light to deal with its members in any way they pleased. You may remember too that in the earlier case of the numerous deaths of young Black males caused by a specific chokehold used by Los Angeles police officers to arrest young Black males, the police chief Darryl Gates explained away these *judicial* murders by arguing that Black males had something abnormal with their windpipes. That they had to be classified and thereby treated *differently* from all other North Americans, except to a secondary degree, the darker-skinned Latinos. For in this classificatory schema too *all* “minorities” are equal except one category - that of the peoples of African and of Afro-mixed descent who, as Andrew Hacker points out in his recent book, are *the least equal of all*.

“Certainly,” Hacker writes, in *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (1992) “all persons deemed to be other than white, can detail how they have suffered discrimination at the hands of white America. Any allusions to racist attitudes and

actions will find Cherokees and Chinese and Cubans agreeing with great vigor ... yet ...members of all these intermediate groups have been allowed to *put a visible distance between themselves and Black Americans.*”

“The Vietnamese,” Richard Pryor quipped, “learned how to become good Americans by learning how to say nigger.”

WHERE DID THIS CLASSIFICATION COME FROM? THE POINT OF MY LETTER TO YOU

Yet where did this system of classification come from? One that was held both by the officers involved in this specific case of the routine “nigger breaking” of Black males, as well as by the mainly white, middle class suburban Simi Valley jurors? Most of all, and this is the point of my letter to you, why should the classifying acronym N.H.I., with its reflex anti-Black male behaviour-prescriptions, have been so actively held and deployed by the judicial officers of Los Angeles, and therefore by “the brightest and the best” graduates of both the professional and non- professional schools of the university system of the United States? By those whom we ourselves would have educated?

How did they come to conceive of what it means to be both *human* and *North American* in the *kinds of terms* (i.e. to be White, of Euroamerican culture and descent, middle-class, college- educated and suburban) within whose logic, the jobless and usually school drop-out/push-out category of young Black males can be *perceived*, and *therefore behaved towards*, only as the *Lack* of the human, the Conceptual Other to being North American? The same way, as Zygmunt Bauman has been pointed out, that all Germans of Jewish descent were made into and behaved towards as the Conceptual Other to German identity in its then Pan-Aryan and Nazi form [Bauman, 1989].

If, as Ralph Ellison alerted us to in his *The Invisible Man*, we see each other only through the “inner eyes” with which we look with our physical eyes upon reality, the question we must confront in the wake of the Rodney King Event becomes: What is our responsibility for the making of those “inner eyes?” Ones in which *humanness* and *North Americanness* are always already defined, not only in optimally White terms, but also in optimally middle-class (i.e. both Simi Valley, and secondarily Cosby-Huxtable TV. family), variants of these terms? What have we had to do, and still have to do, with the putting in place of the classifying logic of that shared mode of “subjective understanding” [Jaime Carbonell, 1987] in whose “inner eyes,” young Black males, can be perceived as being *justly*, shut out from what Helen Fein calls the “universe of moral obligation” that bonds the interests of the Simi Valley jurors as Whites and non-Blacks (one Asian, one Hispanic), to the interests of the White policemen and the Los Angeles judicial office-holders who are our graduates? In her book on the 1915 genocide of the Armenians by the Turkish pan-nationalists, and on the Jews by the Pan-Aryan racialists in the 1930’s-1940’s, Helen Fein points out that in both cases there was a common causal factor. This factor was that over the millennium which preceded their group annihilation, “both Jews and Armenians had been decreed by the dominant group that was to *perpetrate in the crime to be outside the sanctified universe of obligation* - that circle of people with reciprocal obligations to protect each other whose bonds arose from their relation to a deity or a sacred source of authority” [Helen Fein, 1979]. In both cases, although the genocides were inflicted in the secular name of a now *sacred* “*national*” identity, based, in the case of the Turks on the discourse of a historical Pan-Turianism and, in the case of the German-Aryans, on that of the sanctity of a “pure” racial stock, both groups had been defined “*within recent memory similarly to pariahs outside the sanctified social order.*” It was this discursive classification that had enabled them to be misrecognized as *aliens*, as *strangers* who were, as if it were, of a different *species*; strangers, “*not* because they were aliens but because the dominant group was alienated from them by a traditional antipathy.” [Fein, 1979].

This is the same case, of course, with the N.H.I. acronym. For the social effects to which this acronym, and its placing outside the “sanctified universe of obligation,” of the category of young Black males to which it refers, leads, whilst not *overtly* genocidal, are clearly having genocidal effects with the incarceration and elimination of young Black males by ostensibly normal, and everyday *means*.

Statistics with respect to this empirical fact have been cited over and over again. Andrew Hacker’s recent book documents the systemic White/Black differential with respect to life-opportunity on which our present North American order is based. Nevertheless, this differential is replicated, and *transracially* so, between, on the one hand, the *classes* (upper middle, middle, lower middle and working, whether capital owners or jobholders), who are therefore classified *within* the “universe of obligation” integrating of our present world system and its nation-state sub- units, and on the other hand, the category of the non-owning jobless young of the inner cities; primarily Black with Latino, and increasingly also, White, assimilated to its underclass category.

In the wake of the Civil Rights movements, and of the Affirmative Action programs which incorporated a now new Black middle class into the “American Dream,” the jobless category has been made to bear the weight of the Deviant status that, before the Sixties had been imposed on *all* Americans of African and Afro-mixed descent, by the nation-state order of the U.S., *as an imperative condition of its own systemic functioning*. Indeed, it may be said that it is this category of the jobless young Black males who have been made to pay the “sacrificial costs” (in the terms of René Girard’s *The Scapegoat*, 1986) for the relatively improved conditions since the 1960’s that have impelled many Black Americans out of the ghettos and into the suburbs; that made possible therefore the universal acclamation for the Cosby- Huxtable TV family who proved that *some* Black Americans could aspire to, and even be, drawn inside, the “sanctified category” of Americans *just like*

us - if still secondarily so, *behind* “women” and the other “minorities.”

The price paid by the jobless Black male category for this social transformation is inescapably clear. With respect to the judicial apparatus itself, statistics show that whilst Black men constitute 6% of the U.S. population, they have come to make up 47% of the prison population. Whilst, in the entire prison population, in the wake of the mandatory sentences for drug offenses imposed by (largely White and middle class) Drug War officials, both Afro-Black young males and Latino-Brown ones, are to be found out of all proportion to their numbers in the society. The May 7, 1992 *New York Times* editorial which gives these statistics, also point out that it costs \$25,000 a year “to keep a kid in prison; which is more than the Job Corps or college.” However, for society at large to choose the latter option in place of the former would mean that the “kids” in question could no longer be “perceived” in N.H.I. terms as they are now perceived by all; nor could they continue *to be induced to so perceive themselves* within these same terms, as they now do, fratricidally turning upon themselves, killing each other off in gang wars or by other violent methods.

Where does this “inner eye” which leads the society to choose the former option in dealing with the North American variant of the jobless category of the post-Industrial New Poor [Bauman, 1987], the category to which at the global level, Frantz Fanon has given the name *les damnés*, the *condemned*, [Fanon, 1963] come from? Why is this “eye” so intricately bound up with that code, so determinant of our collective behaviours, to which we have given the name, *race*?

“It seems” a sociology professor, Christopher Jenks, points out in the wake of the L.A. “that we’re always trying to reduce race to something else. Yet out there on the streets race does not reduce to something else.” [*Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 13, 1992] I have come to believe, after struggling with this issue from the “lay” perspective of Black Studies (which was itself able to enter academia only in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, the Watts

urban riots, and the protests which erupted after the assassination of Martin Luther King), not only that “race” cannot be reduced as an issue, to anything else, but that it is we in academia who alone hold the key to “race,” and therefore to the classificatory logic of the acronym, N.H.I.

My major proposal is that both the issue of “race” and its classificatory logic (as, in David Duke’s belief that “the Negro is an evolutionarily lower level than the Caucasian”) lies in the founding premise, on which our present order of knowledge or *episteme* [Foucault, 1973] and its rigorously elaborated disciplinary paradigms, are based.

TAKING THE MAP FOR THE TERRITORY: THE FALLACY OF SUPRACULTURALISM

What is this premise? Michel Foucault traces the processes by which our present major disciplines came to be put in place at the end of the eighteenth century by European thinkers, to a central *representation* by means of which the human would come to perceive and know itself *as if it were* a purely natural organism in complete continuity with organic life. For if, in the terms specific to the “local” culture [Geertz, 1983] of Western Europe, and therefore to its founding Judaeo-Christian Narrative of human emancipation [Griaule, 1948, Lyotard, 1989] the human had been represented as a *divinely created being* in the terms of the Biblical Genesis account of origins, the new conception of the human, that would be based during the nineteenth century on the new Narrative of Evolution, would be that of an *evolutionarily selected being*. In this conception the human was held to *pre-exist* the “local cultures,” including ours, by means of which alone human “forms of life” can come to exist [D.T. Campbell, 1982; Lieberman, 1991], as the hybridly biological (*bios*) and narrative-discursive (*logos*) level of existence that they are [Wynter, 1991]. That is, as they are *outside* the mode of subjective understanding or “inner eyes” constituted by the “prescriptive categories” of the “native cultural

model” [Legesse, 1973] which is itself rigorously elaborated by the present disciplinary paradigms of the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

The Eritrean anthropologist Asmarom Legesse points out that our present organization of knowledge is premised on what he terms the *technocultural* fallacy. This fallacy, he asserts, derives from the failure of anthropology [and the other disciplines as well] to distinguish the purposive aspects of human behavior ...and the unconscious structure in human culture (as reflected in language and the cognitive bases of life) from the *nonconscious empirical processes* that link man directly to animal societies and the ecosystem [to in effect economic processes] [Legesse, 1973] It is this fallacy which underlies the premise of the discipline of economics, (as the present master discipline in the place of theology), that our human behaviours are motivated primarily by the imperative common to all organic species of securing the material basis of their existence; rather than by *imperative* of securing the overall conditions of existence, (cultural, religious, representational and through their mediation, material), of each local culture’s represented conception of the Self (Wittgenstein’s “form of life). In this context, history falls into the trap of taking its narration of what happened in the past, a narration clearly oriented by our present culture specific conception of the human, as if indeed it were what actually happened, when seen from a transcultural perspective. The recent controversy over the California school textbook, *America Will Be*, which imagines the United States as a “nation of immigrants” provides an instructive example of the historical paradigm’s conflation of narrative history with “history as what happened” [Waswo, 1988]. The classificatory logic of the acronym N.H.I., (as well as the belief system of a David Duke for whom whilst the “Caucasian” incarnates the ostensibly most highly evolved and selected mode of “normal” human being, the “lower non-White races” and most ultimately the “Negro,” incarnate the most atavistic non-evolved Lack of the human), *derives* therefore from a second fallacy related to the above; one which underlies our present disciplinary paradigms, and their hegemonic mode of economic rationality. This second

fallacy, that of *supraculturalism*, mistakes our present “local culture’s *representation-of-the-human-as-a-natural* organism as if it were the human-in-itself, mistakes the representation for the reality, the map for the territory.

For whilst the human species is bio-evolutionarily programmed to *be* human on the basis of the unique nature of its capacity for speech [Lieberman, 1991] it realizes itself *as human* only by coming to regulate its behaviours, no longer *primarily*, by the genetic programs specific to its genome, but by means of its narratively instituted conceptions of itself; and therefore by the *culture-specific discursive programs*, to which these conceptions give rise.

As in the case of our present scholarly elaboration of the natural organism idea of the human, and of its representation as a “form of life” regulated in its behaviours by the same imperatives of material food production and of procreation that also regulate the lives of purely organic species. Rather than, I propose here by the narratively instituted goal-trees [Carbonell, 1987] or purposes specific to each “local culture” including our own.

It is only within the terms of our present local culture, in which the earlier feudal-Christian religious ethic and its goal of Spiritual Redemption and Eternal Salvation has been inverted and replaced by the goal of Material Redemption, and, therefore, by the transcendental imperative of securing the economic well being, of the now biologized body of the Nation (and of national security!), that the human can at all be conceived of *as if it were* a mode of being which exists in a relation of pure *continuity* with the that of organic life. Whilst it is only within these terms, that the N.H.I. acronym and its classificatory logic is to be understood as part of the *genetic status-organizing principle* of which the phenomenon that we have come to know as “race”, is the expression. The feudal-Christian order of Europe had conceived of the caste (noble birth and descent) organizing principle of its order as being divinely ordained (theocentric paradigm). Equally it is only on the basis of our present conception of a genetic status organizing principle, based on evolutionarily pre-selected degrees of biological value, as iconized

in the White/Black invariant differential, that our present world system and its nation-state sub- units, can be hierarchically allocated on the basis of each category's ostensible pre-selection for higher and lower degrees of genetic worth (biocentric paradigm). One ostensibly "verified" by the individual or category's place on the social ladder.

"The problem of the twentieth century" W. E. B. Du Bois predicted in 1903, would be the problem of the *Color Line*. This line is made fixed and invariant by the institutionally determined differential between *Whites* (as the bearers of the ostensibly highest degrees of *eugenic descent*), and *Blacks* (as the bearers of the ostensibly lowest degrees of the lack of this descent); by its highest degree of its nigger dysgenicity as the extreme form of the "native" within the logic of the "Man"/non-White Native code deciphered by Fanon and Sartre [Fanon and Sartre, 1963]. Consequently the White/Black invariant Absolute serves to provide the status organizing principle that the Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia identified as being based on the *superiority/inferiority* ranking rule according to which all other non-White groups as "intermediate categories," place themselves, and are assessed on their relative "worth" according to their nearness to the one and distance from the other. At the same time, as it also enables the middle classes to institutionally legitimate their own ostensible *analogically* selected genetic superiority, as a group category over the non-middle classes; most of all over the underclass of South Central Los Angeles and its global extensions.

FROM “NOBLE” TO “EUGENIC” DESCENT, “CASTE” TO “RACE,” WHITE/BLACK TO OWNERS, JOB- HOLDERS/NON-OWNING JOB- HOLDERS DIFFERENTIAL

Before the Civil Rights Movement of the Sixties, the institutionally secured White/Black segregation served to absolutize, as the icon of an ostensibly pre-selected genetic value differential between *human hereditary variations*, the representation of *eugenic descent* on whose basis the global middle classes legitimate their ontological hegemonic social status. In the same way as in the earlier feudal order of Europe the Noble/Peasant invariant status differential had recursively served to verify the “truth” of the divinely ordered hegemony of the aristocracy based on its Noble line of descent; one which legitimated their caste dominance. This earlier truth had only been brought to an end by the intellectual revolution of humanism of fourteenth and fifteenth century Europe, when the lay humanists had challenged and displaced the absolutism of the theological categories of the then mainstream Scholastic order of knowledge, presided over by the Clergy - categories, whose primary function was to “verify” the ostensibly divinely ordained status principles of the order, and its code of “Caste.” Equally the code of “Race” can only be brought to an end with the bringing to an end of the “our present mode of truth” together with the Absolutism of its economic categories.

Both W. E. B. Du Bois and Elsa Goveia have emphasized the way in which the code of “Race” or the Color Line, functions to systemically *pre-determine* the sharply unequal re-distribution of the collectively produced global resources; and, therefore, the correlation of the racial ranking rule with the Rich/Poor rule. Goveia pointed out that all American societies are integrated on the basis of a central cultural belief in which all *share*. This belief, that of the genetic-racial inferiority of Black people to *all others*, func-

tions to enable our social hierarchies, including those of rich and poor determined directly by the economic system, to be perceived as having been *as* pre-determined by “that great crap game called life,” as have also ostensibly been the invariant hierarchy between White and Black. Consequently in the Caribbean and Latin America, within the terms of this socio- symbolic calculus, to be “rich” was also to be “White,” to be poor was also to be “Black.”

Where the segregation system of the United States’ variant had made the White/Black invariant into the absolute and primary invariant, with the Civil Rights struggle and the rise of the Post- Industrial consumer-driven economy, the primary focus has shifted to a variant of the old differential. This differential is one between the suburban category of the owners and job-holders on the one hand (of all races including the Cosby-Huxtable and *A Different World* Black Americans), and the Black non-owners and non- job-holders on the other. Consequently, since the Sixties, this new variant of the eugenic/dysgenic status organizing principle has been expressed primarily by the growing life style differential between the suburban middle classes (who are metonymically White), and the inner city category of the Post-Industrial Jobless (who are metonymically young Black males). Where the category of the owners/jobholders are, of whatever race, assimilated to the category of “Whites,” the opposed category of the non-owners, and the non-jobholders are assimilated to the category of the “young Black males.”

The analogy I want make here is this. That if the ostensibly divinely ordained caste organizing principle of the Europe’s feudal-Christian order was fundamentally secured by the Absolutism of its Scholastic order of knowledge, (including its pre-Columbus geography of the earth and its pre-Copernicus Christian-Ptolemaic astronomy), the ostensibly evolutionarily determined genetic organizing principle of our Liberal Humanist own, as expressed in the empirical hierarchies of *race* and *class* (together with the kind of gender role allocation between men and women needed to keep these systemic hierarchies in place), is as fundamentally secured by

our present disciplines of the *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Given that once the physical and the biological sciences had, after long struggles, freed human knowledge of the physical and biological levels of reality, from having to *verify*, as they still did in the feudal-European and all other pre-Sixteenth century human cultures, the “truth” or mode of *subjective understanding/inner eyes* on whose basis the role allocation system of each order can alone be perceived as having been *extra-humanly* determined, and therefore as just, *only the “truths” with respect to our knowledge of the social reality* of which we are subjects (and therefore always already *subjected* and socialized agents/observers), could now be deployed to verify the ostensible extra-human, because bio-evolutionary determined nature of our present status-organizing principle based on the code of “Race.” As the Liberal analogue therefore of the feudal code of “Caste.”

My proposal here therefore is that it is only on the basis of the classificatory logic of our present Humanities and Social Sciences, and its related mode of subjective understanding or “inner eyes” generated from the representation of the human as an evolutionarily selected organism, (and who can therefore be *more* or *less* human, even totally lacking in humanness as in the case of the N.H.I.), that we can be induced to see all those outside our present “sanctified universe of obligation,” whether as racial or as Jobless Other, as having been placed in their inferiorized status, *not* by our culture-specific *institutional mechanisms* but rather by the extra-human ordering of bio-evolutionary Natural Selection.

That our global and nation-state socio-systemic hierarchies are therefore the expression, not of the prescriptive categories of our now globalized cultural epistemological model, but of the, in the last instance, evolutionarily pre-selected degrees of eugenic “worth” between human groups at the level of *race, culture, religion, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and sex*.

THE NEW QUESTION, FROM WOODSON TO WIESEL TO ORR: WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR EDUCATION?

The central institutional mechanisms which integrate and regulate our present world system, I propose here, are the prescriptive categories of our present order of knowledge, as disseminated in our present global university system and its correlated textbook industry. How and why is this so? Paul Ricœur has based himself on the thesis of Clifford Geertz that “ideology is a function of human cultural systems,” to propose that the systems of knowledge by which human orders know themselves, must serve to provide a “generalized horizon of understanding” able to induce the collective behaviours of each order’s subjects. Since these are the behaviours by means of which each order is integrated and made stably replicable as such an order, without such horizons of understanding or “inner eyes,” no human order could exist [Ricœur, 1979].

Legesse further suggests that all mainstream scholars necessarily function as the *grammarians* of our order; that is, as “men and women” who are well-versed in the “techniques of ordering a select body of facts within a framework that is completely consistent with the system of values, the *weltanschauung* and, above all, the *cognitive model*” of the society to which they belong [Ricœur, 1979: Legesse, 1973]. It is only by the “trained skills” which we bring to the ordering of such facts, that intellectuals as a category, are able to ensure the existence of each order’s conceptual framework, which we rework and elaborate in order to provide the “inner eyes” by whose mode of subjective understanding, each order’s subjects regulate their behaviours, for both enormous good and evil.

So what are we to do as the grammarians by means of whose rigorous elaboration of the “prescriptive categories” of our present epistemological order, and therefore of our “local culture” [Geertz, 1983] “inner eyes,” the collective behaviours which bring the present nation-state order of the United States into being as such a specific order of reality are oriented, now that we are confronted with the price paid for the putting in place of this order of reality, as in the case of the Rodney King Beating/jury acquittal/South Central Los Angeles uprising Event? What are we, specifically as Black intellectuals, to do?

For we as Black intellectuals owe our *group* presence in the university system (rather than as pre-Sixties, where our exceptionalism as the token Black scholar verified the rule which excluded our ostensibly I.Q.- lacking population group), to the call for a new intellectual order of knowledge that was originally made in the wake of the Civil Rights movement. This call that had been reinforced and made powerful, then too by the burning cities of Watts, of other ghettos, as well as the uprisings after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination of the “captive population,” who, as James Baldwin wrote, normally have no means of enforcing their will upon the city or State. Given this situation, are we then to recycle the same old pieties? Shall we continue to settle for the *Bantustans* in which, as David Bradley wrote in 1982, we have been trapped? Bradley had first pointed to the systemic nature of the curriculum exclusion imposed on all Black Americans as the function of the United States continuing to conceive of itself as a White and Euroamerican “Nation of Immigrants.” He had then argued that in the wake of the Sixties and Seventies social movements, Black American intellectuals had been trapped by their refusal to confront a central question. This question was that of the *systemic* nature of the rules which governed their exclusion from the mainstream conception of the United States, and which erased their centrality to the existential reality of North America. Bradley wrote:

As a result of rallies we got courses in ‘black literature’ and ‘black history’ and a special black adviser for black students and a black

cultural center...rotting white washed house on neither edge of campus...reachable...by way of a scramble up a muddy bank...And all those new courses did was exempt the departments from the unsettling necessity of altering existing ones, so they could go right advertising a course in 'American Fiction' that explicitly includes Hawthorne, Clemens, James, Wharton, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and implicitly excludes Chesnutt, Hurston, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.

The issue here was that of deconstructing the curriculum mechanisms which expelled the Black Conceptual Other outside the "universe of obligation;" that therefore of redefining *White America*, as simply *America*. The issue therefore of a curriculum freed from the coding of race, on which it is at present instituted, and one that would have necessarily led to the asking of a central question - that of the validity of our present order of knowledge itself. This question had been raised by the Black American educator Carter G. Woodson as early as 1933 in his book *The Miseducation of the Negro* and has been re-asked in somewhat different but still related terms by Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust, as well as by David Orr, an environmentalist educator. Woodson had asked then, what was wrong with our present system of education? One whose scholarly curriculum not only served to strongly demotivate Black students, and to lead to their dropping out, but which also socialized White students to be the lynchers (and policemen-beaters) of Black Americans when they became adults. Woodson then used his analysis of the 1933 school curriculum, to argue that the demotivated and inferior intellectual performance of Black students, as a category, should be sought in the same source from which the deep-seated anti-Black phobia shared in by White students (as well as by the students of all other intermediate non-White groups) was also generated. These effects, he proposed, should be sought for, neither in the I.Q. deficiency of Blacks as an ostensibly evolutionarily retarded population group [C.D. Darlington, 1979], nor in the "innately racist" psyche, of the White lynchers. Instead both were to be seen as psycho-social responses that were regularly induced by the systemic nature of the cognitive

distortions with respect to the North American, as well as to the human past and present, that were everywhere present in the 1933 curriculum/textbooks.

These distortions, he went on, served an extra-cognitive function. This function was that of inducing the White students to believe that their ancestors had done everything worth doing in both the past, and at the same time, to induce the Black students to believe that their ancestors had done nothing worth doing, whether in the human or in the American past. One of the clues to this extra-cognitive function was that all non-Whites were not equally stigmatized. Whilst the past of all other groups was stigmatized, they were nevertheless left with certain shreds of human dignity. This was not so with respect to the 1933 curriculum's misrepresentation of the Afro-American past and as well as its present.

Woodson's "epistemological break" at this juncture was to see that the function of these White/Black misrepresentations was that of *differentially* motivating the respective categories of White and Black, in order to ensure the stable replication of the *invariant relation* of dominance/subordination between the two social categories as the empirical embodiment of the socio-symbolic analogy from which the genetic status-organizing principle, about which our present global national order institutes itself as an autopoetic or self-organizing living system [Maturana and Varela, 1980], can alone be generated. It was therefore the role of these systemic cognitive distortions to provide the mode of "truth" able to induce the White students (as the potential enforcers of their totemic group differential status vis-à-vis the Black category, whether as adult lyncher, policeman-beater or Simi Valley juror), to perceive it as their "just" and legitimate duty to keep the order's Conceptual Other in its systemic place. "Why not," Woodson asked, "exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior?" "There would be," he further pointed out, "no lynching if it did not start in the classroom." Why not judicially "lynch" those who had been made perceivable as "no humans involved?" This all the more so in the case of the Rodney Kings, who since

the Sixties have come to occupy a *doubled pariah* status, no longer that of *only* being Black, but of also belonging to the rapidly accelerating Post-Industrial category of the *poor and jobless*? As the category which, defined by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman as that of the New Poor, embodies a plight, which like that of the ongoing degradation of the planetary environment, is not even *possible*, not to say *resolvable*, within the conceptual framework of our present order of knowledge.

Which is of course, where we come in, and the new form of the question - what is wrong with our education? Environmental educator, David Orr pointed out in a 1990 commencement address, that the blame for the environmental destruction of a planet on which we are losing “116 square miles of rain forest or an acre a second,” and on which at the same time we send up “2, 700 tons of chlorofluorocarbon into the atmosphere” as well as other behaviours destructive of our ecosystemic life support system, should be placed where it belongs. All of these effects, he argues, are the results of decisions taken *not* by ignorant and unlearned people. Rather, they were and are decisions taken by the “best and brightest” products of our present system of education; of its highest levels of learning, of universities like ours here at Stanford. Orr then cited in this context a point made by Elie Wiesel to a Global Forum held in Moscow in the Winter of 1989.

“The designers and perpetrators of the Holocaust,” Wiesel pointed out, “were the heirs of Kant and Goethe.” Although, “in most respects the Germans were the best educated people on earth, their education did not serve as an adequate barrier to barbarity. What was wrong with their education?”

THE ISSUE THAT CONFRONTS US: TO MARRY OUR THOUGHT TO THE PLIGHT OF THE NEW POOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT

I come now to the final point of my letter to you. Jesse Jackson made the point that the uprising of South Central L.A. “was a spontaneous combustion - this time not of discarded material but of discarded people.” As is the case with the also hitherto discardable environment, its ongoing pollution, and ozone layer depletion, the reality of the throwaway lives, both at the global socio-human level, of the vast majority of peoples who inhabit the “*favela/shanty town*” of the globe and their jobless archipelagoes, as well, at the national level, of Baldwin’s “captive population” in the urban inner cities, (and on the Indian Reservations of the United States), have not been hitherto easily perceivable within the classificatory logic of our “inner eyes.” In other words, the two phenomena, that of the physical and that of the global socio-human environments, have been *hidden costs* which necessarily remained *invisible* to the “inner eyes” of the mode of subjective understanding,” generated from our present disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities. And therefore, within the mode of “truth” or epistemological order based upon the representation of the human *as if it were* a natural organism.

My proposal here is that both of these “hidden costs” cannot be normally seen as *costs* within the terms of the hegemonic *economic categories*, and therefore of the absolutism of its related *economic ethic* (as the analogues of the theological categories/Absolutism of the Scholastic order of knowledge of feudal-Christian Europe). That furthermore it is by this ethic, and its supraordinate goal of higher and higher “standards of living” (i.e. the goal of *Material Redemption*, whereas in the feudal order the behaviour-orienting goal was that of *Spiritual Redemption*), which now sets the limits of our culture-specific “inner eyes” - the limits therefore of how we can see, know and behave upon our present global and national

order; the limits therefore of our “Truth.”

That it sets these limits (as the now purely secularized form of the original Judaeo-Christian theological ethic in its feudal form), as rule-governedly as that ethic had set “limits,” before the revolution of lay humanism, with respect to how the subjects of its then order could see, know and behave upon the world. In the same way also, as before the intellectual revolution which took place from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the political ethic (with which the humanists had replaced the theological), had itself set the limits of how the then sociocultural reality of Pre- Industrial Europe could be seen, known and behaved upon; within the terms therefore of what Foucault defined as the Classical *episteme*.

Keith Tribe points out in his book *Land, Labour and Economic Discourse* (1978) that it was only with Adam Smith’s partial, and with David Ricardo’s completed putting in place of new “economic categories,” at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the earlier order of knowledge based on the hegemony of *political categories* was finally displaced; and that the emergent centrality of the processes of Industrial production, over against the earlier hegemony of agricultural production, was given epistemological, and therefore, optimally behaviour-*prescriptive* status.

Black Americans are the only population group of the post- 1492 Americas who had been legitimately owned, i.e. enslaved, over several centuries. Their owned and enslaved status had been systematically perceived within the “inner eyes” and the classificatory logic of the earlier *episteme*, its hegemonic political categories and behaviour-orienting political ethic, to be legitimate and *just*. The frequent slave revolts as well as the Abolition Movement, together with the Haitian Revolution and the Civil War in the United States, fundamentally broke the military power which had sustained that perception. Nevertheless, the displacement of that earlier “Truth” had been only verified at the level of the cognitive models of the society, when “heretical” thinkers like Smith and Ricardo had been able to “marry their thought” to the cause of the emergent forces of the Industrial world - i.e. to the cause of “free trade” (against

“protection” for *agricultural* producers) and of the activity of the Industrial bourgeoisie - forces that were then blocked in their emergence, not only by the restrictive laws, but also, by the behaviour-prescriptive categories of the earlier *episteme* in whose logic the “hidden costs” of protectionist policies for agricultural produce (including products grown by forced slave labor), *could not be seen as costs*.

This is the central point that Bauman makes with respect to the now global category of the New Poor. Consequently, the central issue that confronts us here, is whether we too will be able to move beyond the epistemic limits of our present “inner eyes” in order, in Bauman’s words, to “marry our thought” to the emergent post-Industrial plights of both the planetary as well as the global socio-human environment. Specifically with the “captive population” and, jobless category of South Central Los Angeles, who can have no peaceful way of imposing their will upon a city and State, whose ordered hierarchies, and everyday behaviours are legitimated in the last instance by the world view encoded by our present order of knowledge. Zygmunt Bauman points out that the emergence of the category of the New Poor is due to a systemic factor. *Capital*, with the rise of the global processes of technological automation, has increasingly freed itself from its dependence on *labor*. The organized working class, in consequence, which had been seen as the potential agent of social transformation during the phase of capital accumulation, one that had been primarily based on production, no longer has enough clout, to put a stop to the process of expanding job erosion, now that consumption has displaced production as the primary medium of capital accumulation. During the production phase, the category of the jobless Poor, both in the First as well as in the reserve “native” Third worlds, had a function. This function had been that of providing an excess of labor supply over demand, in order to put a brake on wage costs. In this new consumption phase of capital accumulation, it has no function.

Illiterate, unskilled and without job experiences, as the more and more low-skilled jobs dwindle with the acceleration of automated work processes, the jobless New Poor are without the wherewith-

al to serve as a reserve army of consumption. Where they receive welfare checks, (as in Britain and the United States), as part of an internal “pacification program,” the neighborhood shops, (as we have seen in the case of South Central Los Angeles, where these shops are owned by new immigrant groups such as Iranian, Taiwanese, Korean, Mexican, most of whom maintain a protected labor market by employing their own “ethnic” kin, see *Time*, May 18, 1992) serve as the mechanism to siphon what little wealth there is, out of the ghettos; to thereby lock the New Poor into their discardable throwaway status at the same time as the shop owners (including the Black owners) realize the American Dream, represented as social mobility *out* of the ghettos. As successful “breadwinners,” *their Conceptual Others are those who make possible their accelerated enrichment*; that is, the members of the captive population” of the ghettos (and of the global jobless archipelagoes) who are like the environment, the negative systemic costs, that are not perceivable within the logic of our present “inner eyes” and behaviour-regulating ethic, and its mode of hegemonic economic (rather than ecosystemic or human) reason.

It is within the “Truth” of our present epistemological order, and therefore within the terms of its related “grand narrative of human emancipation” [Lyotard, 1989], whose supraordinate goal or purpose, rather than being as it had been in the case of the earlier Classical *episteme* that of the expansion of the state, is now that of securing the material well being of the biologized Body of the Nation, and therefore of its optimal middle class mode of the subject, Foucault’s *Man*, that, as Bauman points out, we cannot as intellectuals, whether Liberal Positivist or Marxist-Leninist, marry our thought to the plight of the New Poor; cannot marry our thought to the well-being *of the human*, rather than only to that of “Man,” i.e. our present middle class *mode* of the subject (or of sociogeny) [Fanon, 1963].

The poor and the oppressed, Bauman notes, have therefore come to lose all attractions for the intellectuals. This category, unlike the working class jobholders *cannot* be seen, within the economic

logic of our present organization of knowledge, as contributors to the process of production who have been *unjustly deprived* of the “full value of their labor power.” Moreover, the fact that this New Poor, seduced too, *like all of us*, by the clamor of advertisements which urge them to consume, so that frustrated in their consumption goals, they turn on one another, mutilate and kill each other, or “damage themselves with alcohol and drugs” convinced of their own worthlessness, or in brief episodes of eruption, “fire the ghettos, riot, looting whatever they can lay their hands on,” means that *today’s intellectuals, whilst they feel and express their pity, refrain from proposing to marry their thought with this particular variety of human suffering.*

“They theorize,” Bauman writes, “the reason for their reluctance. Habermas would say that the New Poor are not exploited. Offe would add that they are politically ineffective, as having no labor to withdraw, they are deprived of bargaining power... [The] New Poor need help on humane grounds: they are unfit for grooming as the future remakers of the world.” [Bauman, 1987]

How then did they change the course of North American history in two days? How did they, the proscribed category of the N.H.I., Baldwin’s “captive population,” Fanon’s *les damnés*, come to not only impose their will upon the city and the state, but to also directly challenge the mode of “Truth” in whose logic their plight, like that of the environment’s, is neither posable nor resolvable?

If, as Legesse suggests, because of our role as the grammarians of our order, we must ourselves, normally, and as the condition of our order’s integration and stable replication, remain imprisoned in the “structural models” that we ourselves put in place, then how are we to be enabled to break out of one cultural specific native model of reality (one variant of our “inner eyes”) and make the transition from one Foucauldian *episteme*, from one founding and behaviour-regulating narrative, to another? In other words, how can we marry our thought so that we can now pose the questions whose answers can resolve the plight of the Jobless archipelagoes,

the N.H.I. categories, and the environment?

The answer to both will necessarily call for us to move beyond the Absolutism of our present economic categories, as in the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries the lay humanists of Europe moved beyond that of the *theological* categories of Scholasticism; and the nineteenth century Classical economists moved beyond that of the *political* categories of the earlier epistemological order. For Legesse defines his explanatory key in the *new* terms of *culture-systemic categories* which move outside the logic of our present mode of subjective understanding, based on the concept of the human as a purely natural organism which can pre-exist the culturally instituted and “sanctified universe of obligation” by means of which we are alone “socialized” as inter-altruistically bonded mode of symbolic “kin;” and therefore as specific modes of the sociogenic subject [Fanon, 1964] and of systemic sociality [Campbell, 1982]. Legesse suggests that the cognitive escape hatch is always to be found in the category of the *liminal*. This is the category whose rule-governed negation, institutes a principle of difference from which both the optimal criterion of being and the “fake” mode of similarity or of unanimity [Girard, 1986], on which each order can alone institute itself as a living system, are dynamically generated. Whether that of the “fallen” lay humanists of medieval Europe, who were negatively represented as being “enslaved to Original Sin” unlike the celibate Clergy who were as such, the guardians of the mainstream system of Scholastic knowledge, or, in the case of the peoples of African and Afro-mixed descent as the category of the Human Other, represented as enslaved to its dysselected evolutionary origins and whose physiognomic distance from “normal” being, provides the genetic principle of *difference and similarity* which bonds all *Whites*, and increasingly non- Blacks, non-Whites at the level of *race*, and of *all* middle class subjects at the level of *class*. Most crucially of course, since the Sixties the liminal category of *les damnés*, i.e. the N.H.I. category of South Central Los Angeles whose doubled pariah status as Poor/Jobless and Black, has come to serve a central systemic function for the now Post-Industrial nation-state order of the United States.

Because the negative proscription of the *liminal* category, is the very condition of each human order's functioning as an organizationally and cognitively closed self-regulating or autopoietic system [Maturana and Varela, 1980], the premise of this category's proscription is central to the "ground" from which the "regimes of truth" of each epistemological order and its disciplinary paradigms are rule-governedly generated. The liminal category's empirical exclusion, like that of the exclusion of the inner city ghetto of South Central Los Angeles, *is therefore a condition of each order's "truth."*

It is only when such a category moves out of its negated place, therefore, that the grammarians of an order (as in the case where the lay humanists intelligentsia refused their liminal role in the Scholastic system of knowledge), can be freed from their system-maintaining "structural models" and prescriptive categories.

For it is precisely, Legesse argues, out of the field of dynamic interaction between "the generalized horizon of understanding" or "inner eyes" put in place by the prescriptive categories of all culture-specific orders of knowledge, and the empirical on-the-ground process to which the collective behaviours of each order's subjects, as oriented by these prescriptive categories, give rise, that there emerges the liminal category which, in its thrust towards emancipation from its systemic role can serve to "remind us that we need not forever remain prisoners of our prescriptions." Since by its very movement out of its proscribed place, as in the uprising that followed on the Simi Valley jurors' acquittal of the policemen "Nigger-breakers" - such a category generates *conscious* change in all subjects, by *exposing all the injustices inherent in structure*; and again, like the N.H.I. category of South Central Los Angeles, in two days of rage, "by creating a real contradiction between structure and anti-structure, social order and man-made anarchy," epistemological orders and new modes of knowing.

THE SPEECH OF THE STREET? OR THE SPEECH OF A SCIENTIFIC HUMANISM?: TOWARDS THE REWRITING OF KNOWLEDGE

In a 1984 essay, I had proposed that the task of Black Studies, together with those of all the other New Studies that had also entered academia in the wake of the Sixties uprisings, should be that of rewriting knowledge. I had proposed then that we should attempt to do so in the terms of the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela's new insights into the rules which govern the ways in which humans can and do know the social reality of which they are always already socialized subjects [Frantz Fanon, 1963]. I had then cited Sir Stafford Beer's argument (who wrote the introduction to their book) to this effect. Beer, as I wrote then had argued that "contemporary scholarship is trapped in its present organization of knowledge" in which, anyone "who can lay claim to knowledge about some categorized bit of the world, however tiny, which is greater than anyone else's knowledge of that bit, is safe for life." As a result, "while papers increase exponentially, and knowledge grows by infinitesimals, our understanding of the world actually recedes." Consequently, "because our world is an interacting system in dynamic change, our system of scholarship rooted in its own sanctified categories, is in a large part, unavailing to the needs of mankind." If, Beer concluded, "we are to understand a newer and still evolving world; if we are to educate people to live in that world; if we are to abandon categories and institutions that belong to a vanished world as it is well nigh desperate that we should... then knowledge must be rewritten."

My proposal did not get very far then. After Los Angeles, however, both the times and the situation have changed. Hence my open letter to you. St. Clair Drake, one of the founders of the Afro-American Studies Program at Stanford, always pointed out to students that there were "street tasks" and intellectual tasks. To extrapolate from Drake, there is street speech and intellectual speech. It is not

unfair to say that the recent Los Angeles example of the street tasks and street speech of a “captive population” imposing its will upon the city and the State *by the only means* it had available, took place *in the absence* of that new Post-Industrial and post nation-state speech or order of knowledge which it was the collective task of all the New “lay” Studies to have effected in the wake of the Sixties; in the wake of those first urban uprisings therefore which challenged the “Truth” of our present *episteme*.

The eruption of the N.H.I./liminal category in South Central Los Angeles has again opened a horizon from which to spearhead the speech of a new frontier of knowledge able to move us toward a new, correlated human species, and eco-systemic, ethic. Such a new horizon, I propose, will also find itself convergent with other horizons being opened up, at all levels of learning - as for example in the case of the new sciences of complexity related to the rise of the computer as Heinz Pagels points out in his 1988 book *The Dreams of Reason*. It is this convergence that will make it possible for us to understand the rules governing our human modes of perception and the behaviours to which they lead - as in the case of the *misrecognition of human kinship* expressed in the N.H.I. acronym, in the beating, and the verdict, as well as in the systemic condemnation of all the Rodney Kings, and of the global Poor and Jobless, to the futility and misery of the lives they live, as the price paid for *our* well-being. It is only by this mutation of knowledge that we shall be able to secure, as a species, the full dimensions of our human autonomy with respect to the systemic and always narratively instituted purposes that have hitherto governed us - hitherto outside of our conscious awareness and consensual intentionality.

“I believe,” Pagels wrote at the end of his book, “that the most dramatic impact of the new sciences will be to narrow the gap between the natural and the human world. For as we come to grasp the management of complexity, the rich structures of symbols, and perhaps consciousness itself, it is clear that the traditional barriers - barriers erected on both sides - between natural science and

the humanities cannot forever be maintained. The narrative order of culturally constructed worlds, the order of human feeling and beliefs, will become subject to scientific description in a new way. Just as it did during the Italian Renaissance, a new image of humanity will emerge in the future as science and art interact in the complementary spheres... I continue to believe that the distant day will come when the order of human affairs is not entirely established by domination” [Pagels, 1988].

The point of this letter is to propose that the coming of that distant day, and the end, therefore, of the need for the violent speech of the inner city streets, is up to us.

The starving fellah, (or the jobless inner city N.H.I., the global New Poor or *les damnés*), Fanon pointed out, does not have to *inquire into the truth*. He *is*, they *are*, the Truth. It is we who institute this “Truth.” We must now undo their narratively condemned status.

I am Sincerely yours,

Sylvia Wynter Professor, Afro-American Studies

May, 1992

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(The Healing Theology of Baby Suggs, holy)

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ‘cause they don’t love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don’t love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I’m telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they don not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they’d just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.”

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987

Negotizing in Five or How to Write a Black Poem

By Dawn Lundy Martin

One: Formlessness.

One enters an unforgiving, inchoate world. No mold to make, fossilizing. Here is the secret: I cannot tell you because it is not known. My fingers obtund with effort. One asks about stuff, considers what comes next, is maddened by possibility. Some castigating black marks condition the body, soften the skin, open into sepulcher. But the body will not be buried there. It will put down a thing on a page, emancipated [nearly] by the imagination.

Two: Mutilation.

Hands are scarred, almost dead. You bleed from the knees, ruddy. Feebly scratch out signs including “as if.” You are on the floor. You plead. You make filth. What to bare out? What to pitchfork? You want to be rid of the black. And you want to embrace the black. You write “grandmother” and cross it out. You peel. You acknowledge the pain of peeling. You are hollowing in, coarse carving a sound to resemble that which must be said. You drag your canvas over and finally write with whatever fluid has spilled.

Three: Sing a song that cannot be sung.

A maw. A silence. It wanted to say, I am, but said instead, it was. Noted the skin’s purple hue, fell into longing, thought of what was made and what was done. Went to speak and said, sith sith, and then, mmmoss. Finger pointed at the body and then at the sun, realized nothing and fell again taciturn. There was, too, a craving: a stale remembrance that came a jolting. A hard feeling, a swallowed rock. Wanted to wrench a cavity and pull, expose the stone, as if I could, but could not.

Four: I/M/A/G/E

Tell me—I am telling you—the scent of your coming down, breath already at my belly button, easing. Or, the black room of terror that you half-recall, half-invent. Tell me of the exact moment you

slashed through your surprisingly tough skin with a pocket knife and how it felt like rain. I want to tell you about the splitting, of a female body—how I squeezed into it—fitting barely, of the texture of melancholy, of a sycophantic love, draw a flicker for you, let you enter as if entering me.

Five: Completion cleaved.

All that has been spoken. All that threatens the legitimacy of that which is attempting to be said. Phonemic struggle—I'll call it a precursor to blathering. Scintilla. Something dragged in the said. An ocean of debris. In the instants before arrivals some things happened. What is perpetually almost, spilling off its imagined page, signaling an infinite number of openings, leakages, stuck tongues. Blath, said by mistake, and begun again. Bath, said clearly. But, in the end, blath returned more persistently [unofficially], because it was dirty.