Blues Liberation

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical narrative of the theoretical struggles in African American literary theories based on Houston A. Baker Jr.'s concept of "generational shift" which in turn originates from Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm. The narrative begins with "Integrationist Poetics" of the late fifties and early sixties, which was then replaced by the Black Aesthetic of the late sixties and early seventies. In the late seventies, the "Reconstructionist Poetics" emerged to dominate the African American critical scene, while the Black Aesthetic began to lose its theoretical hegemony. The narrative seems to suggest an oedipal struggle in which the previous generation of critics were forced out of the scene as the result of paradigm shift.

In his attempt at critical revisionism, Baker suggests the term "blues liberation" to describe the process in which an African American literary critic engages in critical struggles to gain the freedom of action that promises him/her the manifold range of theoretical persuasions and investigative approaches. S/he is then a blues critic who, though bound by institutional world of discourse, is free "to hypothesize and respect meanings that have previously been 'unthinkable.'" Apart from recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of Baker's notion of blues liberation, this paper also explores the cultural logic upon which his project of periodizing African American literary criticism is based. Michel Foucault's concept of "cultural totalities" and Fredric Jameson's idea of "total system" are deployed to explain

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away Baker's oversimplifying chronology of African American critical industries.

Blues liberation does not aim at offering another paradigm in African American criticism. It involves a liberation from any dominant critical discourse, especially one which is informed by parochial nationalism or forms of essentialism. This is also a process in which a black critic is inspired to explore dimensions of African American expressive culture that has long been ignored or repressed.

Keywords: paradigm, oedipal struggle, critical revisionism, cultural totalities, total system

Communality, or, The Implications of the Theory of Paradigms

The notion of "generational shift," according to Houston A. Baker, Jr., is "an ideologically motivated movement overseen by young or newly emergent intellectuals dedicated to refuting the work of their intellectual predecessors and to establishing a new framework for intellectual inquiry" (Baker, 1984: 67). Baker points out at the same time that the notion actually originates from Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of paradigms: "a new set of guiding assumptions that unifies an intellectual community" (Baker, 1984: 67). This is no place to discuss Kuhn's theory in depth and in length; to put it summarily, Kuhn argues that paradigms are "a set of recurrent and quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational, and instrumental applications." The paradigms of a scientific community are usually "revealed in its textbooks, lectures, and laboratory exercises. By studying them and by practicing with them, the members of the corresponding community learn their trade" (Kuhn, 1970: 43). Paradigms are then a set of common consensuses, including basic assumptions, approaches, etc., accepted by the members of a certain scientific community in their scientific investigations. The science founded on or developed according to these paradigmatic assumptions and approaches is known as a "normal science." The work of a normal scientist is to solve all the scientific puzzles based on the design of paradigms, and Kuhn calls the scientist who succeeds in deciphering the puzzles a "puzzle-solver."

Challenges of the scientific puzzles are what motivate the scientists to forge ahead (Kuhn, 1970: 35-37). Kuhn's discourse offers an explanation to the formation of scientific revolution, which is the consequence of paradigm shifts. As Kuhn argues, despite the many efforts of the scientists, there are puzzles that cannot be solved by the rules of the existing paradigm. These puzzles will then constitute an anomaly. In general, an anomaly may not necessarily pose an immediate threat to or bring about a crisis in the current paradigm. On the contrary, Kuhn thinks that, more often than not, scientific discoveries may result from the scientists' awareness of the anomalous phenomena. However, if the anomalies begin to problematize the basic assumptions of the existing paradigm, or if the anomalies are in great abundance, the members of the same scientific community will then become skeptical about the existing paradigm. The fact may result in a crisis of the

paradigm.　To mediate the crisis, scientists will have to modify the existing paradigm; they may even have to offer new perspectives and new approaches, and to create new vocabularies in order to challenge the existing paradigm.　This may lead to the birth of a new paradigm and the collapse of the old one.　The new paradigm also marks the beginning of a new normal science.　Hence, the completion of the scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1970: 52-76).

　　Baker sees in Kuhn's theory a tropological vehicle, "a useful tool for the sociology of knowledge," because Kuhn's theory has wrought "a basic change in our ways of conceptualizing the nature of any epistemological revolution" (Baker, 1984: 76).　In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, he analyzes the validity of the Kuhnian model of paradigm shift in the study of African American critical history.　As he puts it, the paradigm theory's "focus on community determination . . . and gestalt-like perceptual shifts make [Kuhn's] trope . . . quite suggestive for the sociology of Afro-American literary-theoretical practice" (Baker, 1984: 76), the former referring to an identifiable professional community and the latter emphasizing the unity of community experience. Obviously, what lies behind Kuhn's trope of paradigms is a master code: communality.　And this is perhaps what makes Kuhn's model most pertinent to the study of African American literary-theoretical discourse: owing to the unique history of black people in the United States, African American literary-critical discourse has always been saliently characterized by communality, a communal or collective consciousness.　In an interview with Jerry W. Ward, Jr., Baker succinctly suggests the heuristic value of Kuhn's model in studying African American literature and criticism:

> [M]y notion is that paradigms always guide theoretical endeavors, and I like to think of theoreticians who are addressing themselves to a particular set of problems or puzzles, and who are doing it on the basis of agreed-upon exemplars, as people who share a common paradigm.　The notion, in this sense, I suppose, implies a particular theoretical outlook: On the other side of a paradigm shift you would have another community of scholars who would look at "the same" object and see something entirely different.　When I use paradigm, I use it in the sense of a guiding perceptual orientation that often ushers into the world new objects.　I don't think you can have theoretical inquiry without a paradigm that guides that inquiry. (Ward, 1982: 54)

The emphasis on communality, or the communal sense of paradigm, allows Baker to turn the meaning of "generation" into something more than temporal. It is also a spatial term, referring in particular to a community sharing a common paradigm. To speak of a generation is then to speak of a community insisting on a common paradigm.

Narrating the Critical Struggles

According to Baker, African American literary-critical discourse of the post-Harlem Renaissance period has undergone at least two generational shifts. The first generational shift took place in the mid-sixties when "Integrationist Poetics" popular in the late fifties and early sixties was gradually replaced by the Black Aesthetic. In the late seventies, there was another generational shift, with what Baker calls the "Reconstructionist Poetics" replacing the Black Aesthetic.

The basic concerns of Integrationist Poetics are expressed in the literary-critical assumptions of Richard Wright and Arthur P. Davis. Based on various social indicators involving changes in racial relations, Integrationist Poetics optimistically believes that African American literature will eventually be incorporated into mainstream literature and become part of Anglo-American literature. The Supreme Court's 1954 rule in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* made it clear for the first time that the so-called "separate but equal" practice was against the spirit of equality and therefore unconstitutional. The Integrationists expect the decision to lead to desegregation in social life and redefinition of racial relations in American society. In his essay "The Literature of the Negro in the United States," Wright optimistically points out that equality between black and white people is to be expected. Translated culturally, the decision of the Supreme Court will also provide an opportunity to allow African American literature to be treated equally by the mainstream of American literature. In Wright's own words, "[n]aturally this effort on the part of the American nation to assimilate the Negro has had its effect upon Negro literary expression" (Wright, 1964: 148). However, Wright also recognizes that this mutation will occur only at the narcissistic level of African American literature, viz. the more self-conscious level of African American writing. As for what he calls "the forms of things unknown" in African American culture, those popular and vernacular forms of African American expressive culture, Wright feels

rather pessimistic about the possibility of their merging with mainstream culture because these forms conspicuously involve the cultural identity of African American expressivity.

Davis is another Integrationist critic working prior to Wright. Like Wright, Davis sees in social indicators hints of optimism, and strongly believes in "a oneness of all Americans and a harmonious merger of disparate forms of American creative expression" (Baker, 1984: 69). In 1941, Davis co-edited with Sterling A. Brown and Ulysses Lee *The Negro Caravan: Writing by American Negroes*, an anthology of African American writing with a strong integrationist sentiment. In their "Introduction" to the anthology, they indicate that "writings by Negroes do not seem . . . to fall into a unique cultural pattern. Negro writers have adopted the literary traditions that seemed useful for their purposes. They have therefore been influenced by Puritan didacticism, sentimental humanitarianism, local color, regionalism, realism, naturalism, and experimentalism. . . . The bonds of literary tradition seem to be stronger than race" (Davis, Brown and Lee, 1941: 6-7). They also dismiss the notion of "Negro literature" as inappropriate because the expression "has no application if it means structural peculiarity, or a Negro school of writing." For one thing, "[t]he Negro writes in the forms evolved in English and American literature." They thus consider "Negro writers to be American writers, and literature by American Negroes to be a segment of American literature" (Davis, Brown and Lee, 1941: 7). For Davis and other Integrationist critics, the expression "Negro literature" is void of legitimacy. To participate in the melting pot of American literature and to bring about "a harmonious merger of disparate forms of American creative expression," it is imperative that African American literature surrender its "structural peculiarity" and suppress its own cultural identity. Integrationist Poetics is an obvious product of the melting pot ideology, wishfully believing in the "oneness" of American society. As Baker argues, the Integrationists' optimisim founded on various social indicators, such as desegregation, suggests that they read "documentary statements of ideals as positive signs of a promised land to come" (Baker, 1984: 69). Furthermore, for Integrationists like Davis, the process of literary integration will necessarily involve self-effacement, that is, to be co-opted by the dominant western literary canon.

Integrationist Poetics also asserts that all literary works, whether by black or white writers, must be judged in accordance with "a single standard of criticism." For those Integrationists, "[t]hat Negroes in America have had a hard time, and that inside stories of Negro life often present unusual and attractive reading matter are

incontrovertible facts; but when they enter literary criticism these facts do damage to both the critics and the artists." They thus remind and urge African American writers to demand that "their books be judged as books, without sentimental allowances. In their own defense they must demand a single standard of criticism" (Davis, Brown and Lee, 1941: 7). The assertion also implies that there exists in American literary criticism a critical norm: African American writers must embrace such a norm in their literary production, so must critics in their critical investigations. However, this is also where the core of the problem lies. As Baker rightly criticizes, for many years this literary norm was molded exclusively by "a small community" labeled in the 1960's by black writers and artists as the "white literary-critical establishment" (Baker, 1984: 71). This group includes critics such as T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, F. O. Matthiessen, Cleanth Brooks, Northrop Frye, M. H. Abrams, and Paul de Man, whom Cornel West refers to as "[t]he major Western male literary canonizers of our century" (West, 1987: 193). African American writers are then compelled to suppress their literary and cultural identity in order to live up to the literary standard set down by this "white literary-critical establishment." This act of self-suppression is necessary if they are to enter and to be accepted by the American literary scene envisioned by the literary Integrationists.

If Integrationist Poetics aims at effacing the specificity of African American literature, the Black Aesthetic developed after the mid-sixties endeavors to do the opposite by foregrounding this specificity. Politically affiliated with the Black Power Movement, the Black Aesthetic was part of the Black Arts Movement. The cultural politics of African America after the mid-sixties involved assertion of black American social-political autonomy through cultural practices, and the master code underlying these practices was the black cultural nationalism which emerged prominently during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. Imamu Amiri Baraka, one of the prominent Black Aestheticians, has argued that the major concern of black nationalism is "the development of self" (Baraka, 1969: 105). Driven by such an impulse, the black artist, "in this context, is desperately needed to change the images his people identify with, by asserting Black feeling, Black mind, Black judgment. The Black intellectual, in this same context, is needed to change the interpretation of facts toward the Black Man's best interests, instead of merely tagging along reciting white judgments of the world" (Baraka, 1991: 167). Obviously, the Black Aesthetic was a product of such a cultural politics, and it is because of this cultural politics that the Black Aesthetic emphasizes the primacy of ethnicity and communality in African American literary and cultural production. This fact may explain why Baraka later

turns to the world of the masses to look for what Wright calls "the forms of things unknown" and even to Marxism for political and ideological empowerment.

The social-political reality of the United States after the mid-sixties turned the optimism of those Integrationists into something irrelevant. To be more precise, in the beginning the Black Aesthetic was not formulated as an oppositional discourse of Integrationist Poetics. "The ideological environment in which Black Aesthetic discourse emerged was one in which other race specific texts of the period were marked by a singular priority: social and political empowerment of Black Americans" (Butler-Evans, 1988-89: 21). This is to say that the Black Aesthetic was born in an ideological environment which favored it and that it soon grew to become the dominant African American literary discourse of the time. As I have suggested, although Integrationist Poetics argues for "a single standard of criticism," this single standard of criticism is in fact normalized and defined according to white aesthetics. In the words of Addison Gayle, Jr., this will result in "the cultural strangulation of Black literature by white critics." Gayle further maintains, "the proponents of a Black Aesthetic . . . call for a set of rules by which Black literature and art is to be judged and evaluated. For the historic practice of bowing to other men's gods and definitions has produced a crisis of the highest magnitude, and brought us, culturally, to the limits of racial armageddon" (Gayle, 1971a: 44). Gayle is a staunch critic of Integrationist Poetics; his critical position remains unchanged even in the later phase of the Black Aesthetic when he urges the black writer to "forgo the assimilationist tradition and redirect his art to the strivings within the race" (Gayle, 1971b: 418). This is how Larry Neal, another major figure in the Black Aesthetic movement, outlines the critical intention of the Black Aesthetic:

> The motive behind the black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an ethics which asks the question: Whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors? What is truth? Or more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? (Neal, 1989: 64).

The critical legacy of Stephen Henderson, another eminent Black Aesthetician, should also be accorded a place of central importance in the enterprise of the Black Aesthetic. Baker regards Henderson's critical project as one seeking to establish "a kind of cultural holism," which suggests "an interconnectedness . . . of

Afro-American cultural discourse" (Baker, 1984: 78).   To put it simply, in Henderson's own words, "we must not consider the poem in isolation but in relationship to the reader/audience, and the reader to the wider context of the phenomenon which we call, for the sake of convenience, the Black Experience" (Henderson, 1973: 62).   For Henderson, "the Black Experience" is in fact the basic element that constitutes the essence of blackness: "the recognition of Blackness in poetry is a value judgment which on certain levels and in certain instances, notably in matters of meaning that go beyond questions of structure and theme, must rest upon one's immersion in the totality of the Black Experience.   It means that the ultimate criteria for critical evaluation must be found in the sources of the creation, that is, in the Black Community itself" (Henderson, 1973: 65-66).   What the Black Aesthetic tries to cultivate is, therefore, a desire now generally known as Afrocentrism.   Blackness, in this context, as Baker argues, "came to signify a historical, experiential, and artistic reality that provided a unique cachet for black people's art and culture" (Baker, 1990: xiv).   To sum up briefly, the Black Aesthetic aims, on the one hand, to expose the hypocrisy and hence falsehood of the myth of white supremacy, and to excavate and promote, on the other, the immense artistic and cultural legacy of African America that has long been ignored or repressed.

In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, Baker outlines the project of the Black Aesthetic by recapitulating the basic critical ideas of Baraka, Neal, and Henderson.   Interestingly, the early phase of Baker's own critical project also testifies to his nexus with the Black Aestheticians.   In his *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for example, places Baker among critics like Gayle and Henderson in his discussion of the critical legacy of the Black Aesthetic.   Gates notes that "the notions implicit and explicit in Henderson's ideas were shared by Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Addison Gayle as well" (Gates, 1987: 35).   Baker himself, too, has never disclaimed his critical stance as a black cultural nationalist.   As he claims in his "Introduction" to the paperback edition of his *Singers of Daybreak: Studies in Black American Literature*, "once I had abandoned my graduate school plan to write definitive critiques of British Victorian literature and had turned to black American literature and culture, 'cultural nationalism' has become the ideologically-determined project in my intellectual life" (Baker, 1983: xiv). In his "Introduction" to the 1990 paperback edition of his *Long Black Song: Essays in Black Literature and Culture*, Baker again maintains that "Black cultural nationalism—particularly as codified in the black arts and black aesthetic movement—provided the main frame for *Long Black Song*'s analyses"

(Baker, 1990: xiv). Baker strongly believes in the critical benefits of the black cultural nationalist project. "One of the singular benefits of that project," he points out, "was its success in promoting black American culture to the status of an 'academically respectable' subject for study. In a sense, it gave a local habitation and a name to an enterprise that currently provides work for a large group of American scholars." The project's second benefit "was its iconoclasm; one which shattered traditional verities with brash confidence and provided conditions of existence for a radically modified establishment" (Baker, 1983: xx).

In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, the Black Aesthetic is referred to as "romantic Marxism," the core of which, as I have already suggested, is an essence known as blackness, "a reality accessible only to those who can 'imagine' in uniquely black way." Essentially exclusionary in its orientation, the Black Aesthetic, Baker suggests, is "a kind of impressionistic chauvinism." It is "a closed circle" because it will lead to the belief that "*only* the black imagination can . . . experience blackness, in poetry, or in life" (Baker, 1984: 81, original italics). Despite all this, the critical contributions of the Black Aesthetic in bringing about "generational shifts" and new paradigms in African American literary discourse are historically significant. "It changed the meaning of both 'black' and 'aesthetic' in the universe of American literary-critical discourse so that these terms could continue to make 'useful distinctions' in a world where Afro-American expressive products had come to be seen quite differently from the manner in which they were perceived by an older integrationist paradigm" (Baker, 1984: 81).

The limitations of the Black Aesthetic are understandable. As early as the mid-seventies, Baker had already called our attention to these limitations. He urges the Black Aestheticians, first, to pay attention to the multiple levels of historical evidences and seek these evidences especially in literary texts; second, to shift their focus from history to the specificity of black language; third, to forsake many of their conceptual prejudices; and fourth, to recognize the broad boundaries of black America since African American literary industry can be found in the cities as well as the villages and small towns (Baker, 1983: 56-57). In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, he indirectly criticizes the Black Aesthetic with particular reference to Neal's critical project. First, he regards the Black Aesthetic as a distorted form of Marxist literary theory; class consciousness, the master code of Marxism, for example, is replaced by race consciousness in the Black Aesthetic. Second, he laments that, since the Black Aesthetic is under the ideological influence of the Black Power movement, it has become a branch of political struggles and

social revolution; literature is thus forced to surrender its autonomy to political expediency. And third, he criticizes the Black Aesthetic for overlooking the form and structure of literature while placing extensive emphasis on the contents and contexts of the literary products (Baker, 1984: 85-86).

The limitations of the Black Aesthetic had become all too clear by the mid-seventies, and a number of its theorists had begun to reflect upon and, revise their positions. The biggest challenge came from those literary critics and historians working in the academy. Socially and economically, the black middle class began to emerge after the civil rights movement, providing "conditions for the appearance of Afro-American critics who have adopted the postures, standards, and vocabularies of their white compeers" (Baker, 1984: 88). Baker calls these newly emergent African American critics the reconstructionists. Here is how he sums up the pivotal differences between the Black Aestheticians and the reconstructionists:

> One result of a class-oriented professionalism among Afro-American literary scholars has been a sometimes uncritical imposition upon Afro-American expressive culture of theories and theoretical terminologies borrowed from prominent white scholars. When such borrowings occurred among the reconstructionist scholars who displaced the Black Aesthetic movement, the results were sometimes less than favorable for the course of Afro-American literary study. Instead of furthering the vernacular-oriented mode of analysis suggested by the higher-order arguments of a previous generation, the emergent reconstructionist generation chose to posit Afro-American "literature" as an *autonomous cultural domain* and to criticize this literature in terms "alien" to the implicitly vernacular approach of the Black Aesthetic. Rather than attempting to assess the merits of the Black Aesthetic's methodological assumptions, the reconstructionists adopted the "professional" assumptions (and attendant jargon) of the world of white, academic literary criticism. (Baker, 1984: 88-89, original italics)

The term "reconstructionist" obviously originated in the workshops of the 1977 Modern Language Association/National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar held at Yale University on the teaching and research of African American literature. The essays presented at the seminar later formed the volume entitled *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*, edited by Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto. Baker labels the volume "the handbook of the new

generation" (Baker, 1984: 90) and bases his discussions of the basic tenets of the reconstructionist project on the critical works of Stepto and Gates. In general, the aim of the reconstructionist project is two-fold: on the one hand, the project purposely suppresses the social-political dimension of African American literature in order to assert literary autonomy; on the other hand, it works to recuperate the formal and structural—especially linguistic—components of African American literary products. The project thus chooses to ignore the themes and contexts of African American literary works. As the editors of *Afro-American Literature* argue, the volume is consciously concerned with rejecting "the extraliterary values, ideas, and pedagogical constructions that have plagued the teaching of the literature" (Fisher and Stepto, 1978: 2).

The three papers by Gates that are included in the volume show signs of his early formalist and structuralist phase. The apparent politics of these papers, whether in the form of theoretical investigations or of critical practices, is to liberate African American literature from its identity as a social document. Gates captures in one line the profound concern of these papers: "black literature is a verbal art like other verbal arts" (Gates, 1978: 67). He ends his "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext" by elaborating on this major concern: "We urgently need to direct our attention to the nature of black figurative language, to the nature of black narrative forms, to the history and theory of Afro-American literary criticism, to the fundamental unity and form of content, and to the arbitrary relations between the sign and its referent" (Gates, 1978: 68). Later in his "Introduction" to *Figures in Black*, Gates admits that these papers "were polemics for formalism and structuralism as useful methods for explicating Afro-American literature" (Gates, 1987: xxviii).

Apparently, the focused issue for the reconstructionist project is the literariness and textuality of African American literature. In his attempt to compare the theoretical positions of the Black Aesthetic and the reconstructionist project, Baker rightly notes: "While the Black Aesthetic was concerned to determine how the commodity 'blackness' shaped an Afro-American expressive domain, the emergent reconstructionist paradigm attempted to discover how qualities of a 'literary' domain shaped Afro-American life *as a whole*" (Baker, 1984: 91, original italics). He therefore criticizes the reconstructionists for trying to look for "a 'literary' conceptual scheme for apprehending Afro-American culture" (Baker, 1984: 92), especially those folkloric and vernacular forms Wright calls "the forms of things unknown." He cites Gates as an example, dismissing Gates for his literary elitism and

professionalism because he overlooks "the mass or vernacular level of Afro-America" and "seems to feel no obligation to turn to Afro-American folklore" (Baker, 1984: 103). He even disagrees with Gates about the nature of a literary text. For Gates, a "literary text is a linguistic event; its explication must be an activity of close textual analysis" (Gates, 1978: 68). Gates's emphasis on the textuality of a text of course goes well with his formalist and structuralist position. Baker, on the other hand, denies that a text "constitutes an event." He writes:

> It is, rather, the reading or performance by human beings of a kind of score . . . that constitutes *the event* and, in the process, produces (or reproduces) a meaningful text. And the observer, or critic, who wishes to analyze such a text must have a knowledge of far more than the lexicon of the performers. He should, it seems to me, have at least some theoretically adequate notions of the entire array of cultural forces which shape the performer's cognition, allowing him to actualize a "text" as one instance of a distinct cultural semantics. (Baker, 1984: 104, original italics)

Despite their disagreements, Baker praises Stepto and Gates for their efforts and contributions in attempting to incorporate African American literature into "a contemporary universe of literary-theorectical discourse" (Baker, 1984: 106).

Blues Liberation

Baker's critical narrative, as recapitulated here in a rather abbreviated form, presents a story of family struggles between different generations of African American literary critics. It is a story in which the younger generation of critics engage in an oedipal struggle to replace those of the previous generation. But as the story discloses, no matter how each generation of African American critics position themselves, they are bound to define their positions relative to white taste: the dominant white critical norm is always already present and the whole question of positioning for each generation of African American critics hinges upon their relationship to the white power in American society.

In his critical narrative Baker also reveals his close kinship with the Black Aestheticians. As he himself puts it, where theoretical investigations are concerned, his own preference is "the kind of holistic, cultural-anthropological approach implicit

in the work of Henderson and other spokemen [*sic*] for the Black Aesthetic." He calls this theoretical project the anthropology of art. "The guiding assumption of the anthropology of art," he says, "is coexistensive with basic tenets of the Black Aesthetic insofar as both assert that works of Afro-American expressive culture cannot be adequately understood unless they are contextualized within the interdependent systems of Afro-American culture" (Baker, 1984:109). In an earlier paper, "A Note on Style and the Anthropology of Art," Baker spells out what is assumed to be ideal for his project with an emphasis on the "relationships between cultural style and artistic expression, between cultural contexts and artistic texts." As a way to negotiate among different schools of African American criticism, he calls our attention to the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary nature of his theoretical project: "If art is a function of cultural style, then methods and models from many disciplines are required in order to reveal essential rules of style and their signal role in artistic creation and response." This is to recognize that "art is one system in a complex network of interrelated cultural systems" (Baker, 1980: 30).

For Baker, an ideal African American literary critic is a blues critic, "one versed in the vernacular and unconstrained by traditional historical determinants," a properly trained critic who is "able to discover blues inscriptions and liberating rhythms even in some familiarly neglected works of Afro-American expressive culture" (Baker, 1984: 115). A blues critic, furthermore, is one who is unlikely to be constrained by "a single standard of criticism." Ideally, a blues critic "is bound to engage terms of a traditional historical criticism in order to demonstrate its limitations. At the same time, he is free to move decisively beyond the inadequacies of a past historical criticism and engage Afro-American expressive texts in their full symbolic potency" (Baker, 1984: 117). This "symbolic action of freedom" a blues critic enjoys is what Baker calls "a kind of blues liberation." This means that a blues critic, though bound by an institutional world of discourse, is free to "hypothesize and represent meanings that have previously been 'unthinkable'" (Baker, 1984: 138).

Apparently, in his theoretical project, Baker attempts to deploy the blues as a critical tool to negotiate what he calls the economics of slavery and African American expressive culture. He cites the blues singer Booker White to say, "the foundation of the blues is walking behind the mule way back in slavery time" (Baker, 1984: 188). He movingly explains:

Originating in the field hollers and work songs of the agrarian South and

becoming codified as stable forms by the second decade of the twentieth century, the blues offer a language that connotes a world of transience, instability, hard luck, brutalizing work, lost love, minimal security, and enduring human wit and resourcefulness in the face of disaster.   The blues enjoin one to accept hard luck because, without it, there is "no luck al all." (Baker, 1984: 188)

The blues world thus provides a circumstance in which the traditional code of African American culture takes on contemporary—rather Barthean or Derridian—meanings since linguistically the blues connote a world of uncertainty and instability.   A black blues life, under the tyranny of the economics of slavery, is a life of lack, expressed in the form of fear, poverty, ignorance, helplessness, restless moving, futile seeking, meaningless pain and endless suffering, as Baker's reading of Wright's *Black Boy* suggests (Baker, 1984: 146).   This is a life structured upon desire, a form of consciousness that helps free African Americans from the helplessness and meaninglessness of life.   This also goes back to "the idea of liberation," as Henderson puts it, that collective consciousness of African America (Henderson, 1973: 18).

Periodizing African American Literary-theoretical Discourse

I have already pointed out that Baker's notion of "generational shift," as a period term, is based generally on the family struggles in African American critical discourse.   For the feminist critic Elaine Showalter, this period term raises a number of problems.   Showalter praises Baker's contribution as "the most important and coherent account we have of the black critical revolution," but she also argues that, first of all, "critics cannot be assigned to generations with any precision. . . . The shifts within the critical fields, moreover, cannot be seen simply in generational terms, since in the humanities, intelligent people often transform and revise their theoretical positions in the light of new ideas, rather than stubbornly clinging to their original paradigms unto death."   The second problem with Baker's notion of "generational shift," Showalter contends, is that "it does not take sufficient account of gender, and of the role of black women in shaping both literary and critical discourse" (Showalter, 1989: 350).

Showalter's critiques seem unanswerable. Baker's own critical industry, in fact, may serve well as an excellent example to testify to the possible transformation or evolution of one's critical position "in the light of new ideas." In the last thirty years or so, Baker's critical industry has undergone periodic changes, from his embrace of black cultural nationalism in the early seventies to his acceptance of contemporary critical theories and his emphasis on African American vernacular culture and folkloric tradition in the eighties. This means that it is impossible and certainly inadequate to designate Baker's own critical project to one single generation of theoretical investigations. As Terry Eagleton rightly observes, in every society or period, there remains a general ideology, "a coherent set of 'discourses' of values, representations and beliefs which, realised in certain material apparatuses and related to the structures of material production, so reflect the experiential relations of individual subjects to their social conditions as to guarantee those misconceptions of the 'real' which contribute to the reproduction of the dominant social relations" (Eagleton, 1978: 54). An authorial ideology, overdetermined by a series of distinct biographical factors, including social class, sex, nationality, religion, geographical region and so on, may sometimes enter into conflict with the general, dominant ideology; a writer, therefore, may revise his or her own ideological position so that his or her ideology may be "effectively homologous with the dominant ideology of his or her historical moment" (Eagleton, 1978: 58-59). The converse situation may also be possible. This explains why it is not "always a simple matter to specify the historical period to which a writer belongs; nor does a writer necessarily belong only to one 'history'" (Eagleton, 1978: 59). This understanding of the relations between the general and authorial ideologies also works to describe the theoretical transformations of a critic like Baker, let alone a writer like Baraka, who still holds on to his leftist, revolutionary black cultural nationalism.

Even Shaowalter's second critique, regarding Baker's obvious overlooking of African American feminist criticism, also hardly seems disputable. Baker's paper, "Generational Shifts and the Recent Criticism of Afro-American Literature," which, in its revised version, later became part of *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, was first published in 1981. Baker makes no reference to African American feminist criticism in either version. As a matter of fact, long before the publication of *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, a number of black feminist writers and critics had already actively and vehemently striven to have their voices heard. Seminal essays by black feminist writers and critics, including Alice

Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Deborah McDowell's "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," etc., signaled the arrival of African American feminist criticism. This critical-theoretical lacuna, however, was addressed in 1991 with the publication of Baker's *Workings of Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. The book, in his own words, signifies "a theoretical return beginning with definition and debate and leading to a poetics of Afro-American women's expressivity" (Baker, 1991: 37).

Attention may have to be given to the notion of "generational shift" to explain away Baker's failure to take into account the contributions of African American feminist criticism in his *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. In terms of the archaeology of knowledge, a period term like "generational shift" may suffer from what Michel Foucault denounces as "cultural totalities," which often contribute to the formation of a conceptual base for "the search for a total history, in which all the differences of a society might be reduced to a single form, to the organization of a world-view, to the establishment of a system of values, to a coherent type of civilization" (Foucault, 1972: 13). The notion of "spirit," for example, Foucault writes, "enables us to establish between the simultaneous or successive phenomena of a given period a community of meanings, symbolic links, and interplay of resemblance and reflexion, or . . . allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation." The work of an archaeologist of knowledge, therefore, is to "question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset" (Foucault, 1972: 22). Foucault, accordingly, regards the archaeology of knowledge as "a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must totalize them, but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures. Archaeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying effect" (Foucault, 1972: 160). Seen against the Foucauldian archaeology, Baker's notion of "generational shift" appears to be a unifying system, the purpose of which is to totalize different generations of African American critical-theoretical investigations. In practice, in order to foreground the dominant critical discourse of a certain generation, he is inclined to silence or bracket other critical persuasions in existence. This is why in his critical account of the Black Aesthetic, the critical activities of Integrationist Poetics seem suddenly to have come to a stop. Likewise, we hardly witness the critical acts of the Black Aestheticians in his story of the reconstructionist generation,

not to mention those of the black feminist critics.　Baker himself is an avid reader of Foucault; in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, for example, he rightly problematizes the general theoretical assumptions of the traditional American literary history in terms of the Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge.　The problem of cultural totalities should therefore be given due attention when we come to rethink Showalter's critiques of the notion of "generational shift."

I would therefore suggest that the crucial problem associated with Baker's periodization of African American critical-theoretical discourse lies in the process of totalization.　Differences and diversities are erased or suppressed in the process, resulting in what Fredric Jameson calls "total system":

> [A]ny rewarding use of the notion of a historical or cultural period tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, "expresses" some unified inner truth—a world-view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question. (Jameson, 1988: 27)

But Jameson further contends that "the construction of a historical totality necessarily involves the isolation and the privileging of one of the elements *within* that totality . . . such that the element in question becomes a master code or 'inner essence' capable of explicating the other elements or features of the 'whole' in question" (Jameson, 1988: 28).　In periodizing the sixties, for example, Jameson insists that what he means by a "period" is to be understood "not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied response and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits" (Jameson, 1988: 179).　He also deploys such a period concept in his discourse on postmodernism.　For him, postmodernism is not a period style, by rather "a cultural dominant."　Such a conception will allow "for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (Jameson, 1991: 4).　And it is only in the light of such a conception of "a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm that genuine difference could be measured and assessed" (Jameson, 1991: 6).　As a Marxist cultural critic, Jameson has reasons to express his skepticism about contemporary American pluralism.　In his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, he stresses the importance of the

hierarchical relationship among interpretations: while there are strong interpretations, there are also weak ones.   This hierarchical relationship then creates and defines the order of interpretations.   This explains his insistence on seeing postmodernism as a dominant cultural phenomenon.   He says, "If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable" (Jameson, 1991: 6).   It is therefore of theoretical or ideological significance that in the Jamesonian system, historical periodization must be comprehended in accordance with the logic of the cultural dominant.

The Jamesonian cultural logic as expounded above may also be deployed to explain away some of the difficulties associated with Baker's notion of "generational shift."   I begin this paper by briefly tracing the heuristic value of Kuhn's theory of paradigm for Baker's notion of "generational shift."   As Baker sees it, to label a group of critics as belonging to a certain generation simply means that these critics are "a group of people sharing a common paradigm" (Ward, 1982: 54).   In Jameson's terms, these are the critics sharing "an objective situation" and creating a cultural dominant in a certain generation or historical period.   That is to say, the formation of a generation relies on the paradigm or situation underlying the cultural dominant.   We have seen how in periodizing African American literary criticism, Baker carefully outlines the dominant critical discourse of each generation.   What is implied in his discourse is the fact that other suppressed or marginalized critical discourses also coexist with the dominant one.   To understand Baker's notion of "generational shift" in the light of the Jamesonian cultural logic, we find that the notion actually consists of two basic assumptions related to historical representation. One is synchronic, which means that different discourses, whether dominant or not, coexist and hence relate to each other in a certain generation.   The other is diachronic, which suggests that history is a linear process, with one generation succeeding the other in a chronological order.   It is perhaps with this cultural or discursive logic in mind that we are able to grasp the critical significance of Baker's notion of "generational shift."

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藍調解放

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摘　要

　　本文嘗試以非裔美國批評家裴克（Houston A. Baker, Jr.）的「世代嬗遞」觀念，討論美國黑人文學批評內部鬥爭的問題。這場內部鬥爭最早始於一九五〇年代與六〇年代早期的統合詩學。到了六〇年代末期與七〇年代早期，黑人美學取代了統合詩學。可是到了七〇年代晚期，黑人美學霸權不再，重建詩學崛起，主宰了整個非裔美國文學的批評場景。這種伊底帕斯式的家族鬥爭正好可以勾勒過去半個世紀以來非裔美國文學批評的流變史，雖然江山代有才人出，但此家族鬥爭實則是孔恩（Thomas Kuhn）所謂的典範興替造成的結果。

　　裴克以「藍調解放」一辭描述非裔美國文學批評家如何藉批評鬥爭取得理論與方法上的自由。這樣的批評家正是他所謂的藍調批評家。本文除了探討裴克的藍調解放觀念之外，同時也有意釐清美國黑人文學批評斷代史背後的文化邏輯。本文同時借用傅柯（Michel Foucault）的文化總體論觀念以及詹明信（Fredric Jameson）的總體系統理論來說明此文化邏輯。

　　裴克褐櫫藍調解放，目的不在為非裔美國文學批評建立另一個典範。他的用意無非在於將非裔美國文學批評自任何宰制性論述—特別是狹隘的民族主義或不同形式的本質論—中解放出來。

關鍵詞：典範、伊底帕斯式的家族鬥爭、批評修正主義、文化總體論、總體系統

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