國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩 士 論 文

從美學、政治到非裔美國表現文化：
雷夫・艾利森《隱形人》批評之批判

From Aesthetics, Politics to Afro-American Expression:
A Critique of the Criticisms on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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摘　　要

本文主旨在討論艾利森的《隱形人》與非裔美國表現文化之間的連結，並以此為主軸回應六０年代黑人美學中傳承自哈林文藝復興以來美學與政治的難題。藝術與抗議是非裔美國文學史中的重要議題，牽涉到黑人寫作的美學目的和政治目的。本文首先以堯斯（Hans Robert Jauss）的美學接受理論（reception theory）來定義艾利森作為一名強調讀者角色的「生命世界現代主義作家」（life-world modernist）。從現代主義作家，到表意的現代主義作家（signifying modernist），本文提出生命世界現代主義作家不標榜為藝術而藝術，而將藝術釋交給普通讀者，這就是艾利森眼中非裔美國表現文化的特色之一。在此同時，本文也集中評析赫歐（Irving Howe）、倪爾（Larry Neal）與蓋爾（Addison Gayle）三位批評家對《隱形人》的負面批評說明他們的政治意圖掩蓋了《隱形人》中的「不明事物的諸形式」（the forms of things unknown），也就是非裔美國表現文化，而其正是艾利森不願將《隱形人》化約為抗議文學（protest writing）的首要因素。本文最後以分析《隱形人》來強調艾利森透過他自身所經驗的表現文化形式在小說中體現了黑人獨特的生命世界，也抗拒了美學與政治對非裔美國表現文化的物質化（materialize）。對艾利森而言，書寫的目的在於向讀者訴說對生命世界的經驗本身，而非為藝術或為抗議。以非裔美國表現文化回歸黑人的生命世界，《隱形人》跨越了六０年代黑人美學中美學與政治的二元對立。

關鍵詞：艾利森、《隱形人》、美學接受理論、黑人美學、藝術與抗議、非裔美國表現文化

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ABSTRACT

This thesis mainly discusses the linkage between Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Afro-American expression to explore the aporia of aesthetics and politics in the Black Aesthetic of the 1960s since the Harlem renaissance. Art and protest in the history of Afro-American literature is an inherent issue, and it engages the aesthetic goal and political goal for the black writers. On the one hand, Ellison is defined as a "life-world modernist" who emphasizes the role of the reader in a sense of Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory in this thesis. From a modernist, a signifying modernist to a life-world modernist, Ellison does not recognize the label of art for art's sake. Instead, he releases the work of art to the common readers. This is one of the features of Afro-American expressive culture in Ellison's sense. On the other hand, I situate the negative criticisms on *Invisible Man*, particularly that of Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and Addison Gayle, to show that their political aims make them ignore "the forms of things unknown," the Afro-American expression. Reasonably, Ellison disregards the novel as a piece of protest writing due to Afro-American expression. The final part is the textual analysis of *Invisible Man*. Through his personal experience, Ellison carries the life-world of the black people with writing and de-materializes the Afro-American expression which is based on art and protest. From this point of view, *Invisible Man* leads the readers to perceive the experience of experiencing of the life-world and escape the binarism of aesthetics and politics in the Black Aesthetic during the 1960s.

Keywords: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, reception theory, the Black Aesthetic, art and protest, Afro-American expression

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For my parents, advisors, professors in the academy, friends, and my ex-boyfriend

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Chapter One

The Trials of Ralph Ellison

> It's good for artists to get together to eat and drink, but when they get together in some sort of political effort, it usually turns out that they are being manipulated by a person or a group who are not particularly interested in art.
>
> —Ralph Ellison, "A Very Stern Discipline" (746)

My thesis begins with the so-called "the trials of Ralph Ellison" in contemporary Afro-American literary history. Traveling back to approximately two hundred years ago in Boston in 1772, the first African American poet Phillis Wheatley went to a meeting panel, which its eighteen gentlemen wanted to verify Wheatley's authorship of her poems and attempt to answer the question—"was a Negro capable of producing literature?" (*Trials* 5). Through his solid survey of the historical background of early slavery, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. demonstrates how Wheatley was trialed in *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley* (2003). "The details of the meeting have been lost," Gates says, "but I have often imagined how it might have happened" (5-6). Unlike Wheatley, Ellison does not have to prove himself as a qualified as well as proficient African American writer in front of the public in the twentieth century. By the same token, however, he has to face a kind of new trials in the 1960s and 1970s—Is a Negro writer "black" enough to produce "black" literature? This question is no less sophisticated than the trials of Wheatley to explore, and I often imagine how it might have

happened since I decided to choose my thesis topic on Ellison and his *Invisible Man* (1952).

Hence, in this thesis, there are roughly two kinds of overlapping arguments, and their combination leads to my own reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. One is Ellison's response to the so-called "positive criticisms" that objectifies art in relation to *Invisible Man*, and I will look at this through an interview in *The Paris Review* of 1955. The other is the intervention of the negative criticisms on Ellison and *Invisible Man* through the ideology of Marxism and Black Nationalism, mainly arranging from 1963 to 1976. The two aspects will be infiltrated in Chapters Two and Three respectively in different ways, but the main approach is based on the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss, one of the leading critics in the Constance School of reception aesthetics. The major approach in Chapter Two is to compare Ellison's theory of the novel to the ideas of reception theory of Jauss. Jauss notices the absent place that the readers should occupy both in Formalist and Marxist aesthetics in literary studies. In my observation, Ellison coincidently confronts such an intersection as in New Criticism and Marxism, both of which intervened in the Afro-American literary production during the 1960s and 1970s.

In Chapter Two, my investigation will focus on the commentary of *Invisible Man* which regards it as a "pure literary work" to examine its risk of objectifying black art without considering its audience. This argument will be elaborated in detail by Ellison's idea of the "little man" later in Chapter Two, and this part also engages Ellison's theory of the novel and redefines him as a "life-world modernist." Terry Eagleton describes, "[t]he 'world' of a literary work is not an objective reality, but what in German is called *Lebenswelt*, reality as actually organized and experienced by an individual subject" (51; emphasis original). As we will go through the textual

analysis which discusses the life-world of African Americans that is associated with Afro-American expression in Chapter Four, life-world modernist provides Ellison a powerful writing position.

Chapter Three keeps Jauss's reception theory and applies it to the negative criticisms on Ellison and *Invisible Man*, mainly ranging from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. In this chapter, my argument is that these criticisms are deeply influenced by Marxism and Black Nationalism, and much research evidence also support this point. By investigating the two kinds of criticisms, the aporia of aesthetics and politics of the Black Aesthetic is clearly revealed. Let me begin with a dispute in the United States within the realm of American studies. Observing the historical development of American studies, Gene Wise mentions a debate between Leo Marx and Gordon Kelly in "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement." As one of the so-called "Americanists" during the 1950s, Marx makes efforts to define American studies. Being in the stage of emphasizing "social structures underlying intellectual and artistic expression" (204-5), Wise singles out these words, "[n]o one can say exactly *what* American Studies is…because scholars in the field are free to follow their own personal visions" (qtd. in Wise 183; emphasis original). Unlike the difficulties of the Americanists such as Vernon Louis Parrington and Perry Miller confront in early American studies, the Americanists in the 1950s find the base in the fields of history or literature.

Not until the 1960s the Americanists do start to challenge Marx's question. According to Wise, Robert Merideth's seminar "Culture Therapy 202" brings American studies a new paradigm. Merideth is not satisfied with the American Studies in the academy. What he desires from the American experiences is "consciousness-raising" (186). Hence, American studies works with "black studies,

popular culture studies, folklore studies, women's studies, ecology studies, film studies, material culture studies, ethnic studies, education studies, youth studies, Third World studies, and Native American studies" (186), which are basically categorized as "subcultural studies" (187). The political movements during the 1960s due to the blossoming of these "subcultures" have a deep influence on American intellectuals.

To find an anchor for American studies, Leo Marx pays attention to the function of literature. Wise mentions his 1969 article, "American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method," and points out that Marx "define[s] literature and culture in transcendental language" (194) for its imaginative concepts. At the same time, the impacts of anthropology and sociology keep the Americanists holding another point of view of American Studies. Taking Gordon Kelly as an example, Wise finds that Kelly believes that literature as an imaginative product is a human product that "created and consumed by particular types of people in response to particular experiences in their world" (194). Trying to make a conclusion, Wise comments on this dispute, "[i]n contrast to Marx's sense of literature as *transcending* everyday reality, Kelly declared that literature must be deeply *grounded in* social reality before it can be understood culturally" (194; emphasis original).

The debate between Marx and Kelly implies a universal question in literary studies—the aporia of aesthetics and politics. Literature sometimes is an artistic product; whereas sometimes it becomes a political propaganda in a particular historical condition. Approximately at the period the Marx-Kelly debate takes place, a similar debate happens among the black intellectuals of the 1960s: the committed-art school and the detached-art school of the Black Aesthetic. The black movement activist Maulana Karenga defines the Black Aesthetic thus in *Introduction to Black Studies* (2002),

> First, [the Black Aesthetic] was used to mean a distinctive mode of aesthetic expression by which Black art could be identified. Secondly, it meant a criteria by which Black art could not only be judged in terms of its creativity and beauty, but also in terms of its social relevance. (464)

It is clear that, according to Karenga, the Black Aesthetic is simultaneously "aesthetic" and "political." He observes the historical trends in African American literature and culture, and demarcates two schools in the Black Aesthetic. "Writers such as Ellison and Redding," Karenga writes, "argued the primacy of art rather than race or politics, suggesting art was universal and personal but not black" (464). This idea is completely unpersuasive to Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. With a historical examination from Larry Neal to Chestyn Everett, Karenga comes up with his own articulation of the black art, "it had to be functional, collective and committing" (467). This is the political side of Afro-American literature.

When recapturing the issue of politics and aesthetics in African American literary history, Maryemma Graham points out,

> If the Civil Rights Movement provided a catalyst for the novel in the social and political realm, the demise of new criticism and the democratization of the academy midwived its rebirth. The New Critics had eschewed any kind of political intent in art, calling for the autonomy of art divorced from politics… (2)

In Ralph Ellison's pieces of writings and essays, it is clear that he intends to deal with this aporia of politics and aesthetics by his own concept of literature and theory of the novel. Except for a deliberate discussion of this topic in Chapter Two, several theorists who analyze the related issues of aesthetics and politics also support my research, including Hans Robert Jauss, Jürgen Habermas, and Houston A. Baker, Jr.

in the following chapters of my thesis. Besides, the historical review of the opposition of art and protest in African American literary history is also briefly summarized in Chapter Two. From this perspective, the battle between Marx and Kelly, hence, is just one of the like events in the 1960s.

However, the 1960s is not just the 1960s in George Lipsitz's *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (2001). Like Ellison's paying attention to how Marxism, Black Nationlaism, and sociological theories intervene in the production of Afro-American literature, Lipsitz claims that his goal of this book "explores the links between American Studies and social movements" (xvi). Lipsitz also observes the influence that Marx has made on American studies, having his own unique approaches. Basically, Lipsitz examines the socio-historical conditions in the United States from the 1930s to the 1960s, and his position is very critical to the developing of industrialization and globalization. Therefore, his way to examine Marx is closely related to this anchor, but at the same time he has also addressed the aporia of aesthetics and politics:

> Following Marx's description of the American Studies scholars, he thinks that, Both sides [of the "context"-oriented American studies scholars and the "text"-oriented Southern Agrarian or New Critical opponents] knew that the social contexts framed aesthetic choices and that textual content played a large role in determining the effectiveness of any given work. (69)

What Lipsitz suggests is a possible method to explore the binary opposition of aesthetics and politics in American literary and cultural studies, and his argument could be regarded as a powerful insight for this thesis dealing with the committed-art school and the detached-art school of the Black Aesthetic. This argument will be further elaborated in our discussion of Ellison, his *Invisible Man*, and its reception

both in Chapters Three and Four.

Before illustrating the aporia of aesthetics and politics in African American context, let us trace this aporia back to a primary and serious topic ─ double consciousness. W. E. B. Du Bois defines double consciousness by pondering over the situation of African Americans in the following manner:

> [T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,─a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,─an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (11)

Being granted such an idiosyncratic identity, African Americans are always on the journey back and forth to identify with the American tradition and the African roots. Ellison has to face this "two-ness" as well. In "A Very Stern Discipline," he expresses his being fond of Western thinkers, including Dostoevsky, Henry James, Karl Marx, Gorki, Sholokhov, and Malraux (746). He embraces Western literary and cultural nutrients, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. does in his critical project of *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). Gates turns the direction of "two-ness" to Afro-American literature and criticism. "The black Africans who survived the dreaded 'Middle Passage,'" Gates argues in *The Signifying Monkey*, "from the west coast to the New World did not sail alone" (3). What Gates intends to argue is "the nature and function of

interpretation and double-voiced utterance" (xxi) of African Americans. Exploring the various figures of Esu/Esu-Elegbara, Gates intends to examine "the levels of linguistic ascent" (6) in the unique development of Afro-American literature. Compared with Karenga's definition of "functional, collective and committing" (467), Gates suggests an aesthetic angle to read Afro-American literature.

This thesis grasps the binary oppositions of the detached-art school and the committed-art school of the Black Aesthetic to prove that aesthetics could be the other side of politics, and vice versa. Furthermore, this thesis also treats Afro-American literature as a case study to deconstruct the binary opposition. Russ Castronovo traces the origin of the word "aesthetics" back to the German Romantic tradition of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller to Thomas Paine's notion of common sense (10-11). He emphasizes that even the narrow definition of aesthetics referring to "formal criteria such as unity, proportion, and balance within the domain of art" (10), the word still "resounds with expensive political and social possibility" (10). In Chapter Two, this entangling knot could be partially perceived in Ellison's theory of the novel, and he is also defined as a "life-world modernist" whose position is more than just a modernist as well as a "signifying modernist."

At the same time, this thesis is also a study of a brilliant author whose insightful observation of the racial issues in the United States changes my understanding of the Afro-American literature. It is very fortunate for me to write a thesis on Ellison and *Invisible Man* in the twentieth-first century. Ellison was attacked and praised simultaneously since the decades after *Invisible Man* was published in 1952, which was neither a pure literary work nor a work of protest writing by himself. As my arguments in Chapters Two to Four will show, the novel is closely related to the various aspects of the forms of Afro-American expression.

From Lipsitz's point of view, "Ellison…fashioned works of art and criticism that pointed to the obsolescence of old boundaries dividing popular culture from 'high' culture" (103). Like Lipsitz's argument of refashioning of art, my emphasis focuses on Afro-American expression as a discipline of art in Chapter Four. As Henry Yu's concern about the consumption by elite whites of the music and art of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, he argues that "[m]usical styles such as rhythm and blues, rock and roll, soul, rap, and hip-hop were marketed through an association with their black origins" (107). To Ellison, Afro-American expression is not merely a writing tool that engages African American culture, as would be discussed in Chapter Four. On the one hand, as Lipsitz states, Ellison "exposed an interaction between art and life that refuted formalist assumptions about the autonomy of art" (104); on the other hand, "American studies scholars read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* but still know too little about the Lindy-hop" (106). This thesis tries to discuss the novel by examining the various forms of Afro-American expression.

Finally, this thesis, as the subtitle shows, is a critique of criticisms. Bruce Fink once says, "[i]t is often believed that we human beings share many of the same feelings and reactions to the world, which is what allows us to more or less understand each other and constitutes the foundation of our shared humanity" (*Fundamentals* 2). This assumption might be partial and not always true. Virginia Woolf has said in "How It Strikes a Contemporary," "[i]n the first place a contemporary can scarcely fail to be struck by the fact that two critics at the same table at the same moment will pronounce completely different opinions about the same book" (231). Humanity is complicated and bewildering, though a critic could always explore it by reading a literary piece of work.

For an M.A. student who is a contemporary reader in the twentieth first century

in Taiwan, the task of reading *Invisible Man* is definitely fascinating and worthy of challenging. Jacques Derrida quotes Montaigne's words to start his task of interpreting Claude Lévi-Strauss, "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things" (qtd. in "Structure" 278). Without any doubt, my reading will be totally different from those who read the novel in the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, my thesis becomes a critique of the interpretations of the novel in the past and contains my own interpretations in my "now-ness" at the same time. Reading a literary text could more than simply an issue in literary study. It engages a cultural and political aims, and this point is exactly how the debate between Marx and Kelly have when defining American studies with literary texts. To some degree, the different positions that Karenga and Gates stand when defining Afro-American literature could also be regarded as one of the points when discussing the critics' reading of *Invisible Man*, what I call the trials of Ellison, during the Black Aesthetic later in the following chapters.

As the binarism of aesthetics and politics in American studies by the Marx-Kelly debate has revealed, the definition of Black art under the mapping of Afro-American literature meets a similar dilemma. If literature, like Marx's opinion shows, is "transcending," then it conflicts to Kelly's emphasis of literature as "grounded" in social reality. By this example in the field American studies, the committed-art school and the detached-art school in the Black Aesthetic also penetrate this aporia in the field of Afro-American literature. Hence, Ellison's statement in "A Very Stern Discipline" is adequately connected to his theory of the (Afro-American) novel. This part, as I have mentioned, will be explained in detailed in Chapter Two later. In "A Very Stern Discipline," the interviewers ask Ellison about his opinion about herd activity. Basically, Ellison is not against to writers' getting together to share the

techniques and knowledge with each other, but only when the herd does not engage with any political effort (746). Ellison is very aware of how political acts could have a possible influence on the composition of art. I believe, by my arguments illustrating from Chapters Two to Four, from discussing Ellison's theory of the novel to the textual analysis of *Invisible Man*, this fact will be luminously presented, and it is also why Ellison is so unique among his contemporaries. This thesis examines the trials of Ellison and reconsiders the question─Is a Negro writer "black" enough to produce "black" literature? When the invisible man firstly meets the members in Brotherhood at Chthonian, Emma murmurs, "[b]ut don't you think he should be a little blacker?" (*Invisible* 303). Who could be more capable of representing, speaking for, or writing about the black people is the central thinking direction of my arguments in the following chapters through exploring the trials of Ellison.

Chapter Two

Mr. Ellison and Mrs. Brown: From Signifying to Life-World

> A novel whose range was both
> broader and deeper was needed.
> —Ralph Ellison, "Brave Words for
> a Startling Occasion" (153)

The dichotomy of the committed-art school and the detached-art school, as my observation has shown in Chapter One, is an arbitrary category for the unique historical vicissitude of Afro-American literature. In this chapter and the following chapters, my argument will stick to this point by taking Ellison as an example. Before going into the textual analysis of the novel *Invisible Man* in Chapter Four, it is necessary to discuss the intersection of the novel as a genre and Afro-American literary disputes approximately from the 1960s to the 1970s. In the initial part of this chapter, my argument will focus on a sketching map of the theory of the novel to discuss the art of fiction in context: English novelists, American novelists, and Afro-American novelists. The latter part of this chapter compares Ellison's theory of the novel and Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory. Many of the kernel ideas in Ellison's "The Art of Fiction," "Society, Morality and the Novel," and "The Little Man at Chehaw Station" parallel Jauss's reception theory. There have been scholars who for a long time have tried to define Ellison as a novelist, an essayist, or a literary critic. This chapter attempts to come up with a critical study to define Ellison as a life-world modernist. To distinguish him from his contemporaries by exploring Ellison's theory of the novel, the positive criticisms on *Invisible Man* seem to be Eurocentric and Americentric, and become ambiguous judgments. *Invisible Man* is certainly more than a mere work of art. The novel itself is an interlocutor waiting for

its "little man"[1] anywhere and anytime.

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To adapt Martin Heidegger's opening statement in *Being and Time*, here we could say ─ for manifestly we have long been aware of what we mean when we use the expression "novel." We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed. As Ian Watt points out in *The Rise of the Novel*, "[i]s the novel a new literary form?" (9), which is still one of the questions anyone "interested in the early eighteenth century novelists and their works is likely to ask" (9). To discuss Ellison's theory of the novel, Wlliam Lyne suggests that we start with Henry James. In "The Signifying Modernist: Ralph Ellison and the Limits of the Double Consciousness" in *PMLA*, Lyne notices that Ellison's essay, "The Art of Fiction," is very similar to James's book *The Art of the Novel*. Though he asserts "[i]n Ellison's pantheon of Euro-American ancestors, James's place is secure" (321), he keeps being alerted to the double consciousness[2] of Ellison. He quotes Horace A. Porter's words and agrees with his argument that the relationship between Ellison and James is like Frederick Douglass and his master: "write a hand very similar to that of [the] Master" (qtd. in Lyne 321).

Lyne's research, according to himself, is based on Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s concept of Signifyin(g). In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates intends to articulate a discourse of African-American theory. He claims that "[t]he Signifying Monkey...is distinctly Afro-American" (xxi). African-American writers and critics read what Gates calls "the canonical texts of the Western tradition" (xxii) with their unique cultural roots of "the black English vernacular tradition" (xxiii) simultaneously. The

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[1] I will explain this idea on page 3 and page 14 to 15.

[2] About the definition and serial discussion of the term "double consciousness," please see Chapter One, page 5 to 6.

"two-tone heritage" (xxiii) of African-American writers and critics provides them a "double-voiced" perspective to write and to comment. Gates believes that Ellison belong to the double-voiced literary figure (xxiii). In Gates's words, Signifyin(g) penetrates the "English-language use of *signification* refers to the chain of signifiers" (49; emphasis original) and reveals "the figures for black rhetorical figures" (51). He argues that Ellison's "little man" is the "trickster figure" of the Signifying Monkey. Gates quotes a Yoruba poem starting with the line "Latopa, Esu little man" (qtd. in Gates 65) to prove that Ellison puts himself at "a discursive crossroads which two languages meet" (65), just as the Esu myth "The Two Friends" shows, "Esu's hat is neither black nor white; it is both black and white" (35). Tracing back to the divine trickster figure of Yoruba mythology, Gates further discoveries the interposing figure of the Signifying Monkey and links it to Ellison's little man at Chehaw station.

Undoubtedly, Ellison's theory of the novel needs a meticulous discussion. Watt explores the rise of the novel by the term realism from the view of philosophy. The novelists, especially the realists, desire to write about human experiences to gain "[the] ideal of scientific objectivity" (11). Watt argues that the new literary form of the novel is concomitant with "individual experience which is always unique and therefore new" (13). Since the Renaissance period individual experience had replaced collective tradition (14). Specifically speaking, nobody's experience is likely to be the same as that of another person, and even one's single experience will never repeat twice.[3] Hence, Watt argues that "the novelist's primary task [of conveying] the impression of fidelity to human experience, attention to any pre-established formal

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[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer's tour de force, *Truth and Method* (1975), could probably provide Watt an intensive discussion in the rise of the novel. Gadamer particularly focuses on experience in the domain of philosophy, starting from G. W. F. Hegel to Martin Heidegger in "The Concept of Experience (Erfahrung) and the Essence of the Hermeneutical Experience" (341-55).

conventions can only endanger his success" (13).

Realism is dominant in the nineteenth century. James in "The Art of Fiction," originally a lecture delivering at the Royal Institution, London, in 1884, strictly judges that Anthony Trollope "is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth, of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be), than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing room" (372). James writes his pieces of work with formal realism, and he suggests, "[a] novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression" (374).

Another novelist who believes in impression is Thomas Hardy. Hardy in the preface to the fifth edition of *Tess of D'Urbervilles* defines novel in this way,

> [T]hough the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions, there have been objectors both to the matter and to the rendering. (4)

But the critics ignore their direct impression and begin to fight with the subtitle of *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented by Thomas Hardy." It leads this novel to a controversy, for Tess is never presented faithfully except in the eyes of Hardy. Virginia Woolf is a very careful reader of Hardy. In the second series of *The Common Reader* she discusses Hardy's Wessex Novels by illustrating that for Hardy, a novel is "an impression, not an argument" (qtd. in "Novels" 254). To differentiate an impression and an argument, Woolf suggests, "[i]t is for the reader, steeped in the impressions, to supply the comment. It is his part to know when to put

aside the writer's conscious intention in favour of some deeper intention of which perhaps he may be unconscious ("Novels" 254). In Woolf's opinion, Hardy's greatest novel gives the reader impressions; his weakest novel gives the reader arguments ("Novels" 254).

Woolf's criticism on Hardy's should be traced back to her theory of the novel. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she asks, "...what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennet and quite unreal to me" (97). Tess Durbeyfield and Angel Clare may be real to Hardy himself and perhaps unreal to Woolf. "How shall I begin to describe [Mrs. Brown's] character?" ("Bennett" 105), Woolf wonders. For her, the way the Edwardians, including Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galthworthy, give the reader a "house" ("Bennett" 106), a Woolfean term for the literary convention. By the Edwardian tools, they put Mrs. Brown in the house by describing all "the fabric of things" ("Bennett" 106); the Georgians like James Joyce and T. S. Eliot realize that "[t]here was Mrs. Brown protesting that she was different, quite different, from what people made out" ("Bennett" 107) and they are not sure what should they do to Mrs. Brown. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf ponders a complicated question, regarding "what novelists mean when they talk about character, what the impulse is that urges them so powerfully every now and then to embody their view in writing" ("Bennett" 93).

"Character-reading" ("Bennett" 91) is a crucial point in Woolf's theory of the novel. For Woolf, Mrs. Brown is much more than a character. She is human nature under a historical transition which reveals "...the lack of convention, and how serious a matter it is when the tools of one generation are useless for the next" ("Bennett" 105). As a result, Joyce and Eliot make their efforts to discover the Georgian tools, the brand-new tools for their age. Woolf believes that "Zeitgeist" and literature are

inseparable, and old tools will never be suitable for a new age. In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” she describes the struggles of Joyce and T. S. Eliot,

> For this state of things is, I think, inevitable whenever from hoar old age or callow youth the convention ceases to be a means of communication between writer and reader, and becomes instead an obstacle and an impediment. (108)

Since “they do not know which to use, a fork or their fingers” (“Bennett” 108), Woolf thinks that the reader will be struck by the indecency of Joyce and the obscurity of Eliot (“Bennett” 108-9). There is no a single novelist who can immediately write a piece of literary work which pleases the readership of a new age.

Woolf herself was experiencing a historical change in her own age as well. She asserts, “to the effect that in or about December, 1910, human character changed” (“Bennett” 91). As a female writer, she knows she must abandon the old tools of the literary convention. In *A Room of One’s Own* she tells women, “...a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes. And this shape too has been made by men out of their own needs for their own uses” (100). Hence, the novel as a newly raising literary genre “was young enough to be soft in [women’s] hands” (100). Woolf encourages women that do not dwell in the house that men build for them. A woman has to build a house of her own by the new tools in the new age.

Woolf elaborates this point of view in “The Narrow Bridge of Art.” She reminds the novelists that “[y]ou cannot cross the narrow bridge of art carrying all its tools in your hands. Some you must leave behind, or you will drop them in midstream or, what is worse, overbalance and be drown yourself” (22). Intriguingly, she does not ask the novelist to abandon “all” of the tools but “some” of them. For instance, she

praises Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for its fluidity from poetry to prose and then to the form as a novel itself (21). Woolf expects the novel as a genre can bring not only a new literary form but also a new literary achievement by the influences of the power of music, the stimulus of sight, etc (23). The only way to accomplish this goal is to unfold your own envelope of life.

"Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged," Woolf says in "Modern Fiction," "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (150). For a novelist, in order to prevent life escaping in front of him or her, what he or she needs is just to unfold his or her own envelope. Life is not what people tell you: "See, this is what life is all about!" To unfold your own life in your own envelope; otherwise, you will become the materialists whom Woolf defines. Their attitudes toward life are confined, and they cannot unfold their own lives in the envelope. An "unscrupulous tyrant" ("Modern" 149) provides them a plot, whether it is a comedy or tragedy ("Modern" 149). Hence she urges that "if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he choose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no [literary convention of any kind] in the accepted style..." ("Modern" 150). Shakespeare's plays, in Woolf's words, are "the perfectly elastic envelope of his thought" ("Narrow" 14), so is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* because it keeps distance from the so-called "what-life-is-all-about" ("Narrow" 21).

Unfortunately, a critic usually does not care what a writer's life is about in his or her own envelope. What they care is not impression but argument. "The Art of Fiction" is Woolf's response to E. M. Foster's criticism on George Meredith, Hardy, and James in *Aspects of the Novel* in 1927. Woolf notices that "[a]lways their failure

is some failure in relation to life" (109) and reiterates Forster's serious commentary that "Henry James brought into the novel something besides human beings. He created patterns which, though beautiful in themselves, are hostile to humanity. And for his neglect of life, says Mr. Forster, he will perish" (109). Here comes the argument between aesthetics and humanity in literature, but Woolf emphasizes that "nobody knows anything about the laws of fiction; or what its relation to life; or to what effects it can lend it self. We can only trust our instincts" (110). Amazingly, Woolf deconstructs the house she herself builds for writing a novel, because there is no theory for the novel after all. There are only instincts flowing in one's consciousness.

What consciousness is is a philosophical question. Some critics even point out that "consciousness is always consciousness 'of' something present to but different from consciousness itself" ("Deconstruction" 237). To Watt, consciousness is also a vital point for the novelists in his articulation of the rise of the novel. Woolf has a deep discussion about consciousness in "American Fiction." In this essay she defines what does being American means logically, "whatever the American man may be, he is not English; whatever he may become, he will not become an English man. For that is the first step in the process of being American—to be not English" (116). After comparing and contrasting Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, Woolf discovers being an American man is a complicated matter about consciousness. In her opinion, "[w]omen writers have to meet many of the same problems that beset Americans" (116) and the biggest one is self-consciousness,

> They too are conscious of their own peculiarities as a sex; apt to suspect insolence, quick to avenge grievances, eager to shape an art of their own. In both cases all kinds of consciousness—consciousness of the self, of race, of

> sex, of civilisation—which have nothing to do with art, have got between them and the paper, with results that are, on the surface at least, unfortunate. (116)

As a result, both Anderson and Lewis suffer from being an American. Anderson "must protest his pride" to claim that he is an American who is not an English; Lewis "must conceal his bitterness" of admitting that he is an American man whom the English men would call him typically. Woolf continues to argue,

> For the more sensitive [the American] is, the more he must read English literature; the more he reads English literature, the more alive he must become to the puzzle and the perplexity of this great art which uses the language on his own lips to express an experience which is not his and to mirror a civilisation which he has never known. The choice has to be made—whether to yield or to rebel. (124)

Hence, Mrs. Brown is not a target only between the Edwardians and the Georgians in British empire anymore. She thus becomes a transatlantic figure between the English novelists and the American novelists. In this way, Woolf actually deals with the same issue that W. E. B. Du Bois calls double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk.*

In 1937, Richard Wright published "Blueprint for Negro Writing" in the inaugural issue of *New Challenge*. In this essay Wright claims with the first sentence saying, "[G]enerally speaking, Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America" (1380). Wright urges African American writers to write a collective work that brings Negro nationalism (1387). To write the Negro life "in New York's Harlem or Chicago's South side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class" (1386). What Wright claims in this literary

manifesto, in the sense of representing life, is completely what Woolf is against to.

Hence, the "unscrupulous tyrant" interferes in Afro-American literature and builds a house for African Americans: Black Nationalism and Marxism. "[F]or the Negro writer, Marxism is but the starting point," Wright asserts, "[n]o theory of life can take the place of life. After Marxism has laid bare the skeleton of society, there remains the task of the writer to plant flesh upon those bones out of his will to live" (1384-85). As a novelist, Wright does not keep away from what Woolf says "what-life-is-all-about." He dwells in a house that had been built for him, or, for other angry African American novelists and critics. The ultimate result is that they all abandon Mrs. Brown.

Taking Wright's own novel, *Native Son*, as an example, we would probably wonder whether Bigger Thomas as an African American is presented faithfully by Wright in such an insidious and painful way. Though Wright admits that he dresses *Native Son* up with his childhood (506), and the statement seems to make this novel more authentic, the fact is not everyone is Bigger. In "Everyone's Protest Novel," James Baldwin expresses his dissatisfaction with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Wright's *Native Son*. Baldwin asserts that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "is a very bad novel" (1654) because "[the readers] have only the author's word that they are Negro and they are, in all other respects, as white as she can make them" (1655-56), and Bigger in *Native Son* is "Uncle Tom's Descendant, flesh of his flesh" (1659). Baldwin views the protest novel as "a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream (1657). The mirror forces Bigger denies his life and "admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained..." (1659).

Woolf sees the same mirror through another side of it. In *A Room of One's Own*

she humorously says that if men like Napoleon and Mussolini do not enlarge themselves with women as their mirror, “the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all our wars would be unknown” (45-6). Woolf takes the issue of sex to think about race in “American Fiction,” and Baldwin understands the issue of race by juxtaposing the situations of the contemporary Negro novelists and the dead New England woman (1659). They both keep one single belief: to unfold your own envelope and throw “what-life-is-all-about” away.

By sketching a map of the theory of the novel by English novelists, American novelists, and African American novelists, there are some common features among them. As Woolf’s emphasis on life itself, Baldwin argues that “Bigger’s tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained...” (1659). Bennet, Wells, Galthworthy, Stowe, and Wright, in Woolf’s definition, are the materialists who dwell in a house that is built by an “unscrupulous tyrant” rupturing the envelope of life. How African American novelists unfold this envelope to catch his or her life is a highly sophisticated task: he or she needs to build a house and then deconstruct it. Ellison definitely is not an exceptional literary figure.

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After James wrote “The Art of Fiction” in 1884 and Woolf wrote “The Art of Fiction” in 1927, Ellison’s interview with *The Paris Review* in 1955 keeps the same title: “The Art of Fiction.” During the interview Ellison tells the interviewers of *The Paris Review* that he is not like other social realists of the 1950s who are concerned less with tragedy than with justice, and he is concerned with injustice with art (211). Following what Ellison says, the interviewers raise this question, “[t]hen you consider

[*Invisible Man*] a pure literary work as opposed to one in the tradition of social protest" (211). Ellison replies, "I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest" (212) to deny this binary opposition of art and protest. The binary opposition of art and protest could be traced back to the historical background of the African American intellectuals in the 1920s.

On the one hand, Du Bois delivered an address called "Criteria of Negro Art" at the Chicago Conference of the NAACP in 1926. He says, "[t]hus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (854). In the 1960s and 1970s, the legacy of Du Bois contrives to combine Black Nationalism and Marxism. One of the representatives is Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, and his "Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tse-Tung-Thought" (qtd. in Baker *Journey* 104) has a deep influence on his own creative writing. Although Baker pays careful attention to the difference between Marxism and nationalism and reminds that "Marxism and nationalism are incompatible at many levels" (104), he still agrees that they do function in scientific socialism.

A. Robert Lee adapts the same pattern to explain the Brotherhood in *Invisible Man*, "[i]n the Brotherhood, [the invisible man] becomes a member, and eventual heretic, under the leadership of the 'one-eyed,' and so half-sighted, Jack, and a neophyte believer in politics as Marxian 'scientific explanation' (p. 266)" (25). Marxist thought is also concomitant with literary production, just as Baker points out, "Baraka asserted that 'Black Art' had not been officially ushered into the world and surely housed" (*Journey* 96), Baraka/Jones himself claims that "[t]here is no such thing as art and politics, there is only life...THE LARGEST WORK OF ART IS THE WORLD ITSELF" (qtd. in Baker 104). Baraka/Jones claims radically that there is no boundary between life and art. Any work of art has to do with the real life belonging

to the black people, and this is the axial concept to the committed-art school. This part will be illustrated in detailed with specific examples in Chapter Two of my thesis.

On the other hand, the members of the New Negro Movement moving from the South to the North to launch a new literary trend: the Harlem Renaissance. Houston A. Baker, Jr. sharply penetrates the whole project of the Harlem Renaissance in the very beginning of *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance,*[4] "[t]he term 'modernism' has something of the character of Keat's cold pastoral" (1). What Sterling Brown and Ulysses Lee call "'evolved' forms of English and American literatures," which is opposed to "the form of things unknown," might play the role of the cold pastoral. Baker argues "[a] too optimistic faith in the potential of art may, in fact, be as signal a mark of British and American modernism's 'failure' as of the Harlem Renaissance" (14). Undoubtedly, modernism, in Baker's statement, "for Afro-America finds impetus, empowerment, and inspiration in the black city (Harlem)" ("Modernism" 273), but just as Micheal Levenson in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* says, "[n]o one should be surprised by the distortions and simplifications of Modernism," (1) since "the artistic rebels and rebellions of British and American modernism were often decidedly puerile and undeniably transient" (*Modernism* 13). This is also the deadlock of the detached-art school in the Black Aesthetic. Hence, the commentaries to *Invisible Man* like that of the interviewers from *The Paris Review* calling the novel "a pure literary work" is not only Eurocentric-Americentric but also vague, though it seems to be a positive criticism to a novelist.[5] As Robert O'Meally indicates, many

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[4] "Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance" is a series of Baker's Richard Wright Lecture delivering for the English Institute in August 1985 and the Afro-American Studies Department in November 1985 at Yale University. In 1987 he published *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* by the University of Chicago Press. The quotations from the two different pieces of work are quoted separately.

[5] At this moment, "a pure literary work" is categorized into the "positive criticism" on *Invisible Man* for contrasting to the "negative criticisms" on it by Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and Addison Gayle.

critics "who have considered *Invisible Man* not as some sort of demonstration but as a work of art" (6). Ellison obviously is not satisfied with this kind of commentary.

The Black Aesthetic of the 1960s continues confronting the same dilemma of the Harlem Renaissance. Baker comes up with a term "Renaissancism" to define the Black Arts Movement during the 1960s and 1970s: "Renaissance II" ("Modernism" 273). The Black Aesthetic is the by-product of the Black Arts Movement. In the development of modernism, the debate between art and protest is a crucial issue. Sara Blair in "Modernism and the Politics of Culture" argues,

> Black aesthetic achievement—and particularly literary achievement—was understood by these culture builders [including Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, W. E. B Du Bois, Alain Locke, A Philip Randolph, James Weldon Johnson] as the clearest sign of black fitness for the demands of modernity; "pure" art would itself serve as a form of political activism, activity, propaganda. (169)

As Blair indicates, "'pure' art would itself serve as a form of political activism, activity, propaganda (169). Michael Levenson points out that the modernists including Gertrude Stein, Picasso, Antonin Artaud, Woolf, and James Joyce attempt to challenge the political and religious orthodoxy by form of creative violence (2). The form of creative violence builds another house for African American writers, that is, the language as a resistance per se to political orthodoxy.

Undeniably, Ellison does believe in the aesthetics of modernism as a resistance to the orthodoxy, but he also keeps his African cultural heritage in mind. In a very important piece of work, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," Ellison remembers

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Actually, there are many kinds of positive criticisms on *Invisible Man*, but the focus in this chapter is aesthetic consideration of it. My arguments in Chapter Four will further problematize how aesthetic consideration is materialized by ideology.

when he still wants to be a musician and stays with Hazel Harrison in her basement studio at Tuskegee Institute, Harrison tells him that "you must *always* play your best, even if it's only in the waiting room at Chehaw Station, because in this country there'll always be a little man hidden behind the stove" (494; emphasis original). The little man is the reader. "In this country," Ellison remarks, "the artist is free to choose, but cannot limit, his audience" (501).

In Chehaw station, people come and go. You can never expect who your audience might be. They are "people representing a wide diversity of tastes and styles of living. Philanthropists, businessmen, sharecroppers, students and artistic types passed through its doors" (503-4). This juncture point shows that "even the most homogeneous gatherings of people are mixed and pluralistic" (504). By this metaphor, Ellison says that American democracy "is not only a political collectivity of individuals, but culturally a collectivity of styles, tastes and traditions" (504). Baker's idea of "blues translation at the juncture" is based on Ellison's little man at Chehaw station (*Blues* 12-3). Of course, the American artists are all under this umbrella of influence, but the most important is the little man at Chehaw station.

Unfortunately, American society as a "melting pot" makes Europeans, African, and Asian become Americans (504). It builds a house calling itself "Americanness" to claim that "[Afro-American] music, poetic imagery and choreography were grudgingly recognized as seminal sources of American art" (513). Ellison says that "[t]he white took over any elememts of Afro-American culture that seemed useful," (515) but no matter how the form of art is adapted to change, the little man will still recognize it. The little man knows his own aesthetic roots. He can tell "...music is important as an artistic form of symbolic action" to manifest "transcendent forms of symbolic expression, agencies of human freedom" (518). Ellison's emphasis in this

essay is “the enigma of aesthetic communication in American democracy” (496). Afro-American expression as an American art as well as African vernacular tradition makes the dichotomy between art and protest invalid. The discussion of Ellison’s little man at Chehaw station as a metaphor of the audience to Afro-American expression and Baker’s “the matrix as blues” in *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* will be major theoretical dimensions in Chapter Four of my thesis.

Ellison for sure agrees with those who believe that art itself is political activism, activity, propaganda, but he continues to perplex his critics. In 1965, he expressed his opinion in the interview with James Thompson, Lennox Raphael, and Steve Cannon, “[b]ut if a Negro writer is going to listen to sociologists…who tell us that Negro life is thus and so in keeping with certain sociological theories, he is in trouble he will abandoned his task before he begins” (“Very” 730). As a result, he concludes, “…I think style is more important than political ideologies” (“Very” 747). Baker notices Ellison himself once believed in this formalist concept. In *The Journey Back* Baker mentions, “[a]n exacting formalism was Ellison’s response to the turbulent social climate of the sixties and seventies. Unlike Baldwin, he found artistic noninvolvement a rather attractive status” (117). Unfortunately, “the artistic noninvolvement” is controversial and not persuasive to some critics, either on the black side or on the white side, and in Chapter Three there are three specific instances to elaborate my argument. Ellison’s theory of the novel, let us assume, seems to be extremely contradictory, but it is truly deconstructive.[6] As Niall Lucy puts,

> the “double movement”...of deconstruction involves both an inversion of

[6] In this way, Ellison’s theory of the novel, in Derrida’s words, is “X,” and the statement claiming that “Ellison’s theory of the novel is deconstructive” actually misses the point immediately. See “Letter to a Japanese Friend” in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (270-6). However, how Jacques Derrida argues about the essentialist thinking is not the main purpose of this thesis. Therefore, this statement is roughly supportable for the very moment.

> the hierarchical relationship on whose occlusion or suppression the "neutrality" of the difference between the terms of any binary pair depends, *and* the "irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,'"...which is not really a "concept" at all inasmuch as the very concept of a concept depends on an idea of difference-as-presence, allowing one to say of something that "it" is. (13; emphasis original)

In the following argument my explanation of Ellison's deconstructive thinking starts with the discussion his theory of the novel and then illuminates Ellison's being a life-world modernist.

In "Society, Morality and the Novel" he says, "[b]y its nature the novel seeks to communicate a vision of experience. Therefore whatever else it achieves artistically, it is basically a form of communication" (700). The author writes; the reader reads. Text, therefore, is a bridge between the author and the reader. In Ellison's words,

> [B]etween the novelist and his most receptive reader (really a most necessary collaborator who must participate in bringing the fiction to life), there must exist a body of shared assumptions concerning reality and necessity, possibility and freedom, personality and value, along with a body of feelings, both rational and irrational, which arise from the particular circumstances of their mutual society. (701)

He pays attention to the interaction between the novelists and their readers. Such an interaction, in Ellison's words, "thrives on change and social turbulence" (703) because the reader has to adjust his or her position when positing himself or herself between the fictive illusion and his or her experiences. In Jonathan Arac's words,

> Ellison is explicitly concerned with the responsibility, as he sees it, for the novelist to communicate to the reader as full a sense of reality as possible,

> and he is equally concerned with the danger that novelists and readers may collaborate in evading this obligation and taking poor satisfaction in inadequate work. (21-2)

Arac reminds us of the interstices between the novelist and the reader. The protest novel could neither provide African Americans nor even the white people so-called reality, just as Jim Crow laws fail to provide American people the reality.[7]

Ellison's theory of the novel is coincidently similar to Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory which has risen with its challenging posture in the field of literary theory in the 1960s. Jauss is one of the leading characters in the Constance School of German. In his lecture-based essay "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," Jauss comes up with his methodology of reception theory and takes French literature as his illustrative example. In part I Jauss argues that the patriarchs of the discipline of literary history, especially the history of a national literature, are inseparably associated with "*Zeitgeist*" (5; emphasis original), for "[t]he patriarchs of the discipline [of literary history] saw works [*Dichtwerke*] the idea of national individuality on its way to itself" (3). He mentions German Idealism in part II to support his argument, "[German idealism] indicates the expectations under which the literary history of the nineteenth century sought to fulfill the legacy of the idealist philosophy of history in competition with general historiography (6)."

Hence, he quotes Georg Gottfried Gervinus's studies and to analyze the fashioning of the history of German national literature is concomitant with "the wise direction in which the Greeks had led humanity..." (6). Coming up with this observation, Jauss argues that the concept of German national literature is based upon "the literary myth that precisely the Germans were called to be the true successors of

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[7] This perspective will be illustrated in detailed in Chapter Three, page 36.

the Greeks" (6). Jauss's case study of German national literature provides the discipline of Afro-American studies a perfect example to explore not only the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s but also the Black Aesthetic of the 1960s.

And then Jauss comments on Marxist aesthetics and the Formalist school in part III and IV respectively. In Jauss's words, Marxist aesthetics emphasizes historical consideration, because Marxist literary theorists like Lukács or Brecht are conditioned by "the concepts of periods and genres," and their debate mainly focuses on "literary realism's problem of imitation or reflection" (10). Jauss penetrates this Marxist task which configures a dialectical-materialist literary history and explains its problematic flaw,

> The problem of the historical and processlike connection of literature and society was put aside in an often reproving manner by the games of Plechanov's method: the reduction of cultural phenomena to economic, social, or class equivalents that, as the given reality, are to determine the origin of art and literature, and explain them as a merely reproduced reality. (11)

In this point of view we also see the problem of the protest novels in Afro-American literature. Jauss also examines the aesthetic consideration of the Formalist school. Jauss indicates that the Formalist school abandons "the historicity of literature" (17) but later rediscovers "the literariness of the literature" (17) in a synchronical method to distinguish the "poetic" and "practical" language. At the same time, the Formalist school discusses "the givens of the genre" in the past time through a newly preceding literary form with a diachronical method (17). The formalist school needs to borrow materials from history after all, so doing things with texts but without historical consideration is a mission impossible.

In part V Jauss argues that the defect of Marxist aesthetics and the Formalist school is the lack of the reader,

> The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior. (39)

Ellison has a similar concept in "Society, Morality and the Novel," and Jauss's theoretical analysis coincidently begins with a close examination in Marxist aesthetics and Formalist school respectively and how they are interrelated with each other. Both Ellison and Jauss pay attention to the social functions of a literary piece of work.

In "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," Jauss takes Marxist aesthetics and Formalist school as two examples to develop his argument, and part VI to part XII as his methodology of reception theory and its practice in the field of French literature. He suggests that "the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an 'aporia,' the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship" (10). Jauss sharply points out that "[b]oth methods [of the Marxist aesthetics and Formalist school] lack the reader in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetic as for historical knowledge: as the addressee for whom the literary work is primarily destined" (19). Taking the Black Aesthetic as an example to explain Jauss's consideration, a new relationship in literary history happens because of Ellison. Facing the aporia betwixt and between the committed-art school and the detached-art school, Ellison regards the reader as an indispensable role in the history of Afro-American literature.

Jauss argues that the role of the reader is extremely important because "[i]n the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere

reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history" ("Literary" 19). Likewise, Ellison explains in "Art of Fiction," "the critics and readers gave me an affirmed sense of my identity as a writer....Writing is, after all, a form of communication" (218). Hence, his novel is an interlocutor between the reader and the author. Ellison's theory of the novel proves that his work is not merely for art's sake itself, and those who think of *Invisible Man* as a purely work of art judge his piece of work is not only Eurocentric but also Americentric from the view point of aesthetics. In addition, his emphasis on Afro-American expression, as Lyne indicates, "turn modernism back on itself and show its blindness to the social and economic circumstances of oppression" (329). Ellison's theory of the novel is based on neither art nor protest but the life which belongs to African Americans who are hidden in Chehaw Station. This life-world modernist does not abandon Mrs. Brown, only that Mrs. Brown now becomes a mulatto.

When Ellison refuses to describe *Invisible Man* as what the interviewers of *The Paris Review* imply "a pure literary work," he simultaneously refuses the specialization of art. Jürgen Habermas pays much attention to the specialization of art in the history of Western civilization. In 1979, he comments on Walter Benjamin's theory of art in "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism—The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin" in *New German Critique*. Habermas says that "Benjamin's theory of art is a theory of experience," (47) and this particular experience is a "secular illumination" (47) which makes art be separated from ritual. Habermas positively believes that the "[c]orresponding to the changed structure of the work of art, there is a change in the perception and reception of art" (34).

In "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," his lecture-based essay of 1980, Habermas keeps observing the vicissitudes of the structure of the work of art. He

shows the historical change of art,

> The category of "beauty" and the domain of beautiful objects were first constituted in the Renaissance. In the course of the 18th century, literature, the fine arts and music were institutionalized as activities independent from sacred and courtly life. Finally, around the middle of the 19th century an aestheticist conception of art emerged, which encouraged the artist to produce his work according to the distinct consciousness of art for art's sake. (1754-5)

If Benjamin's theory of art makes sense, Habermas's intention alerts us to avoid the specialization of art since Enlightenment. Hence, he urges "the attempts to declare everything to be art and everyone to be an artist" (1755). Let the work of art be back to everyday life, and let the specialization of art be back to the life-world of "everyday expert" (1757). In Habermas's opinion, modernism provides everyday expert a pathway to life-world. "Because of the forces of modernism, the principle of unlimited self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experience and the subjectivism of a hyperstimulated sensitivity have come to be dominant" (1751). This point will be illustrated in a detailed textual analysis of *Invisible Man* in Chapter Four. Embracing Mrs. Brown in his own self-experience, Ellison deconstructs the house that is built for African Americans and unfolds his own envelope of life. Neither a pure literary work nor a protest novel is suitable to categorize his *Invisible Man*, and this aporia reveals Ellison to be a life-world modernist who writes what he experiences.

In the following chapter we will see how Irving Howe condemns Ellison in "Black Boys and Native Son" that Ellison failed to be a protest writer. As Baker points out, Howe insists that "all black writers had to model their work on the writings

of Richard Wright" (*Journey* 118). Ellison defends himself and responds, "[i]f the Negro, or any other writer, is going to do what is expected of him, he's lost the battle before he takes the field" ("Art" 212). Ellison refuses to dwell in the house that is built with the ideologies of the committed-art school and the detached-art school and insists to unfold his own envelope, an envelope carrying "the forms of things unknown."[8]

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As Chapter One and the initial part of this chapter have shown, there have been scholars who for a long time have tried to define Ellison as a modernist, an essayist, and even a literary critic. Lyne defines Ellison as a "signifying modernist," and James Seaton calls Ellison "one of the greatest American essayists" (497) in the book review of *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Chapters One, Two, and the next chapter all make efforts to explain why Ellison's essays are so important to the studies of *Invisible Man*. In particular, this chapter tries to extent Lyne's opinion and defines Ellison as a life-world modernist.

Lyne does not disagree with Baldwin that "Ralph Ellison [is] totally trapped" (qtd. in Lyne 329) by the double consciousness which becomes "a sword that cuts two ways" (320). As the dilemma that the American novelists have to face in Woolf's observation, Ellison also has his choice to make: whether to yield or to rebel. He embraces Euro-American literary ancestors and African American cultural roots at the same time. Hence, for both Ellison and the critics not only writing *Invisible Man* but also reading *Invisible Man* should be a careful job.

As Lyne in his essay that draws on James, Eliot, and Dostoevsky to defend Ellison's being a signifying modernist for "...those who read *Invisible Man* as an

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[8] This is one of my main arguments in Chapter Three, from page 41 to 44.

essentially African American text take its modernism at face value" (321). This perspective would be more promising if we put Ellison's theory of the novel into consideration. Being a life-world modernist, Ellison is betwixt and between the committed-art school and the detached-art school. His exact, powerful, and deconstructive insight for penetrating the Black Aesthetic is attributed to his theory of the novel, and the Black Aesthetic at the same time is challenged by the act of reading through the critics. Ellison knows that *Invisible Man* will occur as a literary skirmish, and many of these critics and readers are the Black Aestheticians.

Woolf says that the people who are defined as a "contemporary" will not "be struck by the fact that two critics at the same table at the same moment will pronounce completely different opinions about the same book" ("How" 231). Ellison's *Invisible Man* is not an exception in the context of the debate between the committed-art school and the detached-art school in the Black Aesthetic. Baker agrees with Woolf's calendar that there was a change occurred on or about December 1910 (*Modernism* 3), and four years later Ellison was born in Oklahoma City.

Being in an age of change, Ellison has to face what Baker calls "radical uncertainty" (*Modernism* 3), and even "Nietzsche and Marx, Freud and Frazier, Jung and Bergson become dissimilar bedfellows" (*Modernism* 3). Woolf suggests in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" that the critics should be generous and "take a wider, a less personal view of modern literature, and took indeed upon the writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building, which being built by common effort, the separate workmen may well remain anonymous" (240). To build a house is not an easy task, and how the Black Aestheticians intervene in this sophisticated task and their negative criticisms on *Invisible Man* is my focus in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Unfolding the Forms of Things Unknown: The Negative Criticisms on *Invisible Man*

Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong
because he's made poetry out of
being invisible.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (8)

There are positive criticisms, there are negative criticisms. After discussing *Invisible Man* as a pure literary work as the positive criticism on *Invisible Man* by Ellison's theory of the novel, which parallels what Jauss articulates in his reception theory of the Constance School of German in "The Art of Fiction," "Society, Morality and the Novel," and "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," my investigation in this chapter continues to examine the reception of *Invisible Man* and focuses on the negative criticisms, particularly those from Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and Addison Gayle. My argument also recapitulates the researches by William Walling, John F. Callahan and Robert O'Meally on the reception of the novel to articulate other horizons of expectation of the readership of *Invisible Man*. Coincidently, the three critics notice the literary skirmish brought by Ellison and *Invisible Man*, and seek in their theoretical inquiry to unravel the initial reason. At the same time, my argument in this chapter will reevaluate the negative criticisms by Ellison's own statements in "The World and the Jug," "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," and "An Extravagance of Laughter," and link Ellison's writing background to Afro-American expression.

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Approximately ten years after its publication, *Invisible Man* confronts some negative criticisms. One of them is the essay "Black Boys and Native Sons," in which

Irving Howe compares and contrasts Richard Wright and Ellison. According to Howe, Ellison "[is] to move beyond Wright's harsh naturalism and toward more supple modes of fiction, that was only because Wright had been there first, courageous enough to release the full weight of anger" (101). He describes *Invisible Man* as a "flawed achievement, standing with *Native Son* as the major fiction thus far composed by American Negroes" (112).

Ellison disagrees with Howe's point of view about anger and Negro writer. He questions in "The World and the Jug," "I must ask just why it was possible for me to write as I write 'only' because Wright released his anger? Can't I be allowed to release my own?" (162). Ellison does his best to distinguish his writing from Wright's, as he claims in "A Very Stern Discipline," "I wrote what might be called propaganda having to do with the Negro struggle, but my fiction was always trying to be something else, something different even from Wright's fiction" (746). Being angry with and without knowing the essence of anger are two kinds of attitudes. The English novelist Virginia Woolf remarkably takes gender issue as an example in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Under the control of her anger, Woolf draws upon the figure of Professor von X and realizes that "[h]e was not in my picture a man attractive to women" (39). After calming down, Woolf looks at the picture and ponders, "the professor was made to look very angry and very ugly in my sketch, as he wrote his great book upon the mental, moral and physical inferiority of women" (40).

As a result, Woolf seizes an objective perspective to judge the female novelists through the idea of integrity, "the backbone of the writer" (95). Anger leads writers to a havoc of writing. If "anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist" (Woolf 95), it is very likely to tamper with the integrity of African American novelists. Woolf's theory of the novel provides the critics a broader view,

because anger does not choose gender, skin color, and social status. Critics who care about merely complexion are apt to fall into the trap of anger. Ellison replies in "The World and the Jug", "[i]t is not skin color which makes a Negro American but cultural heritage as shaped by the American experiences" (177) and emphasizes that "I tried to the best of my ability to transform [the ideological and emotional penalties suffered by Negroes] into art" (183). Ellison uses the blues as a metaphor to claim that what he intends to do is to "transcend" the painful conditions of Negroes. Unfortunately, Howe could not elaborate this point from Ellison's writing, though he did mention it in his essay. In "Black Boys and Native Sons" he praises Ellison "has an abundance of that primary talent without which neither craft nor intelligence can save a novelist" and "his language sings" (113), but in Howe's essay how Ellison's language sings is immediately interrupted by Ellison's failure of representing the Stalinist figures due to the ideological delusions of the 1950s in the novel (114).

Like Howe, the Black Aestheticians also ignored the aesthetic aspect of *Invisible Man* and overemphasized the reading angle of political reference in the novel. As Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. indicate, "[d]uring the 1960s many black writers were critical of Ellison's belief that African Americans are fundamentally American, shaped by the United States more than by Africa" (198). Hence, in the positive air of praising *Invisible Man* is confronted a "break," which in Ellison's words, is attributed to invisibility,

> Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you are ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where times stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you

hear vaguely in Louis' music. (8)

Invisible Man is never invisible to those who had attacked its being against Black Nationalism, but what is invisible to them is the kernel that the critics of Ellison studies should explore. In 2004, *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Case Book*, edited by John F. Callahan, is published by the Oxford University Press. In his introduction Callahan praises that *Invisible Man* "is one of those rare novels whose commercial and critical success coincides in a continually accelerating, rising curve." He indicates that regardless of the fact that the invisible man, like the incarnation of Jack the Bear, had chosen an uninterrupted hibernation, "the ideological bears were out; in America they wore the shaggy winter coats of Marxism and Black Nationalism, both of whose world views...come in for intense, bitingly satiric treatment in the novel" (4) since 1952.

Another essay by William Walling, "'Art' and 'Protest': Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* Twenty Years After," in *Phylon* in 1973, he proposes a historical study of the reception of *Invisible Man* and reminds the readers of how this literary skirmish is shaped by historical atmosphere in the United States, such as the one in which Rosa Parker, an NAACP activist, refused to give up her seat to a white man on the municipal bus in 1955. Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff prove in *The Race Beat* (2006) that this event had staked passive resistance among the black people. Due to Parker's behavior, according to Roberts and Klibanoff, 48,000 Negro residents in Montgomery "[launched] a bus boycott that was immediately 90 percent effective and that continued for an extraordinary 381 days, constituting the first large-scale and enduring modern protest for Negro rights" (109).

The Rosa Parker event has a deep influence on Ellison. When Parker insisted to sit on that seat, she violated the Alabama state law and raised the black consciousness

among African Americans. In “An Extravagance of Laughter” Ellison wrote an essay about his trip to New York in 1936. “The very idea of being in New York was dreamlike, for like many young Negroes of the time, I thought of it as the street of American cities, and considered Harlem as the site and symbol of Afro-American progress and hope” (619). Such a feeling makes Ellison penetrate the radical difference between the South and the North. The North is a territory where African Americans could experience another life, and Ellison describes his observation when sitting on a bus:

> Now that I was no longer forced by law and compelled by custom to ride in the back and to surrender my seat to any white who demanded it, what was more desirable: the possibility of exercising what was routinely accepted in the North as an abstract, highly symbolic (even trivial) form of democratic freedom, or the creature comfort which was to be had by occupying a spot from which more of the passing scene could be observed? (624)

The “democratic freedom” is a valuable experience to Ellison, but segregation arbitrarily kills this freedom both for the black and the white. Living with the people who have the same complexion is much more comfortable reasonably, because “it was far easier to deal with hostilities arising between yourself and your own people...” (“Extravagance” 624). Living in such a condition is a fake comfort, because there still are conflicts happening outside the area you live. Hence, Ellison regards the Southern buses as “places of hallucination,” a fake peace of “painted ship upon a painted ocean” (625).

Not everyone agrees with Ellison’s point of view. Segregation had reinforced the anger of African Americans. In 1968 Larry Neal ferociously attacked Ellison and *Invisible Man* in *Black Fire*. He argues “We know who we are, and are not invisible,

at least not to each other. We are not Kafkaesque creatures stumbling through a white light of confusion and absurdity...” (qtd. in Neal 36; emphasis original). Obviously, Neal is not satisfied with the Ellisonian invisibility describing African Americans, and to some degree he entertains a latent dislike for the existentialist writer such as Frantz Kafka. During this period the color black was undoubtedly more attractive, or political, than invisibility to African American intellectuals, and the color white was sinful, evil, and unacceptable.

But two years later, Neal completely changes his attitudes toward *Invisible Man*. In “Ellison’s Zoot Suit,” he comments on Ellison’s aesthetic theory of writing,

> Ellison’s 1943 remarks in the *Negro Quarterly* concerning black cultural compulsives were cloaked in the language of politics. But they implicitly penetrate way beyond the sphere of politics. It is obvious from the foregoing passage [about men living outside the history in *Invisible Man*] that he thought enough of the concept of hidden cultural compulsives in black American life to *translate* them into art. Further, as we have noted, the concept is rather non-Marxist in texture and in substance. It probably represents, for him, a “leap” not only in political consciousness but in aesthetic consciousness as well. (114)

Neal questions the influences of Marxism on Afro-American literature. “Marxism puts forth the idea that all literature is propaganda,” he admits, “or becomes propaganda when it enters the social sphere” (106). Intriguingly, he changes his position into a Formalist. According to Houston A. Baker, Jr., Neal’s decision not only slaps his former allies in the Black Aesthetic camp but also endues the Western theorists with their theoretical formulations (*Blues* 86). But what is worthy of mentioning is that Neal, by this adjusted statement, proves that political consciousness

and aesthetic consciousness could be compatible, even could even cooperate with each other.

Another prominent Black Aesthetician who attacked Ellison is Addison Gayle. His attitude toward the Black Aesthetic in the late 1960s seems to exacerbate a Marxist path for African Americans. In Gayle's 1971 essay "Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and White Aesthetic," he explains that the color white is often a good signification of beauty, light, and the color black is the symbol of ugliness and dark. These "man-given" prospectives, according to Gayle, are on the most ingrained level of literary history.

Gayle argues that in the Middle Ages the Morality Plays of England show "[t]he distinction between whiteness as beautiful (good) and blackness as ugly (evil)" (41). Gayle analyzes Crusoe and Friday respectively in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and states that "Crusoe is majestic, wise, white and a colonist; Friday is savage, ignorant, black and a colonial" (42). To prevent the trap of the white aesthetic, Gayle urges the black artist to accept a short but powerful slogan, "Black is Beautiful" (46). Gayle claims that the question of white aesthetic is academic. He refuses to embrace the reviews and opinions by the white critic, and *Invisible Man* immediately becomes the shooting target. "Richard Wright, says Theodore Gross, is not a major American novelist; while Ralph Ellison, on the strength of one novel, is...all because white critics have said so" (45).

In December 1974, Martin Kilson and Gayle published an article is a column entitled "The Black Aesthetic" in *Black World*. Martin Kilson, who stood on the opponent side, attacked the development of the black aesthetic. He insists that the concept of art should be universal and belong to the human beings, rather than one single race or ethnicity. Gayle himself played the role as a defender, who appealed to

all African American artists for preventing themselves from Fridayism—being civilized and appeasing by the white standard.

The final review of their perspectives is described by Hoyt Fuller as proclaiming, "[f]ortunately…Addison Gayle deals more than adequately with a defense of the Black Aesthetic…" (50). This debate seems to offer equal positions for the two participants, but the addresses given by co-editors, John H. Johnson and Hoyt W. Fuller, reveal a preconception of judgment. The intention of this issue is quite clear—the black aesthetic is still indispensable to the African American artists. He states, "what [detached-art school] are opposed to is a particular kind of ideology and politics—Black Nationalism…" (40). Gayle's ferocious argument about the Black Aesthetic in *Black World* is strongly against the Formalist school, or in the context of the United States, the New Criticism. He asserts,

> [t]hose...who [belong to the detached-art school] have been most antagonistic towards art as politics—outside of Black opponents of the Black Aesthetic, who know little of literary history—were the writers who spearheaded "The New Critical" movement of the 1920's. (35)

The detached-art school is equal to the New Criticism to Gayle. "That man is a political animal is a belief shared with Aristotle by writers throughout the world." (40) Gayle strongly expresses this "universal truth" and takes examples of "Cervantes was jailed, Pushkin hounded by the Czar, Byron feared by the British upper class, Wright forced to leave America, Baraka threatened with jail, or Solzhenitsyn exiled from the Soviet Union" (40).

Gayle comments on Ellison's *Invisible Man* in *The Way of the New World* (1976) and does a close analysis of the two different value systems of the black characters and the white characters. He scolds Ellison's invisible man, who "chooses

death over life, opts for non-creativity in favor of creativity, chooses the path of individualism instead of racial unity" (212). He argues that the central flaw of invisible man is his failing to discover his identity in the world of promise and hope which was constructed by the black characters in the novel. As Neal compares the invisible man who was a black with "Kafkaesque creatures stumbling through the white light," Gayle also discovers the roots of the existentialism of Dostoevsky and Camus in *Invisible Man* and asserts that they are "all pointing toward man, not as a member of a specific racial or religious, but as an individual" (211).

Gayle emphasizes that Ellison's individualism is too apolitical to speak for the whole race, but he needs to pay attention that different racial and historical contexts also generate different political appeals. If both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Native Son* could achieve a political goal, then the so-called white canonical literature is nothing different from Afro-American literature. For Gayle, Ellison's disseminating individualism through the invisible man fails in this purpose, and the ideology of individualism abhors not only the collective political ideology for the Black Nationalism but also Ellison's creativity. To sum up, what Gayle intends to ask is whether Ellison's creativity has prevented itself from Fridayism or not. In the interview with Yu-cheng Lee Baker further explains,

> I think [the black artists and the Black Aestheticians] wished to claim that if there was "black content" in a sonnet, it might have produced a different effect on a black audience.
>
> Now, if the formal constraints under which these black writers were working here in many instances marked strictly Western constraints, then a project like the new criticism would serve one very well. (177)

In this way, Gayle's abandoning New Criticism is likely to be a mistake, for New

Criticism provides another way to examine "the forms of things unknown," a phrase means Afro-American expression, in Afro-American literature.

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"The forms of things unknown," a phrase that appears in Richard Wright's "The Literature of the Negro in the United States," is a crucial concept in the studies of Afro-American literature. In 1973, the introduction to Stephen Henderson's anthology *Understanding the New Black Poetry* is titled "The Forms of Things Unknown." "The forms of things unknown" is an opposed concept in Afro-American literature to English and American literature. Baker in chapter two of *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* notices that intergrationists like Sterling Brown and Ulysses Lee in *The Negro Caravan* (1941) ignore "[t]he distinctive forms of Afro-American culture must remain unknown, or they must be transcended by Negro writers who adopt 'evolved' forms of English and American literature" (70).

Ironically, in Baker's words, "the forms of things unknown" became "invisible" to Davis, Brown, and Lee when editing the works of Afro-American literature in this anthology. "The forms of things unknown" in *Invisible Man* is also invisible to Gayle. Although Gayle carefully examines the black characters including Mary Rambo, Ras the Exhorter, and Tod Clifton and their connections with the life-style of black people, he never elaborates the invisible man's narrative. Five pages before he attacked *Invisible Man*, Gayle claimed that "[the invisible man's] narrative is the sociological thesis of Du Bois given lyrical and allegorical form" (206). Gayle would not make this flaw if he took off the winter coats of Marxism and Black Nationalism and the oblivion of the lyrical form in *Invisible Man.* Gayle's negligence, if "intentional" is too strong an adjective, at least is "unconscious."

In 1988 Robert O'Meally wrote an introduction for *New Essays on Invisible*

Man, published by the Cambridge University Press. In this introduction he deals with the reception of *Invisible Man* in the last thirty-five years and comes up with an important study of Ellison. In his research O'Meally finds, as the analysis in Chapter Two of my thesis has shown, "from the beginning, that there have been critics who have considered *Invisible Man* not as some sort of demonstration but as a work of art" (6), but, as my argument shows in chapter one, Ellison does not agree completely with this label either. When discussing the horizon of expectation of the readership in the fifties, O'Meally emphasizes that "[h]umor is a key—perhaps it is the master key—to the highly successful communication process of this novel" (10). He quotes Ellison's own words,

> "By the time I finished *Invisible Man* in the early '50's," says Ellison, "I had white friends, sensitive readers, people who knew much of the world's great literature, reading my novel…and reacting as though it were against the law and in utter bad taste for a white reader to laugh at a black character in a ridiculous situation. Only one or two critics were free [enough] of this involvement to say, 'Well, this is very funny.' I intended it to be funny." (qtd. in O'Meally 12)

O'Meally's argument explains the possible reason of this literary skirmish through interpreting *Invisible Man*. The Black Aestheticians like Neal and Gayle did not understand Ellison's race humor. The race humor in *Invisible Man* could be traced back to Afro-American expression, for example, Louis Armstrong's jazz music. Afro-American expression is "the forms of things unknown," constructed politically as well as aesthetically.

To the Marxists and the Black Nationalists, the aesthetic aspect of Afro-American expression is invisible. As O'Meally indicates, "some of the book's

earliest reviewers missed its profound humor; for them certain humorous passages were, ironically, invisible" (11). But its function is much as effective and vivid as Black Nationalism to African Americans. Almost thirty years later, George Cotkin, a Postwar United States Intellectual and Cultural History professor of California Polytechnic State University, supplements Gayle's reading of *Invisible Man*. In *Existential America* (2003) Cotkin brilliantly relates African-American music tradition to the philosophical roots of existentialism in Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In Cotkin's observation, the narrator in Jean-Paul Sartres *Nausea*, Roquentin, felt "a sort of joy" (176-77) because of a Negress singer in New York City justified one's existence through the energy of creation in African-American music.

Cotkin argues that "[t]hough rooted in the African-American experience, the blues, like existentialism, claims both universal relevance and historical specificity" (162), and he proves that Ellison's thought which expresses "one can hear music in existentialist philosophy and read philosophy in the music of the blues" (175).[1] Cotkin's research is solidly based on Ellison's personal background. While studying in Frederick Douglass School in Oklahoma City, Ellison majored in music theory and learned how to play brass instruments. Later Ellison felt impressed while reading T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* at Tuskegee Institute and found that "Eliot...made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance" ("Change" 112). Cotkin's research of the connection between African American music and existentialism is not just a justification of Ellison's individualism but a rediscovery of Ellison's literary device borrowing from Afro-American expression.

Cotkin agrees with Albert Murray's explanation of the blues. He argues that

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[1] Cotkin's research in *Existential America* is based on Ellison's essays which are published as *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). The two volumes have been included in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (2003), edited by John F. Callahan.

"[t]he blues…must be understood in terms of something more than its lyrical content. In fact, the words of blues songs are often so mumbled and muttered as to be incomprehensible" (175-6). In Ellison's interpretation, the only way to unfold "the forms of things unknown" is the metaphor of invisibility, and invisibility could be traced back to Afro-American expression as Louis Armstrong's Jazz music. Afro-American expression is full of hope, happiness, and desire of living. It is a resurgent form of life-world after all the sufferings that African American face. As Ellison explains in "The World and the Jug,"

> Being a Negro American has to do with the memory of slavery and the hope of emancipation and the betrayal by allies and the revenge and contempt inflicted by our former masters after the Reconstruction, and by the myths, both Northern and Southern, which are propagated in justification of that betrayal. (177)

Baker particularly pays attention to the function of Afro-American expression. He creates a phrase, "spirit work,"[2] to resist the material enslavement to African Americans, and the realm of spirit work including "the tellings of stories, the singing of songs, the dancing of dances, the preaching of sermons" assert a "spiritual sense of who they are" ("Black" 181). Spirit work, however, is not only a cultural form belonging to aesthetic creation like literature or performance, but also a political act that urges African Americans to resist. In Baker's words, spirit work "means the survival energies to get up the next morning and to endure those physical signs and at least, it seems to me, to coexist side by side with, if not to transcend, one's dreaded enslavers" (181). His idea "the matrix as blues" is closely related to spirit work, and it

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[2] Besides the introduction in *Workings of the Spirit*, Baker mentions spirit work in the interview with Yu-cheng Lee and elaborates its definition. See Lee's "From the Black Aesthetic to Black Cultural Studies: An Interview with Houston A. Baker" in *Tamkang Review* 28 (1998): 169-93.

is one of the main theoretical approaches which deals with the textual analysis of *Invisible Man* in Chapter Four.

Therefore, Afro-American expression is a liminal cultural form which is, as Neal describes, a "leap" not only in political consciousness but also aesthetic consciousness. In Chapter Two Hans Robert Jauss's theory provides the study of *Invisible Man* a background to examine its reception. Jauss includes Marxist literary theory and Formalist literary theory to develop the construction of literary history. He suggests that "the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an aporia, the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship" (10). Toward this new relationship, the role Afro-American expression plays in the history of Afro-American literature is promising. It leaps across the dichotomy in Karenga's demarcation, which in Chapter One as well as Two is a basic but arbitrary definition of the Black Aesthetic, the committed-art school and the detached-art school.

This is the reason why Ellison claimed in the interview with *The Paris Review* in 1955, "I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest" ("Art" 212), because he attempts to avoid the dichotomy of political consciousness and aesthetic consciousness by his personal experiences of Afro-American expression. By doing so he keeps his own faith in the racial issues of the United States, but Howe, Neal, and Gayle lose the integrity of critical thinking. As Woolf draws upon the figure of Professor von X, they are possessed by anger. Anger erases their abilities of laugh; only Ellison remembers how to. He remembers it with Louis Armstrong's jazz music, and transforms it into words in *Invisible Man*. In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" Ellison wants African American artists to remember Armstrong's "physicality of his music with sweat, spittle and facial contortions..." (106), and he urges his

contemporaries that it is not anger which could solve the racial issues in the United Sates but laugher.

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When differentiating the North and the South culturally in the early twentieth century, Terry Eagleton argues that the Fugitives literary movement "had its roots in the economically backward South" and tried to fight with "the sterile scientific rationalism of the industrial North" with "the 'aesthetic life' of the old South" (40). The English poet T. S. Eliot had a great influence on the Fugitives, the leading literary critics of New Criticism, who believe in the reservation of aesthetic experiences. In Eagleton's words, they shared the common experiences of spiritual displacement being attributed to industrial invasion and regarded poetry as the only redemption (40).

Around the same period, a group of "the New Negro" assembled in New York City launching the Harlem Renaissance, and by 1930 the black population of Harlem were almost 100,000. Then, as Deborah E. McDowell and Hortense Spillers explain, "[a]mong the events marking these decades [from 1940 to 1960] are the second wave of the Great Migration from South to North that sent approximately five and half million black people from impoverished farms and hamlets into the major war industries..." (1319-20). Ellison was one of them. In the very beginning of this chapter my argument shows how the Rosa Parker event makes Ellison perceive the differences between South and North. He left Alabama for New York in 1936 to save money for the fall semester at Tuskegee Institute. In Tuskegee Institute Ellison read Eliot's *The Waste Land* and found that "Eliot...made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance" ("Change" 112).

Unlike the Fugitives, Ellison regards Eliot as a literary "ancestor" who makes

him trace back to Afro-American expression. Being born in the South and living in the North, Ellison combines his urban experiences in the North and cultural roots in the South to compose *Invisible Man*. Thus, Harlem, the city-within-a-city, is a crucial setting in *Invisible Man*. In the novel Ellison deliberately describes an anonymous protagonist's quest, geographically from the South to the North; psychologically from innocence to experience. The invisible man regards Harlem as a city of dreams, not of realities, because the black people were not restricted and confined like those in the South. In this geographical as well as psychological journey, the invisible man began to search for his own identity as an African American, and his arriving in Harlem in chapter seven is a turning point to him.

As a talented orator, he was invited to join Brotherhood and delivered a public speech to a rally in Harlem. The invisible man realized that delivering speeches makes him feel to be "more human" (346). This ability is also a "skill", which roots in the unique tradition of Afro-American expression, fashions *Invisible Man* betwixt and between a literary work and a political piece. Through analyzing the invisible man's oration as a form of Afro-American expression, the following chapter, "(De-)Materializing Afro-American Expression and Its Beyond" aims to discuss the novel by the theory of Baker. He has a solid analysis of the entanglement of "spirit work" that lurks in Afro-American expression and the industrial revolution. Under the umbrella of Afro-American expression, *Invisible Man* is certainly a masterpiece representing both the historical and aesthetic landmark in Afro-American literary history.

Chapter Four

(De-)Materializing Afro-American Expression and Its Beyond

> Life is to be lived, not controlled;
> and humanity is won by continuing
> to play in face of certain defeat.
> —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (577)

The discussions in Chapter Two which deals with Ellison's theory of the novel and his refusing to see *Invisible Man* as a pure literary work reveal his position of being a life-world modernist. In Chapter Three, the investigation of the negative criticisms on *Invisible Man* proves that anger makes the critics compromise their ability to examine "the forms of things unknown" in the novel. The motivation to discuss the two different critical views and Ellison's own attitude toward them through the reception of *Invisible Man* is to reconsider Maulana Karenga's binary demarcation of the committed-art school and the detached-art school of the Black Aesthetic. If Ellison denies *Invisible Man* as a pure literary work and claims that art and protest are inseparable, then the novel must itself contain the aesthetic and political sides at the same time. To articulate this argument, theorizing Afro-American expression as a cultural phenomenon is a necessary task.

Firstly, this chapter will map Ellison's Afro-American expressive forms and vernacular writing in *Invisible Man* based on this background. Except for the researches of Paul Allen Anderson, Robert O'Meally, Steven C. Tracy, and Eric Sundquist, Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s theory on Afro-American expression is the main approach for the discussion of Afro-American expression and the life-world of African Americans. Secondly, this chapter is also a textual analysis of *Invisible Man*. Assenting to the arguments in Chapters Two and Three, this chapter proves that

Invisible Man transcends the binary opposition of aesthetics and politics to lead the readers to see the life-world that belongs to African Americans by examining Afro-American expressive forms in the novel.

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In Chapter Three, my observation has shown that Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and Addison Gayle ignore the aesthetic contribution of *Invisible Man* and overemphasize its political function. Though Addison Gayle does mention Ellison's "lyrical and allegorical forms" (*Way* 206) in *Invisible Man*, he misses this point and attacks the novel. In this chapter, Afro-American expression as the forms of things unknown not only redeems the aesthetic aspect of the novel but also proves the political meaning of it by a Marxist interpretation, which we will deal with in a moment.

Afro-American expressive forms and vernacular tradition provide us with a background to analyze the novel. In both Chapters Two and Three, I mention that Ellison is a music major during his college years. He says that T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* has a deep influence on him to make him aware of his cultural inheritance. In Chapter Three, my argument has shown that the three critics ignore the aesthetic aspect of *Invisible Man*. They all neglect how vital Louis Armstrong's jazz music means to the Ellisonian invisibility. Anderson focuses on this point and links jazz music to Ellison's being a modernist. In "Ralph Ellison's Music Lesson," he points out that "the refusal 'to see [the invisible man]' as a human equal" (85) shows the White American's "self-deception and irresponsibility to his nation's democratic ideals" (85). Therefore, he believes that "[f]or Ellison, the music of invisibility at its best gestured toward an American future of pluralistic integration along the lines of mutual and reciprocal recognition" (87).

O'Meally's introduction, "Jazz Shapes," in *Living with Music*, records a

conversation between Ellison and him. In 1973, O'Meally met Ellison before his talk at Harvard University on the topic of Alain Locke and the Harlem Renaissance. He asks Ellison, "Don't you think the Harlem Renaissance failed because we failed to create institutions to preserve our gains?" (xi), and Ellison's response is "[w]e have the Constitution and the Bill of Right. *And we have Jazz*" (xi; emphasis original). O'Meally feels very perplexed and wonders, "How did this idea of music-as-institution link the multifaceted Harlem Renaissance with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s?" (xi). O'Meally's question partially overlaps with the critical investigation in my thesis, which tries to explain the aporia of aesthetics and politics and prove that Afro-American expression is the reason for Ellison to escape the binary opposition of art and protest.

Afro-American expression is not only the crucial theme for African American writers including Ellison but also an important subject matter in African American studies. For example, Baker analyzes and theorizes Afro-American expression and vernacular tradition in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American literature* (1984) and in *Workings of the Spirit* (1991), and Baker's theory of Afro-American expression is articulated with solid historical background of African American diaspora. His argument about Afro-American expression actually starts with *The Journey Back*, though in the book he has yet to mention or elaborate on this idea. He only uses "Afro-American verbal art" (xvii) for once. In this book of black literature and criticism with a chronological arrangement, Baker reads closely the early slave narrative by Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustava Vassa the African Written by Himself* and notices the different worlds between the black Africans and the white.

In Baker's opinion, the slavery of West Indies is not likely to happen without the

European industrial revolution (16-7). Hence, the so-called "Western civilization" is a brand new world that Equiano has never seen before, and the life of Africans is surrounded by agriculture and wars. The transatlantic journey brings Equiano to face "a new mechanical order" (17), and he experiences its "cruel and inhumane use" (17). The machine culture then forces Africans, in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s words, the "abrupt, ironic traveler[s]" (*Signifying* 4) who struggle with ferocious danger through the Middle Passage to "'read' a new environment within a received framework of meaning and belief" (*Signifying* 4) and suffer from unequal treatments under the slavery system. After settling down in the new world, they cry during the day time when working, and then laugh at night when singing, dancing, telling stories altogether.

Therefore, Afro-American expression is an amalgamation of a variety of complex emotions such as laughing and crying. For Baker, what is not only historical but also meaningful to African American diaspora is placeslessness. By reading W. C. Handy's works, Baker comes up with the idea "the matrix as blues" in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American literature*. "The blues singer's signatory coda," Baker emphasizes, "is always *atopic*, placeless" (5; emphasis original), and blues are "always becoming, shaping, transforming, displacing the peculiar experiences of Africans in the New World" (5). The matrix as blues does not "represent" the placelessness and transience of African Americans. Instead, it simply "is" the sense of placelessness and transience "to summon an image of the black blues singers at the railway junction lustily transforming experiences of a durative (unceasingly oppressive) landscape into the energies of rhythmic song" (7). In this way, the black blues singer equals with a translator of written texts to "offer interpretations of the experiencing of experience" (7). Blues are experiences themselves, and the experiences are from the tough life of

African Americans. However, it is totally a different issue to the American society. Baker notices the advantages of blues and their contribution to America,

> The signal expressive achievement of blues, then, lay in their translation of technological innovativeness, unsettling demographic fluidity, and boundless frontier energy into expression which attracted avid interest from the American masses. By the 1920s, American financiers had become aware of commercial possibilities not only of railroads but also of black music deriving from them. (11-2)

Ellison's perception of "Americanness," which is an important concept about "the enigma of aesthetic communication in American democracy" ("Little" 496) in my Chapter Two, is an enigma in Baker's *Workings of the Spirit*.

In *Workings of the Spirit*, Baker compares Wright's *Native Son* and *Invisible Man*. Though the two texts are often regarded as two opposite style of writing, even Ellison himself claims so,[1] there is, in Baker's observation, still a common feature between the two novels. In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas and Gus have a conversation about the plane in the air. "I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance" (17; emphasis original), Bigger says. Gus's reply is that, "[i]f you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane" (17; emphasis original). This conversation reminds Baker of Ras the Exhorter/Ras the Destroyer in *Invisible Man* who yells "[h]ell with him, some day we have them too! Hell with him!" (374) to a big transport plane. Baker's comparison of the two novels provides a direction to the study of machine culture, Afro-American expression, and the life-world of African Americans. He argues,

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[1] Though Ellison admits that he writes "what might be called propaganda having to do with the Negro struggle" ("Very 747") as Wright does, he still thinks his writing is different from that of Wright. See the interview "A Very Stern Discipline" in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (730-58).

> The appearance of an airplane in both *Invisible Man* and *Native Son* signifies what might be called a "traditional" dynamics of Afro-American place...Flight does not disrupt a harmonious, fruitful, pre-industrial state of Afro-American affairs. Rather, the transport and the skywriter in the two novels suggest an enormous confinement of black life; they are not disruptions of place but industrial/technological signifiers implying black placelessness. They have the effect of making traditional Afro-American geographies into placeless place. (103-4)

Industrial and technological innovativeness use the uprising of black expressive culture to enrich the cultural life of American masses but also paradoxically limit the development of African Americans. To examine this enigma as a racial paradox in American culture, we need to see Afro-American expression as a fluid thing that draws African Americans back from the "placeless place" and reminds them of the sense of transience and placelessness in their life-world. This statement is also closely related to what Baker calls "spirit work."

In the interview with Yu-cheng Lee, Baker precisely describes his concerns with African Americans. "I mean African Americans have been imprisoned not only by an economic system, but also by the specific material instruments and implements of slavery," he continues the discussions of machine culture in *The Journey Back* and *Workings of the Spirit*, "such as the iron mask, the iron muzzle, the bit, the yoke, the collar, and so on and so forth" ("Black" 181). In Baker's opinion, machine culture becomes "material sign" which tells African Americans that they are chattel and they are not human ("Black" 181). Spirit work, including "the telling of the stories, the singing of songs, the dancing of dances, the preaching of sermon [transmit] a different kind of spirituality and sense of who they are" ("Black" 181).

From Baker's careful examination, to understand the spirituality of African Americans' spirit work, the materiality of the machine culture is unavoidable. Neither spirituality nor materiality should be excluded from the discussion of the life-world of African Americans. In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Baker clearly expresses his intention to "avoid a naïve Marxism" (3). His approach is to reverse the fixed process from the "material as a substrate" to the "semiotic" like "a peculiar expressive form" and argues that the former can only be accurately understood by the latter (3). He suggests, "'production' as well as 'modes of production' must be grasped in terms of the sign" (3). The analysis of *Invisible Man* in this thesis will display Baker's main theoretical articulations of Afro-American expression to discuss the aporia of aesthetics and politics. To borrow Baker's words, if the critics exclusively pay attention to the material world in an Afro-American text, they probably will be blinded to see the semiotic world in the text. The material actually could also be the semiotic under the frame of Marxist literary criticism.

In Chapter Two, Virginia Woolf's theory of the novel provides us a brilliant base to examine the relationship of writing a novel and life. As Woolf suggests, "the influences of the power of music" is one of the directions to bring a new literary form as well as a new literary genre ("Narrow" 23). In order to do so, Woolf says that a writer has to abandon "some" of the tools that belong to the old time ("Narrow" 22) according to his or her own instinct. Afro-American expression is the tool of writing for Ellison, and he knows that it is a double-edged weapon for him.[2] Afro-American

[2] In Chapter Two, William Lyne's commentary on Ellison's double consciousness is included in my thesis on page 2. He argues that Ellison's double consciousness is "a sword cuts two ways" ("Signifying" 320). Except for those Western authors who are regarded as his literary ancestors, Lyne also mentions Afro-American expression. He says, "[s]pirituals, along with the blues, jazz, and folk narratives…are the primary double-voiced tools that are supposed to undermine and transforms the official hierarchies" (238). In this chapter, my analysis of Afro-American expression as a double-edged

expression is an indispensible element for African American writers, but Ellison is very aware of this. In O'Meally's words, "[f]or Ellison, the ideal artist is not merely a recorder of deeds but a visionary, a creator of brave new worlds—one whose technical tools and weapons must be sharp and ever at the ready" ("Jazz" xvii). Ellison's literary device of Afro-American expression as a tool, and this tool has historically changed from the African cultural root to be the symbol of Americanness. As a novelist of the twentieth century, he knows clearly what function this tool operates and its artistic, historical and cultural, even socio-political meaning. Afro-American expression, in a Marxist interpretation, becomes "material" in the text, and it materializes a kind of ideology.

The previous discussion has elucidated that Ellison regards Afro-American expression as a discipline. Therefore, what Baker calls the matrix as blues, which "is" the sense of placelessness and transience of African Americans but which does not "represent" them, is my main direction to discuss *Invisible Man*. Once the emotion is materialized, it is not human emotion but an ideology. As my point of "specialization of art" in Habermas's argument in Chapter Two has revealed, Ellison does not want to materialize Afro-American expression. Afro-American expression as a form is as important as the content, so it is necessary to juxtapose the Afro-American expressive form of *Invisible Man* and Afro-American expression in the novel. In "The Blues Novel," Steven C. Tracy argues that Ellison's *Invisible Man* "combines the blues tradition with elements of naturalism, represented by the extreme conditions of control in the 'battle royal,' as well as existentialism" (133). Tracy points out that the musical forms of the blues "provide a basic structure free enough to accommodate individual temperament, abilities, and creativity" (124), and the lyric patterns are also

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weapon is related to its institutionalization as a discipline. See page 42 to 43; page 49 to 50.

loose and free, since the blues as an oral genre is performed by illiterate or semi-literate performers (123).

No matter the songs are toward 8-bar, 12-bar, 16-bar, or 32-bar, Tracy emphasizes "[c]hanges in wording in the repeat lines can serve to add variety, emphasize particular ideas or emotions, or extend the original meaning in some other way" (123). Following this feature, the text of *Invisible Man* is like the blue lyrics with its

> The concept of invisibility; the creation of poetry; fluid concept of time related to improvisation, boxing, and violation of chronology in the narrative as it flashes back in [chapter one]; the recognition and management of dichotomies, polarities, and uncertainties. (133)

According to Tracy's opinion about the blues, the various events happening to the invisible man could not be regarded as meaningless wordings under Ellison's writing, but the improvisation that makes a circumference circling the issue of invisibility due to Armstrong's artistry. "So there you have all of it that's important" (572), invisible man says so when finishing his narrative of story telling, and the setting and time switch to his underground hole. As the invisible man tells his audience, "[t]he end was in the beginning" (571), and the novel is like a blues song playing over and over again.

As for the aspect of Afro-American expression in the novel, both Tracy and Houston A. Baker pay attention to the characters are related to the blues. Baker does a close reading of chapter two and analyzes "Trueblood episode." Jim Trueblood is a sharecropper who has an incestuous relationship with his own daughter, Matty Lou. Baker defines Trueblood as a "virtuoso prose narrator" (*Blues* 175) and argues that "...the content and mode of narration the sharecropper chooses reflect his knowledge

of what a white audience expects of the Afro-American" (*Blues* 178). Getting help from the white people and Mr. Norton's money because of the narrative of the incest story, Trueblood says "I'm better off than I ever been before" (67), though he knows what he does is "the worse thing a man could ever do in his family..." (67). In this sense, Baker believes "the Norton-Trueblood interaction" (*Blues* 190) actually reveals "the American industrial-capitalist society" (*Blues* 190), because "as an artistic form incorporating the historical and ideological subtexts of an American industrial society, the sharecropper's tale represents a supreme capitalist fantasy" (*Blues* 192). This statement exactly proves that both Robert O'Meally's observation about Ellison's regarding Jazz as a discipline and Anderson's research on Ellison's awareness of the "exoticizing appreciation of the blues and Jazz" ("Ralph" 92) make sense.

Besides Trueblood, Peter Wheatstraw, who calls himself "the Devil's only son-in-law" (176) and claims his name is Blue (176) in chapter nine, is also an important figure. Tracy argues that Wheatstraw is the connection between the blues and existentialist philosophy that of Jean-Paul Sartre ("Blues" 135). As Tracy does, Eric J. Sundquist notices that Peter Wheatstraw is actually the stage name of William Bunch. He is a blue singer whom Ellison knew in the Midwest (*Cultural* 123). Sundquist also has a careful research on the African American folk song, street market song, and spiritual in the novel, such as "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue," "Run, Nigger, Run," "Jack the Rabbit! Jack the Rabbit!," "Many Thousands Gone," etc. In addition, Tracy indicates that Mary is also a character who sings Bessie Smith's "Back Water Blues" ("Blues" 135). These characters are all related to Afro-American expression, and so is invisible man himself definitely.

The relationship of the invisible man and Afro-American expression is widely discussed. Robert B. Stepto's critical investigation of the slave narrative tradition of

Frederick Douglass (“Literacy” 25); Nelson George’s creative reading that suggests “Ellison’s description of a battle royal in *Invisible Man* could be a contemporary rap lyric” (viii) in introduction of *Hip Hop America* (1998). No matter how they argue about Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Afro-American expression plays a crucial role. The most important point for the readers of *Invisible Man*, as my critical research has quoted in previous part of this chapter, is to de-materialize Afro-American expression to avoid of a material reading, but at the same time to materialize it as an Ellisonian style of his own aesthetic expression, his reincarnation of Louis Armstrong.

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Quoting Larry Neal’s attack on Ellison and *Invisible Man* in *Black Fire* in 1968 that, “We know who we are, and are not invisible, *at least not to each other*” (“Ellison’s” 36; emphasis original) in Chapter Three, we realize Neal’s early attitude toward Ellison and his *Invisible Man*. As my observation has shown, he later changes his negative criticism on him and his *Invisible Man* and claims that the novel is both artistically and politically a great one (“Ellison’s” 54). As a matter of fact, Neal’s reevaluation of *Invisible Man* is also one of the reception of Marxism among black intellectuals and activists. Reading Ellison’s short story “It Always Breaks Out,” Neal thinks that in the story burning a Cadillac on the White House lawn could be a public gesture with an amusing political announcement. It could also be regarded as a way of expressing artistic idea (“Ellison’s” 54).

With this argument, Neal separates the definition of art from the frame of Marxist literary criticism,

> The minute a work of art enters the social sphere, it faces the problem of being perceived on all kinds of levels, from the grossly political to the philosophically sublime. It just be’s that way, that’s all. And Marx hasn’t a

thing to do with it. (54)

After all, the critics reading *Invisible Man* is not Marx himself but the Marxists. Neal then admits that Black Nationalism has deformed Marxist literary theory, and the situation proves what James A. Winders suggests, "[i]t would not be possible to claim that Marxism constitutes a theory of literature as such" (625). As Baker wants to "avoid a naïve Marxism" (*Blues* 3) and reverses the fixed process from the "material as a substrate" to the "semiotic" like "a peculiar expressive form" and argues that the former can only be accurately understood by the latter (*Blues* 3), Winders implies that Marxist literary theorists also "view language as 'material' in a textual sense" (625) for culture is inseparable to language. And in this way, the ideology that lurks behind the textuality reveals the social structures and its institutionalization.

Winders continues to suggest a better approach to theorize Marxist literary interpretation, "[s]ince many people subscribe to what in the Marxist tradition would be described as a 'reified' concept of culture…, it can come as a surprise to discover how much attention Marxist theories have devoted to literature and art" (625). From this point of view Winders penetrates the interior structure of Marxism from its own discourse. As basic Marxism defines, the material base is the mode of production or "underlying system of economic forces and relations" ("Marx" 625); superstructure contains social institutions such as education, religion, politics, and art. In *Capital*, Karl Marx actually compares language to a kind of commodity (45).

Like language that human beings have to communicate with each other, people need a stamp to decipher "an object of utility as a value" (45) among the social products. Winders believes that a writer equals a worker in a capitalist society from this view point. If commodities speak, texts speak as well. As a result, Winders says,

The Marxist critique of bourgeois ideology encompasses the commodity

> abstracted unnaturally from the social relations of production that generated it and the *objet d'art* treated as a timeless cultural commodity surrounded by its aura of aesthetic refinement. (628; emphasis original)

Here we see the connection between Marxism and New Criticism, because New Critics "reify" texts to an "ahistorical realm" ("Marx"628). From Jauss's advice that "the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an aporia, the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship" ("Literary" 10) to Baker's reversing the material and the semiotic, the reading politics of the committed-art school and the detached-art school should also be problematized by another possible way of reading.

"Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers" (7). The invisible man then continues, "[t]hat makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a 'thinker-tinker'" (7). Henry Ford founds his own car company in Detroit, Michigan and then leads America to the peak of industrialization and urbanization. His friend, Thomas Edison, who urges him to use the gasoline to power the engine of automobile, is the great inventor of electric light bulb. Benjamin Franklin is undeniably a cult hero who creates the way to wealth. All the three role models the invisible man compares himself with are the representatives of modernization, industrialization, and capitalism.

The naïve invisible man believes that he himself belongs to the so-called "great American tradition" and moves to Harlem to earn a living in many kinds of occupations but fails. The only job that is suitable for him and makes him a "useful" person is the orator in the Brotherhood. In the prologue, the hole that the invisible man dwells in is a symbol of industrialization with an implication of Edison. The invisible man describes that he fights with Monopolated Light & Power by stealing

lights from it to power the 1,369 lights in his hole, and his hole is the brightest place among the other places in New York, including Broadway. “And love light.” The invisible man says, “Perhaps you’ll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form” (6; emphasis original).

The Ellison invisibility annoys the critics like Neal and Addison Gayle, as my critical investigation in Chapter Three has shown. Neal denounces Ellison for he describes an African American as “invisible”; Gayle links light to the signification that the color “white” brings in traditional understanding of color. They all overemphasize the aspect of complexion without paying attention to other aspects that Ellison carefully arranges in the novel. The hole is actually a dead end for the invisible man because he has to hide himself in it because of Ras the Destroyer/Ras the Exhorter.

The symbol of industrialization continues in chapter one. The invisible man gets a chance to deliver an oration at his high school graduation. He takes it seriously and wonders if the white men, “the town’s big shots” (17), will like his speech or not. Strangely, he is taken to a ridiculous “battle royal” that teases the black students with Franklin’s discovery, electricity. This battle royal gathers the black students together, and they all have a pair of boxing gloves. They are soaking wet and forced to pick up the coins on the electrified rug and to hit each other. The audience is the bourgeois class like “bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants” (18).

Another symbol of industrialization of Ford’s car appears in chapter two. After the invisible man suffered from the weird “battle royal,” he delivers his oration and get a scholarship to the state college for Negroes in a suitcase without any reason that makes sense but merely “in the name of the Board of Education” (32). One day he is

asked to pick up one of “the millionaires descended from the North on Founders’ Day” (37), Mr. Emerson, who inspects and encourages the college affairs each spring. Driving him with a car is a terrible and frustrating experience to him, because he is expelled from college by Dr. Bledsoe for taking Mr. Emerson to see Jim Trueblood, who has an incestuous relationship with his own daughter.

No matter the hole that the invisible man lives to fight with Monopolated Light & Power, the electrified rug in battle royal, or the car which he drives Mr. Emerson, the symbol of industrialization are negative. After he is expelled, the invisible man decides to leave for New York. “…how do you get to Harlem?” (157), the invisible man asks. A Red Cap tells him to “keep heading north,” (157) and sojourns in Men’s House. Though he is far away from his hometown, he still has his dream of being a successful orator. He imagines himself making a speech here,

> Of course you couldn’t speak that way in the North, the white folks wouldn’t like it, and the Negroes would say that you were “putting on.” But here in the North I would slough off my southern ways of speech. Indeed, I would have one way of speaking in the North and another in the south. (164)

Intriguingly, speaking as a form of Afro-American expression changes geographically from place to place. This fluidity matches Baker’s definition of the matrix as blues that “is” the sense of placelessness. The invisible man’s oration does not literally “represent” his transience, like the envelope saying “Keep This Nigger-Boy Running” (33) in his dream. Instead, it follows him anywhere and anytime, waiting his “little man” to show up and recognize the Afro-American expression.

At this moment, he meets Peter Wheatstraw who calls himself “blue.” “Folks is always making plans and changing ’em” (175). Wheatstraw tells the invisible man so.

Almost being like a prophecy, the invisible man is not hired by Mr. Emerson's son because he ultimately realizes that Dr. Bledsoe asks so in his recommendation letter. He asks the employers who read the letter to keep the invisible man running. So, the invisible man comes to Liberty Paints and tries to make a living. The engineer Brockway takes him to know the company's product "Optic White." "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White" (217) is the company's slogan.

The company has a union, and it automatically counts the invisible man as one of the members. The invisible man thinks, "[t]hey had made their decision without giving me a chance to speak for myself" (223). For this he has a quarrel with Brockway, and suddenly the accident happens at this moment. The shrill hissing emits noisily from the boiler, and the valve wheels are out of control, losing the standard of the gauges. A horrifying explosion makes the invisible man,

> [seem] to sprawl in an interval of clarity beneath a pile of broken machinery, my head pressed back against a huge wheel, my body splattered with a stinking goo. Somewhere an engine ground in furious futility, granting loudly until a pain shot around the curve of my head and bounced me off into blackness for a distance, only to strike another pain that lobbed me back. And in that clear instant of consciousness I open my eyes to a blinding flash. (230)

The interpretation of this episode could be regarded as a similar one to Neal's reading "It Always Breaks Out." The invisible man's blanking out in Liberty Paint is a politically protest to the machinery that attributed to the white civilization. At the same time, the destroying of Liberty Paint is also a public gesture which symbolizes the foundering of the machine culture of white power in an artistic sense. Marx also has a solid research on the machine culture in *Capital*. According to him, the most

important change since John Watt is the gradual disappearance of human muscle. A man's labour power is substituted by implement-machine with natural forces such as wind and water, or animals, and human becomes "invisible" in the capitalistic application of machinery (230-36).

Waking up in the hospital, the invisible man feels uncomfortable without any immediate memory but "as though I had just begun to live" (233). The only sound in his brain is the black folk song that his grandmother hums. Leaving the hospital, invisible man goes back to Men's House and sees a riot. In the mess the invisible man tries to organize people by delivering a speech. Brother Jack listens to it and praises invisible man as a "talented" and "natural" orator. The invisible man tell Brother Jack that he is "simply angry," but in Brother Jack's opinion his "anger was skillfully controlled" and "had eloquence" (290). Again, orating as a way to show Afro-American expression is the characteristic of the invisible man. The little man, his readers/audiences, is all waiting for him to speak. Brother Jack tells the invisible man, "[t]hey exist, and when the cry of protest is sounded, there are those who will hear it and act" (292).

Orating is a conglomeration of political act and an art of speaking. It is politically and aesthetically a strategy to African Americans. The early slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, serve as an excellent example. He becomes a political icon in African American social movement and a prominent author in Afro-American literary history. The invisible man starts to consider the job offering by Brother Jack, "[i]t was, after all, a job that promised to exercise my talent for public speaking, and if the pay was anything at all it would be more than I had now" (298). The invisible man's job hunting keeps him running from Mr. Emerson's son's office to Liberty Paint, and then he considers

working for a political party now.

"This is your new identity" (309), Brother Jack gives invisible man an envelope and tells him to use this new identity from now on. He is one of the members in the Brotherhood. He has to act as other black people do, speak what other black people would speak, and do what he is expected to do. One of the members asks him to sing. "…*all* colored people sing" (312; emphasis original). He says to everybody, and sings himself with an awkward tone. Brother Jack opposes him by saying that assuming all colored people can sing is "an outrageous example of unconscious racial chauvinism" (312). Here, we could perceive Ellison's deliberate and academic view about Afro-American expression that has been illustrated in the previous section. Once "all colored people sing" sustains as a "Truth," it loses its historical meaning. They sing not because they are "colored," but because they are human beings who suffered from the material world of Western civilization.

The invisible man is trapped in whether he is "colored" or "human." He is getting confused with whether his skill of oration is committed to the black community or to humanity. His first public speech at a rally is launched at Harlem. This job makes the invisible man feel that he is "becoming someone else" (335). During the speech, the invisible man tells the rally, "I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*. Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human" (346; emphasis original). As we can tell by this statement, the job of being an orator makes the invisible man feel more human than those are related to industrialization.

But the problem also rises at the same time. The invisible man's improvising style to speak is regarded as "wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous…it was *incorrect*" (349; emphasis original). The Brotherhood makes a

conclusion that the invisible man must be trained. “There’s hope that our wild but effective speaker may be tamed” (351). In this way, oration as a form of Afro-American expression becomes a discipline to help the activists become “champions of a scientific approach to society” (350). The art of speaking is distorted into a “science” to achieve a goal, and the materiality in language concretes as an ideology. By his skill of orating, the invisible man doubts,

> What had I meant by saying that I had become “more human”? Was it a phrase that I had picked up from some preceding speaker, or a slip of the tongue? For a moment I thought of my grandfather and quickly dismissed him. What had an old slave to do with humanity? (354)

James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and Sean O’Casey suddenly occurs to him. “Our task is that of making ourselves individuals” (354). The invisible man thinks so. He changes his mind and does not say “more.” Instead, he uses the word “less.” “[L]ess a Negro,” “less a being apart,” and “less an exile from down home, the South” (354). Then he asks, “[t]o become less─in order to become more?” (354).

The question, “the possibility of being more than a member of a race” (355) keeps haunting the invisible man like a nightmare. The invisible man tries hard to “master the ideology” of making speeches for the Brotherhood. Brother Jack reminds him, “[m]aster it,…but don’t overdo it. Don’t let it master you” (359). Soon, the nightmare then incarnates a person calls Ras the Exhorter. He is a speech maker whose identity is a black nationalist. The invisible man sees him with a glance while he just arrives at Harlem. One day, when the Brotherhood holds a street meeting publicly, Ras shows up. “We organize─organization is good─but we organize black. BLACK!” (373). He yells. The invisible man has a different opinion from Ras, because he believes that the white could be allies to the black. “You black and

beautiful—don't let 'em tell you different" (373).

Ras shows a double alienation of the invisible man. Firstly, the invisible man is alienated from the machine culture that is related to the white civilization. His labour power is limited and invalid in the "great American tradition" of a thinker-tinker. Secondly, his ability of orating as labour power is also alienated to the Brotherhood for political reason. Hence, his talented skill of oration could neither be simply committed to the resistance to the machine culture nor to a "science" which theorizes the art of making speeches. He needs to redeem his life-world, and Frederick Douglass ignites this motive.

During his conversation with Brother Tarp, the invisible man explains that his grandfather used to tell him about him but he himself knows not much. Brother Tarp then tells him, "[y]ou just take a look at [Douglass] once in a while. You have everything you need…" (378). Looking at the portrait of Douglass, the invisible man suddenly realizes, "[m]y new name was getting around. It's very strange, I thought, but things are so unreal for them normally that they believe that to call a thing by name is to make it so. And yet I am what they think I am…" (379). Inspiring by this idea, the invisible man begins to explain Douglass's situation, "[w]hat had his true name been? Whatever it was, it was as *Douglass* that he became himself, define himself" (381; emphasis original). At this moment, he decides to discover his own life-world. "Well, I had made a speech, and it has made me a leader, only not the kind I had expected" (381). As a result, he keeps running.

***

In Chapter Two, my argument focus on Ellison, who is defined as a life-world modernist, in a sense of Woolf's theory of the novel and Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory. Life itself could not be theorized, and the representation of life by

fictional writing should not be deformed by any kind of ideology. Jauss comes up with the idea of the reader, and Ellison also pays attention to his readers. He intends to give the experience of life itself to his readers but not "what-life-is-all-about." The invisible man now realizes what he wants to do by his ability of oration is to experience life. He refuses to accept "what-life-is-all-about" from Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Emerson's son, Brockway, the Brotherhood, even his grandfather. Just before he is expelled from the Brotherhood, he thinks,

> [The Brotherhood] had given the world a new shape, and me a vital role. We recognize no loose end, everything could be controlled by our science. Life was all pattern and discipline; and the beauty of discipline is when it works. And it was working very well. (382)

As Wheatstraw says about plan changing, the invisible man got to run and run and run. Brother Wrestrum ferociously accuses him "to dramatize our differences" (392).

Brother Wrestrum tells invisible man that "dramatizing difference" is "the worse kind of thing for Brotherhood—because we want to make folks think of the things we have in common" (392). The invisible man's skill of oration, like Ellison's skill of writing, is asked to be taken as a homogeneous representation for a race. For the invisible man it is the "ideology of speech making"; for Ellison is protest writing that of Stowe and Wright. Finally, the Brotherhood transfers the invisible man to the Women Question, a women's rights party outside the Harlem. Hearing this decision, the invisible man says, "[n]o, despite my anger and disgust, my ambitions were too great to surrender so easily. And why should I restrict myself, segregate myself? I was a *spokesman*—why shouldn't I speak about women, or any other subject?" (407; emphasis original).

From this moment, Baker's concept of "the matrix of blues" and "spirit work"

shows its transcendent values. When the invisible man moves from the South to the North, he knows how to adapt his orating skill. Leaving Harlem for the Women Question, the invisible man carries his orating skill to suit a new environment. He does not speak for the Brotherhood anymore, not even for merely the black race. The art of speech making as a form of Afro-American expression does not belong to the black among the black people. It is a spirit work that makes people find their own life-world, far more than a discipline. This reveals the fluidity of Afro-American expression and its transcendence beyond the binary opposition of art and protest.

After Brother Clifton is shot to death by the cop, the invisible man wonders about some issues about history philosophically. At Brother Clifton's funeral, the invisible man delivers a sobering speech. People's anger keep burning because of Brother Clifton's death, and another orator Ras the Exhorter now becomes Ras the Destroyer. The invisible man starts to recognize his invisibility but confront the issue of responsibility. "Why should I worry over bureaucrats, blind men? *I am invisible*" (528; emphasis original). Experiencing a dream-like as well as a messy running, the invisible man says, "I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning" (571).

In the epilogue, the invisible man sums up the whole process of becoming invisible, "[w]hen one is invisible he finds such problems as good and evil, honesty and dishonesty, of such shifting shapes that he confuses one with the other, depending upon who happens to be looking through him in time" (572). His journey is not only a geographical but also a philosophical one that help him to find his life-world by orating. Though he chooses to hibernation, he knows that he still has his social obligations to do. No matter what he is going to do, he wants to live his own life. As he suggests, the invisible man lives a life others might think to be awkward, but a

genuine life of his own nonetheless.

Unlike Wright, Neal, and Gayle, Ellison is a writer who de-materializes the material world by criticizing the materiality around the life-world of African-Americans. At the same time, he has also successfully de-materialized the institutionalization of Afro-American expression in the black vernacular tradition. He is the one who truly understands the interweaving of the material and the semiotic by showing the process of materializing in *Invisible Man*. By doing so, Ellison transcends the aporia of aesthetics and politics that have been a symptom in the history of Afro-American literature. His *Invisible Man* is neither for art's sake nor for protest's sake, but for life's sake. (De-)Materializing Afro-American expression makes it leap beyond a confined battlefield and takes the readers to experience the life-world of African Americans with the invisible man. As the invisible man says, "[l]ife is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat" (577).

The invisible man destroys the so-called "what-life-is-all-about" from both sides of politics and the aesthetics. For politics, as we see in Chapter Three, Ellison shows his uniqueness in composing the art of fiction due to "the forms of things unknown." For aesthetics, my discussion in this chapter shows how Ellison thinks and deals with the complicated issue of Afro-American expression as a cultural phenomenon. The invisible man mentions Louis Armstrong in the prologue. He adores Armstrong and his "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" (8), and he explains how he feels when listening to Armstrong's music. No matter what discourse they argue, like Tracy's observation of Ellison's blues tradition which is related to existentialism, jazz as a discipline to Ellison from O'Meally's interview with him, or oration as an art skill, Afro-American expression is rather than an artistic performance. Afro-American

expression is neither the representative for American democracy, nor the exotic performance on stage. It is life-world itself for the “little man” who is an “everyday expert.”

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Who's Afraid of Ralph Ellison?

In *Cultures of Letters* (1993), Richard H. Brodhead surveys the scenes of literary production in the nineteenth-century America and illustrates his opinions about the literary production, thus:

> Writing always takes place within some completely concrete cultural situation, a situation that surrounds it with some particular landscape of institutional structures, affiliates it with some particular group from among the array of contemporary groupings, and installs it some group based world of understandings, practices, and values. (8)

From Chapter One to Two, Ellison's position is switched from a signifying modernist, who struggles and faces his "two-ness," to a life-world modernist who emphasizes on the "little man" who could recognize Afro-American expression. Once again, Ellison's attitude toward writing, as I reiterated in Chapters Two and Three, is the reason why he is so different from the protest writers, such as Wright. In Chapter Two, we actually see the different ideas toward writing a novel between Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Ellison's "The Art of Fiction," "Society, Morality, and the Novel," and "The Little Man at Chehaw Station." Abandoning the extreme and ideological writing methods of protest writing, Ellison hopes to "talk" to the readers and his audience with Afro-American expression. From this view point, *Invisible Man* is more than a pure literary work of art without any extra socio-cultural function.

In Chapter Three, I further examine the importance of Afro-American expression, that is, the forms of things unknown, to Ellison. Generally speaking, this chapter could be regarded as an epitome of the literary and cultural atmosphere among the (black) intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. Again, we realize that

Ellison's uniqueness is due to his attitudes toward writing in "The World and the Jug," "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," and "An Extravagance of Laughter." At the same time, this chapter is also a short study of the reception of *Invisible Man* from the mid-fifties to mid-seventies. By investigating the limited reception of the novel, we also understand that it is Ellison's recognition of Afro-American expression which makes him different from even the literary critics on the issue of Afro-American literature. To continue illustrating this point, Chapter Four focuses on the various forms of Afro-American expression that Ellison appropriates and adopts in *Invisible Man*.

In Chapter Four, what is more important is "(de-)materializing" Afro-American expression. As I have indicated in Chapter One, black music under the theoretical frame of American studies is not simply an art form anymore, but has become "the fascination with exotic art forms in modernism…" (Yu 106). In *Invisible Man*, the invisible man's orating skill is materialized as an object of art by this sort of exoticism in a similar manner. Though Ellison adopts the forms of Jazz, Blues, and even story telling, he does not want to use them as a tool for writing an African American novel, as if they are so necessarily indispensable to black literature. In addition, the invisible man's orating skill is also materialized by the ideology of Brotherhood. Through my analysis in Chapter Four, the issues of art and protest could be mirrored as the aporia of aesthetics and politics in the Black Aesthetic, especially in the dichotomy of the committed-art school and the detached-art school.

As what I have done in Chapter One, my thesis also ends with a literary debate. Through a meticulous discussion of a wide array of topics ranging from Ellison's theory of the novel and the possibility for him to be a "life-world modernist," the negative criticisms on Ellison and *Invisible Man* by Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and

Addison Gayle, to Ellison's use of Afro-American expression in the novel, my thesis could, to some degree, formulated as this probably be a question: Who's afraid of Ralph Ellison? The answer could be found in Paul de Man's argument in "The Resistance to Theory."

When discussing the relation of literary scholarship, the theory, and the teaching of literature, de Man explains that the methods of reading and interpretation for understanding literature formulate a discipline that engages "rational means" (4). To "theorize" an object of study means to "be rational." From the textual analysis, we see how the art of speaking of the invisible man is distorted into a "science." If Afro-American expression as a black vernacular tradition is merely an art form, it already is theorized in the realm of aesthetics. It is just like an exhibition in a museum of ethnology, so people are likely to say "*all* colored people sing" (*Invisible* 312; emphasis original). But the fact is that not every single black man is Louis Armstrong, Mos Def, or Jennifer Hudson.

Likewise, the invisible man's orating skill could never be "tamed." Brother Wrestrum wants to avoid dramatizing the differences among the black people, but the invisible man's orating skill makes him different from other black members. Political cause also "theorizes" Afro-American expression by assuming a logical pattern of being a black man. Protest writing, in this perspective, theorizes Afro-American literature by Marxist thinking and Black Nationalism. Ellison is very brilliant, as he does not theorize his writing according to either aesthetics or politics. He, like Jauss, intends to accept the aporia of the aesthetic and historical consideration in Afro-American literary history.

Crudely speaking, literature as creative writing is "literary"; theory is "non-literary" due to the system of logic and grammar it owes. Literary theory,

however, is a mixture of both “literary” and “theoretical”. De Man notices that “[l]iterary theory can be said to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic” (7). Like my argument in Chapter Two has shown, a complete aesthetic judgment, such as “*Invisible Man* is a pure literary work,” is apt to be ambiguous, even Eurocentric and Americentric to a writer like Ellison. De Man reminds us that “[a]esthetics is part of a universal system of philosophy rather than a specific theory” (8), so de Man asserts that literature involves the voiding of aesthetic categories (10).

As Jauss pays attention to the historical and aesthetic considerations in literary history in “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” de Man conducts his own discussion of literary theory from the frame of aesthetic and historical contexts. In de Man’s opinion, “the development of literary theory is itself overdetermined by complications inherent in its very project and unsettling with regard to its status as a scientific discipline” (12), and such an understanding is adopted in my arguments. In Chapter Two, I indicate that Woolf’s theory of the novel means to follow the instinct. To paraphrase her words in de Man’s way, we realize that literature falls in fact into the realm of rhetoric. When mentioning the classical *trivium*, de Man writes “[t]he uncertain relationship between grammar and rhetoric (as opposed to that between grammar and logic) is apparent…” (14). In *Invisible Man*, the invisible man’s oration is a rhetorical behavior without theorizing the form of Afro-American expression in the wake of aesthetics or politics. This simply makes him become “more human” (346). He experiences his life-world with black verbal art, just as Ellison has refused to theorize Afro-American literature for the sake of either art or politics.

For one thing, Ellison does not want his *Invisible Man* to become a protest writing in the context of Marxism and Black Nationalism; for another thing, he

worries about his using Afro-American expression as a literary style would be considered as an "object of art." He simply wants to write a life-world of African Americans, neither a world full of protest, hatred, conflicts, nor an exotic world of African American verbal art. Delmore Schwartz admits in *Partisan Review*, "the language of literary criticism seems shallow and patronizing when one has to speak of a book like [*Invisible Man*]…" (qtd. in O'Meally 3). Intriguingly, Schwartz made this claim in 1952, exactly the year the novel was published. I wonder whether he would be astonished if he should witness the debates on the novel from the 1960s to the 1970s.

Back to my argument in Chapter Two, Ellison's uniqueness is attributed to his emphasis on the role of the reader, in his words, the "little man" at Chehaw Station. What little man expects to have is not art or protest, but Afro-American expression as "the experiencing of experience" from Baker's point of view. *Invisible Man* is neither a pure literary work nor a piece of protest writing. Instead, it is an experiencing of experience, a work of Ellison's instinct. Those who are afraid of Ellison actually resist the fact that literature itself is rhetoric but not logic and grammar. The invisible man's closing sentence, "[w]ho knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you" (581), now opens up a new possibility in the horizon of literature, literary history, and literary theory.

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