

Locating Asante: Making Use of *The Afrocentric Idea*

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How silly of a writer to think that he or she must leave the source of power in order to be universal; true universalism in literature adheres in the ability of a writer to capture the special story or stories of his or her own culture in ways that those stories make impact on others, regardless of the first language.

MOLEFI KETE ASANTE

It may be accurate to suggest, as Mary John Smith does, that the history of scholarly inquiry is, in many respects, a chronicle of changing paradigms. "As new ways of understanding the world emerge, old world views collapse in their wake" (Smith 1988, 301). We are often reminded of the "Copernican revolution" with its heliocentric theory of planetary motion. It eclipsed Ptolemy's geocentric orientation, in which the earth was believed to be a fixed base around which the sun revolved. Thomas Kuhn is correct in his critique of narrowing monism within scientific fields (1977); it fosters a brutish reverence for one way of looking at the world.

Popper (1970), Toulmin (1972), Campbell (1970), and others advance an idea characterized by pluralism, maintaining a greater tolerance

for alternative world views and holding that prevailing paradigms are always subject to intradisciplinary criticism. Scientific "evolution" would aptly describe the development of knowledge within a given field. Karl Popper would further insist that a pluralistic scholarly community is an open society in which no dominant paradigm is ever sacred (1965). Certainly, this helpful criticism advances our appreciation for intradisciplinary diversity. But it does not go far enough to advance our understanding of the development of a truly universal view of knowledge, the universe and human activity.

Enter Molefi Kete Asante's *The Afrocentric Idea*. Not only does this volume continue the conversation on the revolutionary nature of paradigmatic changes within knowledge communities, but it forges ahead toward an evaluation of the foundations upon which the so-called scientific disciplines go about the business of "coming to know." *The Afrocentric Idea* is not a mere addition or clarification to our understandings about paradigmatic change. It stands as a forceful heuristic, opening discussion on all of the issues and assumptions which undergird the present state of scholarly conversation about the development of knowledge. As such, it is as important a contribution as Kuhn, Popper, and the rest may have offered. Largely, however, it will stand as an even farther-reaching idea than any we have examined.

Asante is free to question the commitments of his own scholarly training in ways others have not been. Examining "the ground" upon which science and knowledge development stand, he raises what he calls the "first-order question" that goes unasked and, therefore, unanswered. This willingness yields territory fertile for exploration. Claiming no allegiance to a narrow idea of the scientific adventure, he urges our examination of the generation of knowledge to include what heretofore has been believed to be "random, mystical type[s]" of discovery (Asante 1987, 16).

This liberty and willingness to go beyond the text of academic conversation into its "structure," posing critical questions about traditional assumptions and values embedded in the materialistic view of reality, place this work as a "criticism of the ruling ideology of . . . society."

My objective has always been a critique that propounds a cultural theory of society by the very act of criticism. In other words, to provide a radical assessment of a given reality is to create among other things, another reality (Asante 1987, 5).

So it is by this very act of reality that expands and carries a torch for those who is not the place others what our eyes have always the confusion a clear, day of an oppressive situation

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By tendering this volume displace Eurocentric paradigms and dispel the myths of the decade. He appeals for his ining human phenomenon historical experience of

So it is by this very act of criticism that Asante calls into order a view of reality that expands the limits of human knowledge. As critic, he carries a torch for those who know and have always known that the world is not the place others have required us to believe it is. He articulates what our eyes have always seen, and our ears heard. There arises from the confusion a clear, definitive voice, within the academy, "in defiance of an oppressive situation."

I have the insight that comes from being born black in the United States. That fact puts me in a critical mood within the intellectual and social milieu I share with Eurocentrists. As a critic, I am always seeking to create a new world, to find an escape, to liberate those who see only a part of reality (1987, 5).

Although Asante is by no means the first (or last) to bring exacting critique to the Eurocentric enterprise, he does provide one of the most strident cases warranting a reexamination of the assumptions under which we are forced to operate. His call is to move beyond a hegemonic Eurocentrism to one which is appropriate in its context within a universe of ideas. He urges a view that "considers the possibilities of other realities, indeed shared realities" (1987, 7). He is rigorous in this articulation, which culminates nearly two decades of pursuit of a broader frame. Of the Eurocentrist apologists, he writes:

They assume that everyone else should simply acquiesce in their expansive provincialism. They not only make their arguments with a bewildering array of tropes, figures and oxymorons, but they assert them as if there is no other reality, no other experience (1987, 7).

This is the academic theatre of operation out of which Asante has moved. His is a post-Eurocentrist's attempt to get beyond the imposed vision to a notion that is more akin to the witness of his personal and cultural realities. His own journey informs the similar trek required of all those who would theorize about knowledge and reality. A true picture of what is "universal" is the quest here.

By tendering this volume, Asante proposes an idea that will, at once, displace Eurocentric provincialism (as the assumed universal notion) and dispel the myths of objectivity which characterize the current facade. He appeals for historical and conceptual authenticity when examining human phenomena which emanate from outside the cultural and historical experience of Europe and its descendants.

Specifically, phenomena which are part of the African panorama require examination that aligns method of scholarly inquiry with the cultural attributes of African peoples. Rejected is the notion of viewing African phenomena through Eurocentric lenses and claiming to have arrived at accurate understandings of African human behavior. In short, an examination of African human activity deserves and requires perspectives and methodologies contiguous with that activity. Hegemonic Eurocentrism fosters an analysis that "takes a back seat to galloping ethnocentric interpretations of [African] phenomena" (Asante 1987, 9).

The crystallization of this critical perspective I have called Afrocentricity, which means, literally, placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior (1987, 6).

As such, as has been claimed elsewhere, we are called to examine African phenomena with Africa and African peoples as *subjects* at the center of our study, instead of in the margins. What Asante espouses is a "centrism" that permits, if not requires, an acknowledgment of "place."

The Afrocentrist sees knowledge of this "place" perspective as a fundamental rule of intellectual inquiry because its content is a self-conscious obliteration of the subject/object duality and the enthronement of an African holism. A rigorous discipline is necessary to advance the intellectual movement toward a meaningful concept of place. In saying this I am challenging the Afrocentrist to maintain inquiry rooted in a strict interpretation of place in order to betray all naive racial theories and establish Afrocentricity as a legitimate response to human conditions. All knowledge results from an occasion of encounter in place. But the place remains a rightly shaped perspective that allows the Afrocentrist to put African ideals and values at the center of inquiry. If this does not happen then Afrocentricity does not exist. . . . The Afrocentrist will not question the idea of the centrality of African ideals and values but will argue over what constitutes those ideals and values (1990, 5).

In *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, in which Asante details the broad parameters of Africalogical inquiry, the idea of centrism becomes clearer and directly applied:

Centrism, the groundedness of observation and behavior in one's own historical experiences, shapes the concepts, paradigms, theories, and methods of Africalogy. In this way Africalogy secures its place alongside other centric pluralisms without hierarchy and without seeking hegemony. As a discipline, Africalogy is sustained by a commitment to

centering the study of African cultural voice of the complicit door for interpretations of reference to the African

Clarifying his presupposition what he calls a "critical re-orientation" of an Afrocentric orientation is his desire to "see a paradigm of discovery with verifiability which what the Afrocentrist knows of economies in real, everyday experiences for a broader idea of relevant to a discussion about

Asante boldly dismisses things." Communication of traditions of Western cultural concept of communication (1987, 59).

How can the oppressed possible that established Eurocentrism to understand the literature cannot neutralize their culture white critics or engage in critique of ethnocentrism is never to black and white, often try to Their attempts at criticizing can they go beyond the limits

Asante claims that Africa understood when our literary bounds of Eurostream form gives . . . in order to perform (167).

Ultimately, what Asante views of phenomena, an approach and understanding of human life will cause us to "see" and edge that the Eurostream

centering the study of African phenomena and events in the particular cultural voice of the composite African people. Furthermore, it opens the door for interpretations of reality based in evidence and data secured by reference to the African world voice (1990, 12).

Clarifying his presuppositions, then, Asante has cleared the way for what he calls a "critical re-evaluation of social phenomena on the basis of an Afrocentric orientation" (1987, 10). Essentially, this present work is his desire to "see a paradigm of complementarity that integrates discovery with verifiability where necessary" (Asante 1987, 16). Claiming what the Afrocentrist *knows* as true, namely that "oppositional dichotomies in real, everyday experiences do not exist" (1987, 15), Asante argues for a broader idea of the scientific, particularly as it becomes relevant to a discussion about the use of discourse.

Asante boldly dismisses the notion of "Europe, the teacher in all things." Communication conceptions and use are not rooted only in the traditions of Western culture. No, there is the "existence of an African concept of communication rooted in traditional African philosophies" (1987, 59).

How can the oppressed use the same theories as the oppressors? Is it possible that established European theory regards its view as the best way to understand the literature of African Americans? . . . Eurocentric critics cannot neutralize their cultural 'superiority' when they criticize previous white critics or engage in criticism themselves; the fundamental question of ethnocentrism is never touched. In fact, the Eurocentric writers, both black and white, often try to consolidate their Eurocentric impositions. Their attempts at criticizing ethnocentric rhetoric never go beyond, nor can they go beyond, the limits of Eurocentrism (1987, 165-66).

Asante claims that African-American communication cannot be understood when our literary and rhetorical criticism is limited to the bounds of Eurostream formulations. "Rhetoric must transcend ideologies . . . in order to perform the task of continuous reconciliation" (1987, 167).

Ultimately, what Asante has proposed is an alternative to materialistic views of phenomena, an advance toward a multicultural negotiation of approaching and understanding expressive phenomena. An Afrocentric understanding of human communication and all human responses to life will cause us to "see" anew. The new vision will be the new knowledge that the Eurostream hegemony has canceled out with the claim

that it does not exist or is not valid. Such claims are supported in a monocultural framework because the new knowledge is generated by and represents the concerns of folk who are seen as aberrant from the European and European-American male experiential norm. These claims, however, are the gasping lips of a fading old world order.

We see on the horizon the development of an idea of people that transcends the fruits of colonial mentalities. This is the discovery and restructuring of knowledge that will set us—all of us—free!

AFROCENTRIC THEORY AND CRITICISM

It is this idea of revising the conceptualization of knowledge and theory that urges Asante toward the Afrocentric Idea. Now, the rules for structuring the bases of information, concepts and theories undergo a shift. "No longer can the structures of knowledge which supported . . . hegemony be defended: [Euro-Americans] must take their place, not above, nor below, but alongside the rest of humanity" (Asante and Ravitch 1991, 268). Afrocentric theory becomes a marshaling force in the march toward multiculturalism in American thinking and education at all levels. Claiming multiculturalism as a self-defining movement, Asante insists that "the educational experience should reflect the diverse cultural heritage of our system of knowledge" (Asante and Ravitch 1991, 269).

Over and again, challenges to academic traditions resound from the Idea. Not only does it become necessary to critique current configurations in American educational curricula, but the theory impacts upon the examination of every genre of creative production. This present discussion is concerned with the implications of Asante's application of Afrocentric theory to expressive forms, including discourse and art. He claims that the Afrocentric enterprise transcends "mere demystification of Eurocentricity" (1991, 136), implying that the theory does not dispense with Eurocentric criticism. Rather, the literary, rhetorical and artistic theories of Eurocentrists must assume a posture alongside other possibilities and vision—especially where African Americans and their texts and art are up for examination.

A reasonable approach to discourse and criticism of art demands analytical, cultural contiguity. That is, useful, balanced critical theories assume viewpoints that account for the cultural venue within and from which discourse and art are created. Afrocentric ideas regarding texts and creative production, then, reflect African or African-American

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cultural responses to life, which distinguish such theory and criticism from the monocultural or ethnocentric Eurocentrism which we have outgrown. Any critical response to discourse and art must embrace the cultural items of its creator; otherwise, the explanation and interpretation such criticism provides has little validity.

What profit is gained by criticism of African-American rhetoric, for example, which has no orientation, knowledge, experience or understanding of the African cultural bases from which such rhetoric arises? The result would be a mere demonstration of what we have always seen: multicultural illiteracy cannot serve a society seeking interpretations and understandings of human experience that itself includes many cultures.

If it is safe to assume that part of what critical theory attempts is a reasoned dialogue about the symbolic, figurative and artistic uses of expressive genres to approach the universal by way of the particular; it is essential, then, to include in our idea of criticism a touchstone which reserves space for the dimension of culture. Theory and criticism then serve a function other than merely providing validation in a hegemonic theatre of operation. They lead to a truer sense of understanding.

This amounts to a "humanizing" turn within the humanities. Again, for the Multicultural Afrocentrist, a view of art and rhetoric will not discount Eurocentric approaches. It will, however, enhance and balance theory and criticism by stating positions, tendering interpretations, defending explanations, and making judgments centered around a unified, inclusive idea of what it means to create when the generative materials are informed from African and European (American) cultural experiences.

The diverse terms of African-American life express themselves in both African and European (American) signs and symbols. The Afrocentric Idea seeks to generate theories which account for these African-based elements. The challenge is always to tease out, for a particular artist, writer or speaker, those cultural approaches to the craft of expression which provide witness to both the African influences and the European-American ones.

In several instances, by now, Professor Asante has opened dialogue positioned around ascertaining "the cultural and intellectual address" of a writer, speaker, dancer, musician, actor, etc. His concerns focus around the "general cultural terms" of African-American rhetors and artists. In the case of discourse, for example, Asante establishes "two fundamental realities in situating a text: *location* and *dislocation*" (1991b, 1). In such a formulation, attention is given to the location of both the writer and

the serious reader of a text. An Afrocentric critic will, above all else, reflect a modicum of Afrocentric literacy. That is, the reader will have "an adequate orientation to the cultural motif which will more often than not be apparent in an African American writer's work" (1991b, 2).

While there are certain readily understandable guideposts in good literature, accessible, that is, to the least literate of us, . . . one must have more than a passing appreciation of African American culture. Indeed, the good critic and serious reader of African American literature should have been exposed to a variety of cultural information, e.g., the Dozens, folk tales, Ebonics, barber shops and beauty parlors, Baptist churches, Hoodoo and Roots rituals, *Ebony* magazine, *Jet* and numerous authors and musicians. This means that critics must take courses in African-American culture and history as they take courses in Euro-American history and culture. In fact, they must search the ancient foundations of the African's cultural response to reality and environment much as one looks to Greece or Rome for analogues in Euro-American writers and authors (1991b, 2-3).

A first-order "location" then occurs within the critic or theorist who renders a close reading of texts.

"[In] order to make judgments about the author's creative abilities as well as the author's philosophical underpinning," the critic will familiarize herself with the location of the writer (Asante 1991b, 7). By attending "to every nuance of African American culture," the reader may avoid losing the meaning of a text. This requires an effort to determine "from what center of experience the writer writes" (Asante 1991b, 14). Thus, "locating" a writer amounts to identifying degrees to which the writer has "immerse[d] herself or himself in the culture of the people...becom[ing] more authentically a voice of the culture, speaking... the language of the African American heritage with all of its universal implications in similar experiences of other people" (Asante 1991b, 14).

Professor Asante offers "language, attitude and direction" as markers which assist in the location of a writer and a text. *Language*, which involves structural rules, nuances, words and deep systems, is useful for determining if and how the writer navigates in a symbolic system of a racist society. What makes this writer's navigation a successful one? *Attitude* refers to the "signals of predisposition to respond in a characteristic manner to some situation, value, idea, object, person or group" (1991b, 6).

Direction pertains to Asante, "a text must be read by the dynamic interplay of the

The function of any attempt to determine "location" occurs in the analysis of texts proceeds from different perspectives, theories and methods. The critic's and a writer's cultural orientation is critical.

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An Afrocentric or methodological perspective and the suppositions and premisses are understated—in particular for culture as the teachers and writers write.

Confronted with the structure of knowledge about the support of African agriculture—all—communication posed Western criticism.

Direction pertains to a tendency or inclination in a writer's objective. For Asante, "a text must fit within a multiplicity of places, each one defined by the dynamic interplay of culture and purpose" (1991b, 10).

The function of "locating" an author precedes or at least inheres in any attempt to determine discrete approaches to various genres. Once "location" occurs in literary or rhetorical criticism, a balanced appraisal of texts proceeds using a multitude of available, relevant and applicable perspectives, theories and methods. The point here is that before theories and methods can be applied, the first-order questions regarding a critic's and a writer's "location" with respect to the numerous centers of cultural orientation and operation must be addressed by the serious critic.

The serious reader of writers must work to reaffirm the centrality of cultural experience as the place to begin to create a dynamic multicultural literacy, because without rootedness in our own cultural territory, we have no authentic story to tell (Asante 1991b, 15-16).

Assuming the value of "location" in the Afrocentric enterprise, building theory about human communication and expression and criticism offers possibilities which move us closer to an authentic dialogue about African-American communication. It is not enough to argue for inclusion of "centered" approaches. What are needed are reconceptualizations of our perspectives about human communication studies.

AFRICALOGICAL RECONSTRUCTIONS

An Afrocentric analysis and reinterpretation of discourse use begins with methodological considerations, as a way of clarifying the need for this perspective and the heuristic qualities of studying from it. Once the pre-suppositions and assumptions about the nature of an Afrocentric enterprise are understood, it becomes possible to view human communication—in particular, African-American discourse—with a proper regard for culture as the progenitor of the available materials from which speakers and writers will make their artistic, rhetorical choices.

Confronted with the weakening Eurostream hegemony over the structure of knowledge, and often unable to gain acceptance of the import of African philosophy and culture in African-American—if not all—communication, commentators have wittingly and unwittingly imposed Western constructs and values on rhetorical artifacts which grow

from traditions beyond the conventionally recognized sources. What we have had as a result are series upon series of critical studies which have failed to understand and value the communication of African Americans.

The past two decades have produced a core of communication scholars who have touched upon victory by demonstrating the inadequacies of conventional rhetorical criticism and moved toward correction by proving the failures and thrusting their analyses into uncharted areas of cultural relevance and significance for African Americans. As pioneers, they have instigated a posture that stands in critique of Eurocentric dominance over the examination of African and African-American social phenomena. They have successfully countered, within the academy, the arrogance and provinciality that assumes itself as both objective and universal when in actuality it is neither. They have attacked the hegemony of the Euro-American ideology which masqueraded as all-knowing and all-wise in its insistence that there is only one valid perspective and approach to knowledge.

Refusing to be limited to a reductionist, materialist stance as they sought to understand African-American phenomena, these scholars advanced a notion that called into question the commitments of their own scholarly training, thus freeing themselves from the "ground" upon which earlier scholarship was founded. They unmasked cultural and gender supremacy and opened avenues for other ways of coming to know and understand human phenomena, particularly with respect to people of African descent.

By placing African ideals and values at the center of inquiry, "the Afrocentrist seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce [this] centrality... as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data"—in this case, data concerning African-American communication (Asante 1990, 6). In other words, it is valid to discuss the analysis of African phenomena (continental or diasporan) with Africans as subjects and not merely objects of examination.

The rhetorician seeking to understand the communication of African Americans will find it helpful to locate himself within the cultural and historical experience of our people. In doing so, he will employ the "terms"-for-living which are germane to our African experience in America. The Afrocentrist recognizes that "we are either existing on our own terms or the terms of others. Where will the African person find emotional and cultural satisfaction, if not in her own terms? By 'term' I

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mean position, place or space" (Asante 1990, 8). To analyze communication using "terms" that are not those of the person or people producing the communication is tantamount to being "out-of-place." A more valued posture is to "locate" oneself with the people, using their cosmological, epistemological, axiological and aesthetic orientations as a starting place from which to view their communication phenomena.

In his latest explication of the Afrocentric enterprise, Asante formulates four principal issues of inquiry. For him:

The Afrocentric enterprise is framed by cosmological, epistemological, axiological, and aesthetic issues. In this regard the Afrocentric method pursues a world voice distinctly African-centered in relationship to external phenomena (Asante 1990, 8).

What follows is a discussion about how this four-fold framework serves as an Afrocentric paradigm in the analysis of African American communication. The term "orature" is an appropriate and significant symbol in that it attempts to place the orality of African communication at the core of African-American discourse, written or spoken. The oral continuities between the continental and diasporan African peoples characterize, possibly more than any other factor, our peoples' approach to language. When we have examined orature as we have studied literature, we will be able to "construe the totality of African culture" (Asante 1987, 10).

A *cosmological* analysis will be concerned with the place of African culture in communication. An attempt is made to determine the "location" of the rhetor, meaning an assessment of the speaker's use of an African cultural referent and connectedness in her or his creation of messages. Determining location involves an examination of the presuppositions and assumptions out of which the rhetor is operating. Are these aligned with some African cultural base? Does there exist a clear or identifiable link with the people of Africa (continental or diasporan)? How is this connection made evident?

Most African-American rhetors operate from an assumed African base. More often than not, this choice has to do with the expectations of their primary audiences, which are, in large part, comprised of other African Americans. But, beyond this, the attempt to "locate" a rhetor asks penetrating questions and provides enlightening answers.

Is there an awareness of an African world view operating in the communication? Dona Richards (1990) is helpful in detailing the extent to

which African Americans are truly African in cultural ethos. Her claim that the emotional substance of the African-African American collective is a spiritual one is validated in daily experience. More than characterizing an African-American "emotional tone," the essence of the African-American response to external phenomena is at once *emotive-intellectual-physical-spiritual*. Spirit, a non-rationalistic phenomenon, escapes the limitations of conventional, reductionist logic. As Richards (1990, 208) states:

It cannot be quantified, measured, explained by or reduced to neat, rational conceptual categories as Western thought demands. Spirit is ethereal. It is neither touched nor moved, seen nor felt in the way that physical entities are touched, moved, seen and felt. These characteristics make it ill-suited to the analytical mode most favored by European academics. We experience our spirituality often, intellectual language can never be accurate.

Spirit escapes the bounds of psychology. It refers to shared reaction and response. It results from unique, shared cultural, historical phenomena and, for African Americans, takes Africa as its cultural genesis (Richards 1990, 209). The discussion of spirit as phenomenon is vital because of its defining nature with respect to African world view.

World view often refers to the manner in which a cultural group makes meaning within its surroundings. It is a statement about how it makes sense of life and the universe, or cosmos. World view points to the orientation taken by people as they move to bring order to their existence. Unable to function in a chaotic state, humans create a patterned, ordered existence. The central, dominating idea within that created order for Africans is spirit (Richard 1990, 209). As such, the African world view is one dominated by spirit as the driving force toward the maintenance of ordered life.

For Africans, spirit cannot be separated from matter. In the Eurostream reality, spirit and matter are divided into seemingly opposing pairs. The Afristream, however, orders a universe of complementary, interdependent pairs. As such, spirit finds its expression in material phenomena; material realities find their meaning in spirit. For the Afrocentrist, this truth guides the cosmological analysis of communication. *The objective is to determine how a rhetor creates communication from a spiritual (African) world view.* Once the world view of the speaker is identified, movement toward "locating" her or him is advanced.

The *cosmological* awareness and use of *nommo* refers to in communication *nommo* (human-being understanding—all are communication. What is being what ways does this weaken—others?" The *magara* principle. scribe how *magara* is

Another circle of This African concept or the natural rhythm That is to suggest the fundament to life. C the rhythms experienced provides the framework perceived and appreciated partly as a function of fitting to examine for to the rhythms in a of mentality partly as an *aesthetic* element used aesthetic reference rhetorical expression fundament in the form of language in communication

Rhythm is *ntu*, the point of sensing rhythm, as the essence in communication. Rhythmic and in sync with consciousness. To fit including human-being language into "flow the other. Rhythm: reaction of others, all affirm meaning. It

The *cosmological* analysis may also take up the question of the rhetor's awareness and use of *the presence of nommo*. By now a familiar conception, *nommo* refers to an African sense of word or word-force. Nommo in communication represents the spiritual modality through which *muntu* (human-beingness) is activated. Life, meaning, communal understanding—all are created and recreated through nommo in communication. What is being asked of the rhetor is: "To what degree and in what ways does this speaker use nommo to affect—strengthen or weaken—others?" This ability to have rhetorical effect is understood as the *magara* principle. The cosmological question, then, could seek to describe how magara is actuated through nommo in the communication.

Another circle of examination focuses around the *ntu* progression. This African conception refers to participation in the cosmic life-force or the natural rhythms which impart being and reality to phenomena. That is to suggest that an African cosmology understands *rhythm* as a fundament to life. Ordered human life is centered in accordance with the rhythms experienced in the universe. In an African sense, rhythm provides the framework in which social and psychological realities are perceived and appreciated, suggesting that communication is created partly as a function of the frame of mentality of a speaker or writer. It is fitting to examine for evidence of a mentality framed by an acquiescence to the rhythms in a rhetor's environment. Although rhythm as a frame of mentality partly constitutes the *cosmological* issue, it finds expression as an *aesthetic* element of Afrocentric analysis. For example, commonly used aesthetic referents, such as *stylin'* and *soundin'*, have to do with rhetorical expressions indicating the dependence upon rhythm as a fundament in the formulation of meaningful approaches to the use of language in communication.

Rhythm is ntu, the universal life force. Rhythm brings the African to the point of sensing a spiritual connectedness to the cosmos. Ntu-rhythm, as the essence of the universe, presides over the use of language in communication. To be moved by ntu, to ascend to it, is to be energized and in sync with that fluid quality which characterizes African consciousness. To find ntu is to be connected, as well, to all being—including human-being. Rhythm functions in communication to bring all language into "flow." It causes speaker and language to be at one with the other. Rhythm moves communication, written or spoken, in the direction of others, allowing the rhetor and active participants to agree and affirm meaning. It conducts participants closer and closer to a shared

understanding, even a common identity. The Afrocentrist looks to see in what ways the ntu-rhythm is allowed to preside: to what degree does the rhetor facilitate ntu?

The presence of nommo and ntu are ultimately sensed in African ritual drama. Ritual drama in the African-American experience takes several forms. It is traditionally used as a primary mechanism for "renewal, replenishment, redefinition and rebirth" (Richard 1990, 218). In African-American religious life and church services, African ritual drama is most manifest.

Through a repetition of acts performed according to cultural prescription, the group is redefined, nommo is at work and ntu is achieved. Through ritual drama, people are recreated. A new order is established. Spiritual strength is reaffirmed. Opposing forces are neutralized; the people are ready and able to move on. Transcendence beyond the dehumanizing entrapments of existential reality is experienced. To what degree does the rhetor's communication contribute to ritual drama? In what ways are elements of ritual drama captured in the communication? Does the communication function in accord with ritual or against it?

Cosmological considerations also include the functional role of communication within a community. The Afrocentrist examines to determine the extent to which communication helps actualize group survival. The notion is best expressed as "art for life's sake." As such, there is communal "voice" in communication. How does the rhetor articulate this voice?

The *epistemological* discussions might center around the rhetor's use of myth and mythofoms during the creation of communication. Specifically, within the Afrocentric perspective, myth functions as an important organizing principle for the collective. African-American myth becomes unlike traditional myth in that it carries a future orientation when used in communication. Typically, cultural groups rely upon myth to provide meaningful explanations which close the gap on mystery. Communication involves myth as both the explanation for the human condition of oppression and an answer to the question of existence in a racist society. Moreover, myth is engaged to provide a glimpse and glimmer at liberation and the displacement of hegemony. Myth presents the future as brighter than the present and, certainly, the past.

A significant function of the African-American myth in communication is the demonstration of control over circumstances as opposed to control over nature (Welsh et al., 1981). Mythofoms provide

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The Afrocentrist to function as a would be the conventional mythofom

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characterizations of heroines and heroes in myths. Generally, mythoforms can be associated with specific types of myths: for example, the suffering genre, which attempts to dispense with suffering and uplift victory, employs Harriet Tubman, Staggolee, John Henry and others.

The Afrocentrist would examine to see how mythoforms are allowed to function as a result of a rhetor's artistic choices. Of import, too, would be the consideration of how rhetors *themselves* function to personify mythoforms.

The place of ancestral memory, or what Amiri Baraka calls "epic memory," is an epistemological concern. An effort is made to determine the role and degree to which communication is embedded within or relies upon a collective memory of the past, as "recorded" over the long sweep by the oral tradition.

The *axiological* question attempts to determine the extent to which what the rhetor creates in the context of the collective exists for the good of the collective. Conventionally, the term "ethics" comprises this area of inquiry. The Afrocentrist attempts to describe how the creation of communication facilitates the survival of the collective. Are the strategies employed by the rhetor useful to serve the ends of community? Are the objectives of the communication contiguous with the aspirations of the group? Would the group sanction it as acceptable communication? How does this communication operate in the interests of people of African descent?

Generally, for Africans "beauty is as beauty does." In other words, right conduct, as determined in and by the collective, constitutes a conception of beauty. The dependence on the external for the determination of beauty is problematic for a careful Afrocentric analysis. Conduct, rather than physical attributes of a person, is isolated in any analysis of social behavior.

Kariamuw Welsh-Asante's "senses" which comprise the African aesthetic serve as a heuristic when considering the artistic aspects of African-American orature (1990, 72). Fundamentally, by isolating qualities of the use of discourse by Africans and African Americans, we are able to note commonalities in approach to language. Continental and diasporan use of language involves a base of fundamentals whose value is cultivated in the epic memory and oral tradition of the collective. The African approach to language, like dance, music and other art, reflects an appeal and appreciation for certain cosmic sensations which are valued differently within the Eurostream tradition. Such is fitting. It is

equally fitting to provide a mode of analysis which accounts for these differences in appreciation and emphasis.

An aesthetic arises from the culture and serves as a vibrant expression or reflection of the ethos of the collective. When considering African-American orature, the Afrocentrist is careful to examine for traces of this African aesthetic—especially in terms of how rhetors develop its aspects. It is reasonable to see the development of an interrelationship between the *aesthetic* considerations and the *cosmological* ones mentioned earlier.

An aesthetic analysis may be comprised of the development of the following elements. The question would have to do with the degree to which and with what mastery the rhetor and the orature reflect these artistic foundations. [It should be said that in many forms, African-American orature is typically analyzed with these elements in mind.]

1. **Polyrhythms:** simultaneous occurrence of several major themes, motifs, and other rhythmic patterns (as in music).
2. **Dimensionality:** an "extra" [quasi-spiritual] presence in orature that is harmoniously functional within discourse. Either in the meaning of discourse, the vocal attributes of a speaker, the sense of voice behind voice, that "help" that comes for the preaching and hearing of the "word."
3. **Curvilinear Arrangement:** often demonstrated through indirection and useful in the facilitation of nommo. A statement about structure and arrangement of ideas.
4. **Intensification/Repetition:** the intensification of a single idea or image in orature. Movement by repetition from one level to another until saturation or satisfaction is experienced.
5. **Holism/Organic Unity:** the parts are not emphasized or accentuated beyond the whole; neither is the individual. All are as important as any other participant in orature. Silence is as functional as speech. "Call" is as vital as "response."
6. **Lyrical Approach:** culturally determined and expressing a basic response to reality. Linguistic expression is fundamentally suited for song. Indicates a rhetor's choices from available materials within an African cultural experience.
7. **Improvisation:** simultaneous composition and performance of a "call." Anticipates and reacts to "response." Intentional.
8. **Storytelling/Image-Making:** as primary objectives. Story functions as idea or point [not merely to support an idea]. Images, in

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These eight aesthetic foundations are useful and comprise most of the symbolic analysis of discourse.

An Africalogical approach to communication which places the values and ideals of Africans at the center of inquiry yields interpretations and explanations which conventional rhetorical theory and criticism are unable to produce. Divested of an urgency to validate a monocultural, Eurocentrist hierarchy in the conceptualization of communication theory, analysts would do well to learn from this harmonizing perspective.

The Afrocentric idea is one way of revealing the multicultural essence of our effort to understand the human experience. An elevation of African-centered approaches to the reflection and study of phenomena in a multiplicity of settings advances our knowledge and understanding of African Americans' responses to life. While it is far too early to catalog the implications and ramifications of the contributions of Professor Asante, it will ever be said that his Afrocentric ideas have put us well on our way toward a truly "human" appreciation of the human condition.

As a fundamental question, "location" of theorist, critic, rhetor and artist opens the way to inclusion of authentic African-American visions and ideals.

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