



## ***On the Obsolescence of the Disciplines*** **Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter Propose a New Mode of Being Human**

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the difficult but necessary task of dismantling our disciplinary boundaries in order to even begin to understand the *who, what, why, when and how* of human beings. Sylvia Wynter argues that when Frantz Fanon made the statement “beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 1967) he effectively ruptured the present knowledge system that our academic disciplines serve to maintain, by calling into question “our present culture’s purely biological definition of what it is to *be*, and therefore of what it is *like to be*, human” (Wynter 2001: 31). This rupture that Fanon caused remains *the space*, Wynter argues, that will necessarily move us out of our present Western/European/bio-economic conception of being human whereby the *Self* requires an *Other* for its definition, toward a hybrid nature-culture (2006a: 156) conception that needs no *Other* in order to understand *Self* (1976: 85).

*But they don't want to get to the fundamental issue. Once [Fanon] has said ontogeny-and-sociogeny, every discipline you're practicing ceases to exist.*

*--Sylvia Wynter (2006b: 33)*

This article discusses the difficult but necessary task of letting go of our current disciplinary boundaries in order to even begin to understand the *who, what, why, when and how* in which human beings work as humans beings. Sylvia Wynter argues

that when Frantz Fanon made the little statement “beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) he effectively ruptured our present knowledge system that our academic disciplines serve to maintain, by calling into question “our present culture’s purely biological definition of what it is to *be*, and therefore of what it is *like to be*, human” (Wynter 2001: 31). This rupture that Fanon caused remains *the space*, Wynter argues, that will necessarily move us out of our present Western/European/

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bio-economic conception of being human whereby the *Self* requires an *Other* for its definition, toward a hybrid nature-culture (2006a: 156) conception that needs no *Other* in order to understand *Self* (1976: 85).

If we do not move *beyond*, as we have already moved *through*, our present disciplines, the maintenance of which functions to insure our present world order, then we will never be able to properly deal with all the local and global crises that we confront and the study of which sociologists make our life's work until we first see these struggles as different facets of the "central ethno-class Man vs. Human" struggle (2003: 260-1). These crises, Wynter notes, not the least of which includes the possibility of our species extinction, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth's resources, poverty, AIDs, and the like, must be seen as the direct effects of the sharp imbalance between the two *cultures* (Snow 1993 [1959]) or two *languages* (Pocock 1971: 6) between the natural sciences, on the one hand, and the humanities and the social sciences, on the other (Wynter 1995: 2).

That we have been unable to reach "another landscape"—as proposed by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) in the 1960s—in order to "exoticize" Western thought to make visible its *laws* whereby we would be able to unfix the sign of *blackness* from the sign of evil, ugliness, and the negation of *whiteness*, has been for two reasons. These are, according to Wlad Godzich (1986) as quoted by Wynter, first, "the imperviousness of our present disciplines to phenomena that fall outside their pre-defined scope" and, second, "our reluctance to see a relationship so global in reach—*between the epistemology of knowledge and the liberation of the people*—a relationship that we are not properly able to theorize" (Wynter 2006a: 113).

The shift *out* of our present conception of *Man*,<sup>1</sup> out of our present "World System"—the one that places people of African descent and the ever-expanding

global, transracial category of the homeless, jobless, and criminalized *dammned* as the zero-most factor of *Other* to Western Man's *Self*—has to be first and foremost a cultural shift, *not* an economic one. Until such a rupture in our conception of being human is brought forth, such "sociological" concerns as that of the vast global and local economic inequalities, immigration, labor policies, struggles about race, gender, class, and ethnicity, and struggles over the environment, global warming, and distribution of world resources, will remain status quo. The rise of the disciplines would come to ensure the maintenance of the Master Conception of the Western epistemological order; in the present day, this order would in turn produce the classificatory system whereby jobless Black youth would be categorized as "No Humans Involved." The role of academics in reproducing this system is perhaps best articulated in Wynter's brilliant article by this title—as an open letter to her colleagues (1992).

The "rise of the West" by way of its contact with a "New World" outside of Europe, and the "specific idea of order"—an order that was to be effected and reproduced at the deepest levels of human cognition—was the result of this new relationship. Just *how* a rupture in the then current order of papal order by the then "liminal Others" of that order was made possible by this new relationship with the "New World"—along with the following rupture that would occur in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—needs to be properly investigated if we are to ever have any permanent impact on our contemporary battles against

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<sup>1</sup> Wynter proposes that there are two phases of Man which she labels Man1 and Man2. Man1 emerges in the late 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> Century through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and whose order of being is *political*; Man2 replaces the political mode of being with a new *bio-economic* order of being. A more detailed overview of these two phases is laid out by Greg Thomas in "Sex/Sexuality & Sylvia Wynter's *Beyond...*: Anti-colonial Ideas in 'Black Radical Tradition'" (2001: 112).

slavery, colonialism, and movements for justice and freedom.

Wynter's 40-year archaeological project in human thought, particularly during the last 25 years, stems from her reading and development of Frantz Fanon's concept of "sociogeny," that he proposes in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967: 11). What Fanon does is to offer an explanation for the "double consciousness" lived by Blacks in the Diaspora that was articulated by W.E.B. Dubois. Fanon does this, Wynter poses, by calling into question "our present culture's purely biological definition of what it is to *be*, and therefore of what it is *like to be*, human" (Wynter 2001: 31).

From Fanon's statement, "Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny," Wynter develops the concept of a "sociogenic principle" (sometimes written as "sociogenetic principle") to refer to and contrast with the purely biological "genomic principle" used to define the "species specific" codes of purely organic life. Fanon's conception of the human thus becomes for Wynter a truly revolutionary one—revolutionary as in causing a permanent alteration or rupture. This new conception, according to Wynter, was as disruptive of the present order of knowledge as that of the previous ruptures in intellectual thought—those effected by Copernicus (and Columbus) in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and by Darwin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In her words, there are three intellectual revolutions that define our "modern" world: the Copernican, the Darwinian, and the Fanonian. This last revolution, Wynter argues, has yet to be completed (Eudell and Allen 2001: 7). There was a brief moment in the 1960s when it might have been completed within the context of the global Black Power Movement (with its three arms: Black Arts, Black Aesthetics, and Black Studies) and anti-colonial struggles of the Third World. These movements offered the "initially penetrating insights" that called into question the structures of

the global world system and the nature of the "absently present framework which mandated all their/our respective subjections." Within this brief hiatus, the disciplinary apparatus and its boundaries would challenge the range of anti-colonial and other intellectual movements, particularly by the Black Studies, Black Arts, and Black Aesthetic Movements—all part of the Black Power Movement—before these movements were "re-coopted." As Wynter shows, these insights presented their ultimate failure, "in the wake of their politically activist phase, to complete intellectually that emancipation" (2006a: 112-113).

Wynter argues that the reason for this failure is that the psychic emancipation initiated by these movements for that brief hiatus "had been effected at the level of the map rather than at the level of the territory" (118). The systemic devalorization of blackness and overvalorization of whiteness are only functions of the "encoding of our present hegemonic Western-bourgeois biocentric descriptive statement of the human" (Ibid). This is part of an overall devalorization of the human being itself "outside the necessarily devalorizing terms of the biocentric descriptive statement of *Man*, overrepresented as if it were that of the human" (119).

The territory, then, is that of the instituting of our present ethno-class or Western-bourgeois genre of the human, on the model of a natural organism. This model is enacted by our disciplines. The disciplines, Wynter writes,

must still function, as all human orders of knowledge have done from our origin on the continent of Africa until today, as a language-capacitated form of life, to ensure that we continue to know our present order of social reality, and rigorously so, in the adaptive 'truth-for' terms needed to

conserve our present descriptive statement. That is, the one that defines us biocentrically on the model of a natural organism, with this a priori definition serving to orient and motivate the individual and collective behaviors by means of which our contemporary Western world-system or civilization, together with its nation-state sub-units, are stably produced and reproduced. This at the same time ensures that we, as Western and westernized intellectuals, continue to articulate, in however radically oppositional a manner, the rules of the social order and its sanctioned theories. (2003: 170-171)

But, it is this model that is ruptured by Fanon. Wynter's fight, then, has been precisely to move us all towards the completion of the intellectual/conceptual transformation that was initiated by Fanon. If "we"<sup>2</sup> study what brought about the previous two revolutions we will have a better understanding of how we can fully realize the next one.

Even though we are still within the effects of Darwin's "local if now global" bio-economic conception of the human, Fanon, like Copernicus and Darwin, has shown us the door *out* by the single suggestion that *subjective experience* could occur from the neural processes of the brain. From his own experience as Western-educated colonized subject moving from the Caribbean to France, Fanon questioned how a subjective experience "as-a-feature-in-itself" could simultaneously depend on "underlying physical processes."<sup>3</sup> For Wynter, Fanon's conception becomes

<sup>2</sup> The "we" that Wynter speaks of and to would be the "liminal Others" to Western *Man*.

<sup>3</sup> Wynter cites David Chalmers in "The Puzzle of Conscious Experience" (1995: 80-83) and *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (1996).

crucial for imagining how it might be possible to take the "leap of faith" necessary to move out of our present Western mode of consciousness and way of being. The term "Western," of course, can no longer be thought of as a racial term, and would need to include all "ex-native colonial subjects" raised in, educated in/by, and otherwise socialized in/of/by the West, like Fanon himself (Wynter 1976: 83).

The conceptual breakthrough of Copernicus in astronomy and the voyages of Columbus cannot be understood outside the "general upheaval" of Renaissance humanism and the rise of the new system of the modern state, which replaced the feudal order. Likewise, the conceptual breakthrough of Darwin cannot be understood outside a parallel social and intellectual upheaval from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward (Wynter 1997: 158). Columbus held the then counter-premise that "God could have indeed placed lands in the Western hemisphere and therefore 'all seas are navigable,'" and Copernicus held the then counter-premise that the earth moved, both parts of the sequence of counter-thinking that allowed the intelligentsia of Western Europe to break with the regime of truth that had legitimated the geography of the Latin-Christian Europe. These both then fostered the rise of the physical sciences. The magnanimity of this rupture would be met again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Darwin's challenge to the hegemonic premise of the divinely designed "origin of the species." According to Wynter, Darwin's "counter premise of the origin of species in the process of bio-evolutionary Natural Selection opened the frontier of the biological sciences and made our now increasingly veridical rather than adaptive knowledge of the bio-organic level of reality" (1997: 158).

Wynter argues that we must come to terms with the Janus-faced reality of both of these ruptures. The events of the late fifteenth century, with the Columbian

voyages *and* Darwin, must be seen *both* as a “glorious achievement and as the first act in a process of undoubted genocide/ethnocide/ecocide, as well as of an unrivaled degree of human subjugation.” If so considered, we will then be able to move to complete the second half of the partial autonomy of our cognition as a species by breaking the barrier between the culture of the natural sciences and the cultures of the disciplines of individual and social behaviors (1997: 146; 2003: 263). Wynter writes:

So the academic system that you have gifted the “natives” with could seem, at first glance, to be merely a Trojan Horse! But note the paradox here. That Word, while an “imperializing Word,” is also the enactment of the first purely degodded, and therefore in this sense, emancipatory, conception of being human in the history of our species. And it is that discontinuity that is going to make the idea of laws of Nature, and with it the new order of cognition that is the natural sciences, possible. So there can be no going back to a before-that-Word. So as ex-native colonial subjects, except [when] we train ourselves in the disciplinary structures in which that Word gives rise, [and] undergo the rigorous apprenticeship that is going to be necessary for any eventual break with the system of knowledge which elaborates that Word, we can in no way find a way to think through, then beyond its limits. (2000b: 159)

In assessing the production of knowledge from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century voyages to Africa and the “New World,” it is our “present definition of what it is to be human” that became then and now equated with *Western Bourgeois Man* (*Bio-Economic Man* since the 19<sup>th</sup> century). This

emergence was the result of a mutation that occurred within the previous Judeo-Christian conception of what it was to be human. Wynter begins her “Argument” in the early 1970s in agreement with Immanuel Wallerstein who locates a mutation in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the “X” factor of which was with the arrival of Columbus in the Americas and the acquisition of this “new land” and new relationship with “Nature.” This mutation would lead to the rise of capitalism as a world-system.<sup>4</sup>

However, Wynter departs from Wallerstein’s analysis by asserting that the mutation that took place, in which capitalism would emerge as the world order, was not firstly an *economic* shift, but a *cultural* one. The emergence and reproduction of the capitalist world-system was the central effect of a prior *cultural* mutation—the Western-bourgeois formulation of a general order. There was already a “secular” conception of being “human” that was a break from the former “sacred” conception, or order of knowledge. In other words, it is not first and foremost the mode of production—capitalism—that controls us. While it does indeed do so at an outward and empirical level, for the processes to function, they must be first *discursively* instituted. These processes must be regulated and at the same time normalized and legitimated (see Wynter, 2000, p. 159-160).

What does control us is the economic *conception* of the human, which is, of course, that of Man. This conception is produced and reproduced by the “now planetary” academic disciplines. The economic conception represents the first purely secular and operational public identity in human history (160), an identity that

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<sup>4</sup> See Wynter’s reference to Wallerstein’s *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (1974: 15, 85-87) in her 1976 article entitled “Ethno or Socio Poetics” (1976: 79-81).

requires that we behave as producers, traders or consumers. Our *economic* identity replaced our former *political* following our former *theological* conception of “human.” The economic apparatus, as Wynter notes, is a *function* of that identity, not the other way around (Wynter 2006b). We cannot see it as such because we are in it, in the bio-economic mode of being and conceiving of the human; we need to get outside of it in order to see how it works.

The enormity of the task before us, getting outside of our economic conception of “human,” should not be taken lightly. Even the most positive of the critics of both Fanon and Wynter cannot completely escape the need to re-ground himself *within* this economic paradigm. Lewis Gordon has written extensively about both Fanon and Wynter, and recently analyzed Wynter’s article “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be ‘Black’” (2001) in his article entitled, “Is the Human a Teleological Suspension of Man? Phenomenological Exploration of Sylvia Wynter’s Fanonian and Biodecean Reflections” (Gordon 2006). Even he, however, cannot help but need a more grounded “economic solution” to Wynter’s “epistemological project.” Elsewhere, Gordon states,

Although Sylvia Wynter qualified her conclusions by reminding us that we should work through epistemological categories and ‘not merely economic’ ones, her discussion so focuses on the question of *conceptual* conditions that it is difficult to determine how those *economic* considerations configure into the analysis. (Gordon 2004: 79; my emphasis)

Wynter’s and even Fanon’s “callings,” Gordon argues, require the “empirical validation” of scholars like Irene Gendzier for a

more practical solution to the global problems, for example. Gordon writes,

...Gendzier poses the following consideration. The critics of development have pointed out what is wrong with development studies, particularly its project of modernization, but their shortcoming is that many of them have not presented alternative conceptions of how to respond to the problems that plague most of Africa and much of the Third World. Think, for example, of Wynter’s call for a new epistemic order. *Calling for it is not identical with creating it.* This is one of the ironic aspects of the epistemological project. Although it is a necessary *reflection*, it is an impractical call for a practical response. (81; my emphasis)

Not only is the “practicality” of an economic solution required to validate the “impracticality” of the “epistemological project,” but *calling* and *creating*<sup>5</sup> are placed back firmly in their disciplinary divisions and one is never the other. To say this, however, is to miss the “territory” of Wynter and Fanon *altogether*.

In 1999 and 2000, Sylvia Wynter was invited to give the keynote address to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Coloniality Working Group Conference at State University of New York at Binghamton. The culmination of these two keynote speeches, published in 2003, was entitled “Un-Settling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After *Man*, Its Over-Representation” (Wynter 2003).<sup>6</sup> In her two keynotes and in the article, Wynter engaged those

<sup>5</sup> I have argued elsewhere (2006) that calling and creating should not be treated as separate activities, since *calling* most certainly is *creating* in the guerilla poetics of Wynter and so many others that would make their mouth like a gun, to use the words of Paule Marshall.

who had been present at both events, as well as other scholars of the SUNY-Binghamton academic community from a variety of disciplines. The 2000 conference title, “Un-Settling the Coloniality of Power,” was in reference to a concept proposed by Anibal Quijano, a faculty member at Binghamton at the time as well as an invited speaker at the 1999 conference. It was the his notion of “Coloniality of Power,” the subject of his 1999 address as well as the title of a subsequent published article (2000) that the Coloniality Working Group took as their main theme. Wynter, in her 2000 keynote address, while paying tribute to Quijano’s foundational concept, complicated the matter of “Coloniality” and hence the central theme of the conference, by insisting that coloniality is never merely a question of “Power.” Wynter renamed the issue for her audience with the four-part heart-of-the-matter concept of Coloniality—that of “Being/Power/Truth/Freedom”—and proceeded to illustrate why it was indeed a four-part, and not a one-part, discussion.

To Wynter, the divide between sciences (in which the social sciences appear partial) and the humanities remains solid (1971;

<sup>6</sup> Wynter has had a long relationship with scholars at the State University of New York at Binghamton. It was here that she was invited to her first conference in the United States, around 1971 (2000b: 171-172). She has returned to give other addresses, including in November 1998 at a 3-day conference honoring the life of Walter Anthony Rodney, entitled “Engaging Walter Rodney’s Legacies: Historiography, Social Movements and African Diaspora” where she gave the most profound speech I had ever heard. Her keynote speeches at the 1999 and 2000 conferences were a continuation of an exchange with Immanuel Wallerstein and members of the Gulbenkian Commission, that took place at Stanford University on June 2 & 3, 1996, at a symposium, “Which Sciences for Tomorrow? A Symposium on the Gulbenkian Commission Report: Open the Social Sciences.” Wynter’s contribution was a challenge to the conclusions of this report, and her talk was entitled, “To ‘Open/Restructure’ the social sciences? Or a New Science of the Human, of the Word? To reenchant the World? Or to disenchant ‘Man?’”

1984; 2000c; 2003; 2006a). This division, which comes out of the rise of Humanism and the Aesthetics movement, keeps everyone of us from making any real sense of how humans actually work. Wynter cited C. P. Snow’s argument in 1959 about the “Two Culture” divide between the “literary intellectuals” and the “natural scientists” and argued that the persistence of this divide in the post-1945 period has been recently refuted by Immanuel Wallerstein and an interdisciplinary team of scholars called the Gulbenkian Commission. In 1996, this team produced the *Gulbenkian Report on the Social Sciences* (Gulbenkian-Commission 1996).

Despite these interventions,<sup>7</sup> Wynter argues, it is still the case that while the natural sciences have made much progress in explaining and predicting the nonhuman world, the disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities are still unable to account for the parameters of the collective human behaviors that shape our collective world, including the large-scale inequalities and degradation that these collective behaviors have caused (2003: 270). Wynter argues that this is because—as a result of the new conceptualization of European Man from Christian Man to Western Man as a direct outcome of a revolutionary new relation to Nature out of the context of the large scale exploitation of the New World—whole areas of cognition were no longer accessible (except through art):

As western man “pacified” New World nature, eliminated the “sav-

<sup>7</sup> Along with the project of the Gulbenkian Commission, Wynter addresses the efforts of Herbert Simon and his followers in a special issue of *Stanford Humanities Review* called “Bridging the Gap” when she argues that like Simon we are condemned to repeating the same divisions that we set out to dissolve if we merely take a “cognitive approach to literary criticism” and keep our disciplinary languages intact (1995).

age,” penned them up in reservations, he did the same with whole areas of his Being. Indeed it would be difficult to explain the extraordinary nature of his ferocity if we did not see that it was, first of all, a ferocity also wrought, in psychic terms, upon himself. Western man—as defined by the bourgeoisie—restained [sic] those areas of Being whose mode of knowing could sustain the narrative conceptualization (the heraldic vision) of his new world picture, but eliminated, penned up on reservations—those areas of cognition which were, by their mode of knowing, heretical to the conceptualized orthodoxy that was required. (1976: 83)

“What is to be done?” and “What can we do?” we ask as activists and intellectuals—as cultural workers—with the “education” we have gotten. Again, we must recall part of the quote from Wynter that I included above:

So as ex-native colonial subjects, except [when] we train ourselves in the disciplinary structures in which that Word gives rise, [and] undergo the rigorous apprenticeship that is going to be necessary for any eventual break with the system of knowledge which elaborates that Word, we can in no way find a way to think through, then beyond its limits. (2000b: 159)

The eventual break will come from intellectuals (such as Fanon) themselves, as was done in the previous two ruptures. Specifically, since it has been intellectuals, particularly those within the academy, who have served so well in their roles in maintaining the Western-bourgeois system of “Man,” it is proposed that in bringing

about the “heretical leap” Wynter speaks of, intellectuals will have to play key roles. It is the “Western educated” intellectuals—“all of us” as Wynter argues—that therefore need to be radically *re-educated*.

Redefining humans not as bio-evolutionary beings—as we have done “ever since Darwin”—but as a hybrid of “bio” and “logos” that actually define us as *human* beings, we make our Enlightenment-to-Darwinian way of being human obsolete. When this happens, a new mode of being human (“After Man”) will be put forward, one that does not require an “Other” to contrast the “We” of the West. As the hybrid bio-cultural creatures that we are, Sylvia Wynter shows us, we impose a new “autopoiesis.” Our grasping this process will cause a new rupture of a great magnitude, enabling us to *leave* our present conception of *Man*. While poetics, in our present conception, is confined to the “leisurely humanities” in Western Academia—or to a “calling,” and is understood as a “thing” and not an action or an event, poetics would then be alternatively regarded as the action by which humans work to create themselves anew. A new “science of the human”—a “science of the Word” would then illuminate this process. Without this new base, which would break down our present disciplinary boundaries, our efforts at serious *social* change remain a futile endeavor.

Each human system auto-institutes itself, “effecting the dynamics of an autopoietics, whose imperative of stable reproduction has hitherto transcended the imperatives of the human subjects who collectively put it into dynamic play” (1984: 44). At the same time that humans create the system they live in, they also create the mechanisms that make the system work “automatically,” in a way that we can no longer see why and how those mechanisms are functioning. A system of self-definition, a *rhetorical* process, integrates itself with the neurophysiological mechanisms in the



brain. The areas of cognition that would allow us to see how the system works, or how change can occur, are suppressed in order to keep the system from actually changing. How this process operates is suggested by the term “autopoiesis,” coined by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1972), from their work in biology. Wynter argues that while we know something about “self-correcting” processes from the natural sciences, we know very little about how it works in humans.

In order to understand the workings of this process, we need to begin a new “science of human systems,” a transdisciplinary operation that needs to have its base *in the literary humanities* because it is here that we would be able to re-enact an epistemological break, similar to that “founding heresy of the *Studia Humanitatis*,” when the discourse of Humanism and the institutionalized system of lay learning “came into being as a counter-exerting force” to the orthodox Absolutes of the late Middle Ages. This can occur by appropriating a Jester-like position of “external observer”—that is, *liminal*-position that would be necessary to make our present epistemology obsolete (1984: 52). This would, however, require going beyond or working outside the disciplines as a whole since the disciplinary traditions—from the nineteenth century Western conception of literature as the juxtaposition of its “High Culture” to that of anthropology’s “primitive”—require that literature (all art) have no public utility and nothing “real” to contribute to “the needs of mankind” (45-46).

The Black experience in the New World has been paradigmatic of the non-Western experience of the native peoples. This experience constituted an existence which daily criticized the abstract consciousness of humanism. The popular oral culture which the blacks created in response to an initial negation of this humanness, constitutes, as culture, the *heresy of humanism*; and that is

why black popular culture—spirituals, blues, jazz, Reggae, Afro-Cuban music, and hip hop—and its manifold variants have constituted the underground cultural experience as subversive of the status quo Western culture as was Christianity to the Roman Empire. For it was in this culture that the blacks reinvented themselves as a *we* that needed no *other* to constitute their Being (1976: 85).

If the rise of the demise of the feudal order and the subsequent scientific revolutions were made possible by the lay humanists of the Renaissance Europe going back to Greece and Rome in order to find an alternative secular model of being human, beyond a “theocentric” conception of the order, then...

...so too, in order to find an alternative model of our present biocentric and ethno-class one, our intellectual revolution will begin by going back to the continent of Africa where the event of singularity to which I give the name of the First Emergence—that is, our emergence from subordination to the genetic programs which prescribe the behaviors of purely organic life, and our entrance instead into the behavior programming mechanisms of the Word/of Myth—first took place. Doing so in order to bring into existence what Aimé Césaire first proposed in 1946 as a science of the Word...will condition the study of nature (of the neuro-physiological mechanisms of the brain)...(Wynter 2000c)

Wynter asks, 500 years after the 1492 voyage, “can an analogous premise be put forward that there are laws of culture that should hold in the same way for the now hegemonic and globalized culture of the

techno-industrial West as they have served for all human cultures hitherto?" (Wynter 1997: 143). Further, Wynter inquires,

If, as Clifford Geertz pointed out, our contemporary culture should be recognized as being but one local example 'of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds,' can such laws now be seen as being applicable to this 'local culture' (however now globalized) as to all others? Are there laws that function for our contemporary world-systemic order in as prescriptive a manner as they do for all the traditional cultures that Western anthropology, through its critical sifting of the data provided by 'native informants,' has so lucidly charted, dissected, deciphered, and analyzed and so eloquently led us to comprehend? (Wynter 1997: 143)

What Wynter is asking is that in the same way as Newton makes his "analogy of Nature" that is always consonant with itself, could we also infer and predict from a parallel "analogy of Culture" that is also always consonant with itself (Wynter 1997: 144)?

If we applied the mountains of gathered data from the study of cultural bodies of non-Western cultures to our own Westernized cultural body (whose processes of textualization still remain opaque to us, as the severity of our global crises reveal), could we decipher the laws governing its institutions and stable replication as a self-organizing and "linguaging living system," to use the term of Maturana and Varela (Wynter 1997: 144)? Wynter allows us to pursue this further:

Contemporary physicists have enabled us to imagine a singularity/Event by which the universe and

time came into existence together (making it meaningless to ask what came before the universe). Can we imagine a parallel Event/singularity by which, as both the Cameroonian scholar Théophile Obenga and the Italian scholar Ernesto Grassi propose, the human species first emerges in the animal kingdom? Can we imagine this event as effecting a rupture with the primacy of the genetic constraints on its behaviors, by substituting in the place of the gene the "sacred signs" or governing code of the Logos, the Word? (Wynter 1997: 144)

To further the comparison, we could substitute the place of time with the emergence of value, culture, and mind, those things that could only have come into existence with the emergence of the capacity for languages, "which had empowered the branch of the primate family who were its bearers to move outside the genetically regulated order of nature (*ordo naturae*) and to put in its place the culturally instituted order of words (*ordo verborum*)" (Wynter 1997: 144).

Given the role of "defective Otherness" that is analogically imposed upon the peoples and countries of Africa and the black diaspora by the representational apparatus of our Western world-system, central to which is that of the cinematic text, the challenge to be met by the black African, and indeed black diasporic, cinema for the twenty-first century will be that of deconstructing the present conception of the human, Man, together with its corollary definition as homo-oeconomicus—to deconstruct both, the order of consciousness and the mode of the aesthetic to which this conception leads and to which we normally think, feel and behave.

The proposed deconstruction must take as its point of departure the First Emergence of fully human forms of life, as

an Emergence that was later to be attested to some 30,000 years ago by rock paintings at multiple sites, including by the Grotto Apollo of Namibia, “as an explosion whose dynamic moving images bear witness to the presence of the representational apparatus inscripting of their ‘forms of life’, of their culture-specific modes ... of being human” (Wynter 2000a). Wynter’s hypothesis is that our origins must be placed in *Representation* rather than in *Evolution*, which would redefine the human outside the terms of our present hegemonic Western-bourgeois conception as a purely bio-economic being which pre-exists the event of culture—this would, of course, call for a new poetics. This poetics is to be that of *homo culturans/culturata*, that is, as the auto-instituting because self-inscripting mode of being, which is, in turn,

reciprocally enculturated by the conception of itself which it has created; the poetics, in effect, of a hybrid nature-culture, bios/logos form of life bio-evolutionarily pre-programmed to institute, inscript itself, (by means of its invented origin narratives up to and including our contemporary half-scientific, half-mythic origin narrative of *Evolution*), as this or that culture-centric (and, as also, in our case, class-centric) genre of being human. (26)

Ernesto Grassi defines the linguistically inscribed codes, which when neuro-physiologically implemented can alone enable us to *experience*, to be conscious of ourselves as *human* subjects. These codes do so by enacting correlated clusters of meanings/representations able to mediate and govern directly—through a bio-chemical reward and punishment system of the brain which functions in the case of purely organic forms of life—to motivate and demotivate the ensemble of behaviors that are of adaptive advantage to each species. How

exactly, in the case of humans, does the mediation by the verbal governing codes and their clusters of meaning, their recoding of the behavior-motivational biochemical and punishment system specific to purely organic forms of life, take place? What are the laws that govern their mediating and recoding function? To answer this, Wynter proposes that traditional (i.e., pre-Islamic, pre-Christian) cultures of Africa are the ‘cultural bodies’ best able to provide us with the insights into what the laws that govern this mediation, and, thereby, our behaviors, *must necessarily be*. In the case of our contemporary Western world-system, we need to decipher what must be the governing code and its related, representational system which now functions to induce our present global collective ensemble of behaviors, and seek instead another code based on the analogy of culture, one that is always consonant with itself (27-28).

V. Y. Mudimbe argues that it is precisely in the terms of the “mirror” of the West, and its “epistemological locus”—whatever one’s culture of origin, given we have been educated as academics, filmmakers, critical subjects, etc., even when “oppositionally so”—we have remained *within*, and therefore unable to see the terms of our own self-representation. Such a perspective would require, Wynter argues, the effecting of a radical discontinuity not only with the deepest levels of Western thought (which Marxism, feminism, and any nationalism has been unable to do), but with all human thought hitherto—including that of traditional African “cultural universes” within the framework of their own rationality. This is necessary to ensure the creation of a “transculturally applicable mode of discontinuity” that Wynter called the “Second Emergence” (44).

Citing African scholar Théophile Obenga in 1987, Wynter argues that we need to employ the same strategies used by the lay intelligentsia of fifteenth-century

Europe when they ignited their intellectual revolution—that of Renaissance humanism. In other words, the strategy that enabled the then “Others” of the religious order to move outside the limits of *their* mode of being human, beyond the then hegemony of the religious medieval Christian world, that required them to reconceptualize their past in new terms, will be the same strategy that will be required of the present-day “Others” of our present order—and order in which Africans have been made to represent the “zero denominator.” Just as a re-conceptualization by the lay intelligentsia of fifteenth-century Europe required a return to and revalorization of their pre-Christian Greco-Roman intellectual heritage in order for them to propose a new conception of their past which would give rise to a new image of the earth and conception of the cosmos that would be indispensable to the emergence and gradual development of the natural sciences, “a new mode of human cognition” (45), a reconceptualization by the African intelligentsia around the world and a return to and revalorization of their African intellectual heritage<sup>8</sup> would be a necessary strategy for effecting a move outside our present mode of being human. Obenga proposes that...

...if the intelligentsia of Africa are to bring an end to the ongoing agony of the continent, they will also find themselves compelled to reconceptualize the history of Africa, as outside the terms of our present ‘epistemological locus’ and its ‘cultural universe’; and to do so by going back to the First Emergence of the human out of the animal kingdom, and then to the full flowering of the consequence of this First

<sup>8</sup> This is where the work of Cheikh Anta Diop (1974; 1996 [1990]), Ayi Kwei Armah (1995; 2002), and Ishmael Reed (1996 [1972]) are so relevant.

Emergence in the Egypt of the Pharaohs. (Wynter 2000a: 45)

However, challenges Wynter, this will have to be done differently than that of the “great civilization” syndrome of contemporary bourgeois scholarship. Instead, writes Wynter, we need to instead begin systematically emphasizing the earlier and “most dazzling” and “most extraordinary” phase of this history—in which the history of Africa converges with the origin of the human (See also Joyce 2005; Joyce 2006).

We have our work cut out for us, this is for sure. Wynter’s call for us to complete the Fanonian rupture seems an impossible task from our present visionary scope—stuck in the disciplines. However, it remains only *the most practical* job at hand.

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