

BRENDAN JOHN BROWN

The New School of Social Research

THE HERETIC AND THE ICONOCLAST:  
SYLVIA WYNTER'S  
ENGAGEMENT WITH DERRIDA

*"The density of History determines none of my  
acts"*<sup>1</sup>

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

*"unheard-of thoughts are required, thoughts  
that are sought across the memory of old signs"*<sup>2</sup>  
-Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*

*"Human beings are magical"*<sup>3</sup>  
-Sylvia Wynter, *"Culture as Actuality"*

**Introduction**

In an interview between Jacques Derrida, Jean-Louis Houdebine, and Guy Scarpetta entitled "Positions", Derrida speaks of the "general strategy of deconstruction", wherein the focus is to "avoid both *simply neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it"<sup>4</sup>. He is speaking against a common misunderstanding of the project of deconstruction as mere "reversal" - the substitution of the prime (privileged term) for the subprime term (the underprivileged term). Instead, Derrida insists upon the need for a subsequent phase, "we must traverse a phase of *overturning*". "The necessity of the phase is structural"<sup>5</sup> and is one that recognizes the violence of the history of Western metaphysics. Derrida says, "to do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in classical philosophical oppositions we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-a-vi*, but rather with a violent hierarchy". Therefore, reversal would only result in a violence the same as before since the very structure of violence has not been displaced. Derrida speaks explicitly of the danger of "a *neutralization* in practice that would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on previous oppositions, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pg. 205

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, pg. 88

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Culture as Actuality", pg. 35

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, pg. 41

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 42

field effectively"<sup>6</sup>. What is assumed in such philosophical movements is that reversal *alone* is enough. And therefore, a reversal would undo the violence of the hegemony of the prime term. The presupposition of this argument is that the privileging of the prime term did not contaminate the epistemo-ontological formulations of the subprime term. Such argument would replicate the violence of the binary oppositions since it accepts the conceptual determination of the subprime term by the prime term. Instead, what is needed is to disrupt the field through a movement of the "interval"<sup>7</sup>, which are "certain marks ... that *by analogy* can no longer be included within the philosophical (binary) opposition ... resisting and disorganizing it"<sup>8</sup>. The disorganization by the philosophical oppositions, these third terms are never re-appropriated and evade a speculative dialectics that might synthesize a solution. A dialectical thesis/antithesis/synthesis would *aufhebung* the marked violence of the philosophical oppositions into "an anamnestic interiority (*Erinnerung*), while interning difference in a self-presence"<sup>9</sup>, according to Derrida. Which is to say, in the philosophical opposition between binary terms - Presence/Absence, West/Rest, White/Black - the violence emanates from the subjugation of the prime term's overrepresentation of as being the totality of the field itself. Therefore, by demonstrating the elided "third term", Derrida argues that deconstruction differs and delays the hierarchical violence. *Finding* the third term constitutes the strategy, the ceremony, the intervention of deconstruction.

What happens when the I/We of the West/the Rest overdetermines its marking such that the "we" of West becomes the "We" of the World? The implication of the overdetermination implies that the "referent-We" has become metonymy for the universal class of the human. In responding to Derrida's question at the end of his essay, "The Ends of Man", Sylvia Wynter's answer to the question of "but who, we?"<sup>10</sup> is a method for rethinking the binary oppositions of the "Two-Culture Divide": Black/White, Global North/South, Man/Woman, etc. It is the radicalization and the racialization of Derrida's *peon* which Wynter expands beyond his provincialism that will be the focus of this essay. A point that has been generally overlooked within the

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 41

<sup>7</sup> Derrida lists several examples of the interval in his work, at the time, such as "pharmakon", "the supplement", "the hymen", "the gram". All these terms constitute the disrupting interval which can neither be assimilated by the system, nor some tertiary third term which would provide as "solution in the form of a speculative dialectics". Jacques Derrida, "Positions", *Positions*, pg. 43

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 42-43

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*. pg.43

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man", *Margins of Philosophy*, pg. 136

secondary literature for both authors. The aim of my reading of the relationship between Wynter and Derrida is centered upon drawing out Wynter's use and extension of Derrida's concepts and strategies as it informs crucial moments in her essay. While sustained and important work has drawn out the relationship between Sylvia Wynter and Michel Foucault<sup>11</sup>, or Deleuze and Guattari<sup>12</sup>, or, even, Edmund Husserl<sup>13</sup>, there is little commentary in the secondary literature on her relationship to Jacques Derrida. This is despite the appearance of his work at crucial junctures in her work. I will argue that we cannot fully grasp Wynter's critique of Western Humanism and the operating morphogenic strategies which produced the ontological, epistemological, and metaphysical divides which structure of the Modern episteme of our present worldview without understanding the influence of deconstruction and Derrida on Wynter.

Wynter's essay "The Ceremony Must be Found" and its relationship to what Jacques Derrida has termed "the history of Western metaphysics as presence" will constitute the majority of my analysis. Wynter identifies and focuses a significant portion of her essay on elucidating the occult presence of what Martin Heidegger has called "onto-theology" and its historical manifestations in the transition from the Renaissance to, following Foucault, the "Classical Age of Reason". As I will demonstrate, Derrida's contention that the history of Western philosophy is a history of philosophical binaries which operate on the implicit assumption of mutually exclusive categories plays a significant role in Wynter's identifying and analyzing the epistemic and discursive logics that have resulted in the historical subjugation of black and brown subjects. What will become evident, then, is how Wynter's project of autopoiesis and ceremony-finding integrates post/decolonial historiographical praxis with Derrida's deconstructive readings of Western philosophy. The welding of these two projects demonstrates not only the importance of Derrida to Wynter's overall project, but, in a more understated manner, indicates a possible *new* frontier of deconstruction as a practice. The Ceremony, on my reading, becomes the site of *intervention* which corporealizes and radicalizes deconstruction *beyond...*

The term "ceremony" is highly specific to Wynter and could be defined as that which "yoke[s] the antithetical signifiers and breach[es] the dynamics of order/Chaos, through which the order

---

<sup>11</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Before *Man*: Sylvia Wynter's Re Writing of the Modern Episteme", *Human Being as Praxis*

<sup>12</sup> Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*

<sup>13</sup> Paget Henry, "The Transcendental Space of Caribbean Philosophy", *Caribbean Reasonings: After Man, Towards the Human*

brings itself into living being"<sup>14</sup>. These oppositions are necessarily founded on the metaphysical exclusion of the Other "which determines the meaning of their meaning on the basis of these oppositions", writes Wynter citing Derrida<sup>15</sup>. It is only by yoking together these metaphysical oppositions that the Ceremony may be found. The imperative of the ceremony derives from the need to rethink the referent-we based on the *human, not "Man"*. We could summarize the methodology of Wynter by demonstrating and identifying how (1) the structural oppositions of binary terms (Black/White, Man/Woman, Presence/Absence) are oriented around the overrepresentation of Man (as the Western, white, bourgeoisie, male subject) as the stand in for the horizon of humanity, (2) widen and unsettle the overrepresentation by deconstructing the antithetical terms through the finding of the ceremony, and (3) autopoetically institute a new construction of the Human: "Human beings are magical: Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by home and desire"<sup>16</sup>. Taken together, this is a call "which re-enacted ... a parallel counter-exertion, a parallel Jester's heresy to that of the *Studia*"<sup>17</sup>. Wynter writes:

"a counter-exertion is called for parallel to that of the *Studia's* original heresy. The *Studia* must be reinvented as a higher order of human knowledge, able to provide an 'outer view' which takes the human rather than any one of its variations as Subject; must be re-formulated as a science of human systems, which make use of multiple frames of reference ... to attain the position of an external observer, at once inside/outside the figural domain of our order. As such a new cognitive mechanism it must ... take as its proper sphere...the hominid-into-human self-making/modelling/figuring, as this is documented and enacted in narrative representations, in art and ways of life, and in laws of the functioning of human behaviors which enable the autopoiesis of each mode of the human. It is only ... through the counter-exertion of such a new science that ceremonies will be findable"<sup>18</sup>

For Wynter, it is "autopoiesis" – or the act of self-troping and describing – which constructs our subjectivities. It is the continual act of "defining, rather than definition, because the latter does not exist as a reality except by and through our collective systems of behaviors, systems which are themselves oriented by the ordering modes of knowing or epistemes of each human system". For Wynter, it is *writing* which is the ordering mechanism of verification of these systems. She writes, "and the ordering

---

<sup>14</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found", pg. 27

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 28

<sup>16</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Culture as Actuality", pg. 35

<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must be Found", pg. 37

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 56-57

epistemes are themselves reciprocally verified by those collective systems of behaviors which Derrida calls 'writing' in the broader sense, that is, by putting into play the classificatory principle of Sameness and Difference ... effects autopoiesis through which all that lives realizes its mode of being"<sup>19</sup>. The manner to which we re-present ourselves to ourselves is always mediated by language. The importance of Derrida to Wynter is specifically predicated upon the use of language within the system of defining "who we are". By becoming aware of the centrality of our self-describing behaviors, we can induce a new form of causality wherein our capacities are isomorphic with our "multiple self-inscripting, auto-instituting modalities". This "new mode of causation" is done so "outside the terms of our present 'Two Culture' order of knowledge and its adaptive 'regimes of 'truth' based on the biocentric disciplinary paradigms"<sup>20</sup>. That is, by becoming aware of *how* we describe ourselves based on our epistemic formulations, we can overturn these definitions – Man as the metonym for humankind – in favor of non-Eurocentric definitions of the human. The ceremony is the enacting of a *New Studia* that requires "change of 'style'; and ... it must be plural".

The "radical trembling" that Derrida speaks of in the context of the "Ends of Man" is the same sort of unsettling that Wynter institutes by finding the Ceremony. For Derrida, the subterranean necessity which links the "We" of Europe to its Other can only be effected by either "repeating what is implicit in the found concepts and the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available", or "to change terrain in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself *outside* (emphasis mine)"<sup>21</sup>. The "outside", however, as Wynter notes, is both the alterity and absolute interiority of the episteme<sup>22</sup>. The Ceremony, as informed by Derrida's deconstructive strategies, teaches the "discursive techniques for reaching and engaging the governing templates that provide the classificatory systems of sameness and difference around which epistemes are auto-instituted"<sup>23</sup>. The Ceremony is the site of intervention within the *aporia*. This *aporia* is the "inevitable and endemic contradiction ... specific to the West's post-medieval *transformative mutation* effected by the discourse of Humanism", which is a "humanly emancipatory process [for the lay Humanist intelligentsia] on the one hand, and humanly subjugating processes on the other, [and]

---

<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found", pg. 22

<sup>20</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom", pg. 330

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man", *Margins of Philosophy*, pg. 135

<sup>22</sup> See quote from footnote 13

<sup>23</sup> Paget Henry, "Wynter and Caribbean Thought", *After Man Towards the Human*. Pg. 286

are each nevertheless the lawlike contradiction of enacting of the other"<sup>24</sup>. On my reading, this nexus – aporia, ceremony, and autopoiesis – is deeply engaged with the work of Jacques Derrida.

In what follows, I will proceed through the essay in a largely uniform manner in order to outline the relationship between Sylvia Wynter and Jacques Derrida. The protocol of this reading will be to (1) mark the intervals of Derrida's appearance within Wynter's work and its importance within her framework and (2) to demonstrate a "strategy" of Ceremony-finding (overrepresentation, unsettle, widen, and then turn/overture). By beginning with "The Ceremony Must Be Found", I will locate the importance of the metaphysics of presence – or onto-theology – for Wynter's historiographic analysis of the foundations of lay-Humanism and the emergence of the categories of race. In this essay, Wynter lays down the overrepresentation of Man with the referent of Humanity. This is produced beginning with the colonization of the New World and the emergence of the secular West, which took its figure of the bourgeoisie, white male subject as being the "General Equivalent of Identity"<sup>25</sup> of the Classical Episteme. Therefore, Wynter establishes the failure to find the Ceremony specifically at this transvaluation from one figure – the scholastic theocentric conception of Man as Redeemed/Fallen Flesh – to the next – the secular, lay-Humanist Ratiocentric genre of Man(1) – because of the lawlike enactment of both the emancipation of one group of humans (the lay, secular Middle Class) and the subjugation of the Other. This reading of the emergence of the Classical Age of Reason, by Wynter, locates an epistemic rupture which reveals both the contradictions of the discursive logics of previous episteme, and the inevitable aporia for the subsequent one. The location of the rupture in the *brisure*, or joint, is important for undoing the exclusionary violence of the creation of a subjectivity on the basis of self-presence. By outlining Wynter's arguments surrounding autopoiesis, ceremony, and the genres of Man, we will see the deconstructive strategy of determining the hierarchical violence based on metaphysically exclusionary terms is necessary for ceremony-finding. On my reading, "The Ceremony Must Be Found" operates like a methodological manifesto for Wynter's call for enacting the heretical *New Studia*.

---

<sup>24</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found", pg. 189

<sup>25</sup> Wynter writes, "providing the organization principle of the cultural order since the construct functions as the General Equivalent of Identity of that order. The structure of role allocations and related patterns of interaction then constitute themselves in relation to this construct as the major referent". Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond Liberal and Marxist Leninist Feminism: Towards an Autonomous Frame of Reference", pg. 32

There is often an anxiety of overstating one's own goals. Or, to be misconstrued on the basis of a claim which one did not intend to make. I would like to declare that I am not arguing for Wynter's project of Ceremony-finding as being a derivation of Derrida's project. Moreover, I am not indicating on the part of Wynter a hidden desire or intention to follow in his footsteps. Instead, I am indicating that Wynter has engaged with Derrida's work in novel and overlooked ways. In particular, the integration of Derrida's analysis of the deconstructive logics of Western philosophy with cognitive research is a novel interpretation of both Wynter, on my reading, and Derrida, by Wynter. As such, this essay is aimed at making a very small claim: Derrida shows up at an important moment in Wynter's work. I am trying to ask the question, "why?" Why is it that Wynter constructs her autopoietic institution of "who we are" on the basis of the "Principle of Sameness and Difference"? To answer this question, I believe, one must read seriously the appearance of Derrida's work as informing her analysis and critique of the discursive structures of Western thought. The consequence of this influence, in my opinion, indicates a re-interpretation of the Ceremony as both a geographical and cartographical intervention, but also as a sustained practice which informs our practices of philosophy as a discipline. This essay aims to think critically about the limitations of Derrida's work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the possibilities of Wynter's imperative to find the Ceremony.

**Wynter's Engagement with Derrida: "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?"**

In "The Ceremony Must Be Found", Wynter's use of the imperative - "must" - compels us to think deeply about the relationship between "the Ceremony" - our attempt at self-description, and hence "who we are" - and the ongoing failures of secular Humanism to coherently answer this. For Wynter, the discursive structures of Western thought entail a movement to occlude this answer to the fundamental question, "who are we?" This occlusion is explicitly taken up Derrida with his sustained engagement with the Heideggerian question of the origin of Being. Wynter, on the other hand, is engaging with the Fanonian question of "what is it to *be*?". For Fanon, the replacement of "phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny" with "sociogeny" allows for, according to Wynter, "the calling into question of our present culture's purely biological definition of what it is to *be*". Modifying Fanon, it becomes the "sociogenetic principle", since it engages with both the bio-genetic understanding of the Human, and the epiphenomenal modes of consciousness<sup>26</sup>. This sustained engagement with three different iterations of the question of being

---

<sup>26</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle", pg. 31

indicates Wynter's onto-metaphysical engagements, and, moreover, situates Wynter's reading of the history of Western thought within the purview of *onto-theology*. That is, Wynter's engagement with Derrida, for instance, implies a reading of the history of Western philosophy as an *onto-theology*, or a metaphysics of presence. It, therefore, becomes *how* do we overcome the metaphysics of presence which structures the history of Western thought?

Early in "The Ceremony Must Be Found", Wynter outlines her hypothesis on the beginning of the Classical Age: "the argument is that it was such a rewriting of knowledge that constituted the founding heresy of the original *Studia Humanitatis*, seen in their broader sense as human knowledge of its sociohuman world, the heresy that laid the foundations of our modern rational world, whose ordering discourses were no longer to be interwoven with the *mythos* and the *theologos*"<sup>27</sup>. The transition out of the Scholastic, theocentric understanding of the world and Man to a lay-Humanist ordered episteme marked a specific event of upmost importance for Wynter: "its release of rhetorical man from the margins, orienting his behaviors by a new ordering secular *Logos*, the Natural *Logos* of Humanism which took the place of the Christian *Theologos*"<sup>28</sup>. This entailed a cognitive emancipation which allowed the lay-Humanists to re-write "the normative order of knowledge" of the Renaissance, which was "the opposition between the category of the 'Spirit' ... and the 'Flesh'". This structural opposition was predicated upon "spiritual Sameness and fleshy/Difference" which was mapped on the cosmogeny of the Renaissance<sup>29</sup>. What is important for Wynter is establishing the *structural opposition* of the ordering of the episteme and how this ordering was produced: "the classificatory principle of Sameness and Difference, or systemic code about which each human system-ensemble ... call ... 'autopoiesis'". This principle is verified by that "which Derrida defines as 'writing'"<sup>30</sup>. The content of the Classical episteme was to be re-written, but its guiding metaphysical presuppositions remained the same.

If in the Scholastic, Christian ordering of knowledge was predicated upon a theocentric model of the cosmos, then its *onto-theological* structure is predicated upon a metaphysics of presence/absence. The Sameness/Difference dichotomy was derived from the onto-theological dichotomy of Presence/Absence. For, in asking the question about the very

---

<sup>27</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found", pg. 21

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 25

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 26

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 22



question of “who are we?”, both the Scholastic and lay-Humanist tradition are posing a fundamentally ontological question. *Onto-theology*, as first formulated from Kant, but commonly attributed to Heidegger, is:

“If we recollect the history of Western-European thinking once more, then we will encounter the following: The question of Being, as the question of the Being of beings, is double in form. On the one hand, it asks: What is a being in general as a being? In the history of philosophy, reflections which fall within the domain of this question acquire the title ontology. The question ‘What is a being?’ [or ‘What is that which is?’] simultaneously asks: Which being is the highest [or supreme] being, and in what sense is it the highest being? This is the question of God and of the divine. We call the domain of this question theology. This duality in the question of the Being of beings can be united under the title ontotheology.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, when the lay-Humanist tradition sublated the Scholastic episteme – with their Spirit/Flesh, Supralunar/Earth, Clergy/Laity – they *reversed* the hierarchy. Wynter writes, “it was here that a mutation occurred in that a reversal had taken place”. Instead of laity being sublated by clergy, “theology was now being submitted to the authority of the lay activity of textual and philological scrutiny [...] ... the category of the celestial was being submitted to the activity of the *humanista*”<sup>32</sup>. What remained stable in the transition, though, was the *form* of the metaphysical delineation. In the *aufhebung* of Laity over Clergy, the ratio-centric definition of Man was still founded on Presence/Absence, Sameness/Difference.

The new identity of Man was mapped onto the Presence/Absence of Natural Reason. The question of its Being was, as Heidegger noted, a doubled gesture: “What of the Being of beings?”, and “What Being is the highest being?” On the first question, the “physico-ontological principle of Sameness/Difference” was breached by “homo-ontological principle of Sameness/Difference”. For, the Celestial/Earthly binary was sublated such that it became Earthly-Man-of-Reason/ Subhuman-Lack-of-Reason. The *secular* Man, which was once condemned as Fallen Flesh, now became the prime term in the discursive opposition structuring the newly anointed Classical Age of Reason. Those who possessed reason and rationality were of the Same homo-ontologically. This engenders the second question. There was a “by/nature difference of superiority/inferiority

---

<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Kant’s Thesis about Being”, pg. 10-11; trans. Ted E. Klein, Jr. and William E. Pohl

<sup>32</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found”, pg. 28

between groups ...naturally caused by a principle based on a differential endowment of Reason"<sup>33</sup>. The most *high* beings, as closest to God, were those endowed with Reason by the Grace of God. An endowment, however, which was "no longer guaranteed by religious, but *by theoretical systems*". It was the exploration of Nature based on Man's cognitive faculties which determined his superiority. Despite the displacement of the theocentric model of the Universe, secular Humanism viewed the newly formed Natural Sciences as a way to get "closer to God". Therefore, those Other cultures which did not possess letters or sciences were viewed as the nadir of humanity, the furthest from God, and lacked rationality. Even though there was a decisive epistemic rupture between the Renaissance and the Classical Order, its onto-theological metaphysical presuppositions, through the *aufhebung*, remained the same. And therefore, thwarted any attempt to breach the "interdiction of ceremonies between the ... categories of the celestial and the terrestrial"<sup>34</sup>.

*But why did the ceremony fail? Or, first, what is the ceremony?*

For Wynter, the "Ceremony" was the opportunity to, "wed the structural oppositions" (White vs. Black; Rational vs. Irrational; Presence vs. Absence; Redeemed vs. Fallen; *bios/mythos*). We can see in "The Ceremony Must be Found" Wynter attempts to demonstrate the failures of secular Humanism, because, as a project, it is fundamentally constructed upon the basis of an onto-theology. Onto-theology necessitates a law-like enactment of subjugation and emancipation predicated on presence and proximity of being. These "structural oppositions" - the Classical Age's, for example, hierarchy of Reason/Unreason - "function to orient the parameters of" exclusion and subjugation. "The basic law of their functioning must be therefore the interdiction of any ceremony which might yoke the antithetical signifiers and breach the dynamics of order/Chaos"<sup>35</sup>. The use of "interdiction" is two-fold. On the one hand, it is a military tactic to "divert, *disrupt*, *delay*, or destroy the enemy's"<sup>36</sup> (italics mine) resources and capacities. On the other hand, an "interdict" is an ecclesiastical censure which prevented either the individual or a community from receiving/performing the "celebration of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist or in any other ceremonies of public worship"<sup>37</sup>. A ceremony's movement is to *overcome* this interdiction. It is an act of subterfuge which subverts and displaces the interdiction through an enactment of rituals despite the fiat. However, the

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 34

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 31

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 27

<sup>36</sup> Joint Force Development, "Joint Interdiction", pg I-1; [https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3\\_03.pdf](https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3_03.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Code of Canon Law 1331-1340

ceremony itself is an interdiction. It is an act of deferral and delay, in the militaristic sense, as well as it is a *dissension*. For Wynter, the need for Ceremony-finding is a *heretical* re-writing of the episteme; it a rupture or a break from the episteme. The heretic, as a dissident, is censured by the law-like interdiction, which they subvert through a counter-interdiction. This dissension, following Derrida and Wynter, is an “original act of an order, a fiat, a decree, and as a schism, a caesura, a separation, a dissection”<sup>38</sup>.

The ceremony is set in opposition to a formulation of the Natural *logos* of Humanism, the onto-theology of Being-qua-presence. A consideration of *logos* as self-presence, wherein “consciousness, before distributing its signs in space and the word, can gather itself into its presence”, writes Derrida. If the construction of the subject in the Renaissance, Scholastic interpretation of Man and the Classical Order of Man-as-Rational is predicated on the ontological principle of Sameness/Difference, as Wynter explicitly argues, then Derrida is correct when he writes, “What does consciousness mean? Most often ...consciousness offers itself to thought only as self-presence, as the perception of self in presence”. Continuing, “the privilege granted to consciousness therefore signifies the privilege granted to the present”. Finally, “this privilege is the ether of metaphysics, the element of our thought that is caught in the language of metaphysics”<sup>39</sup>. Wynter recognizes that the cognitive faculties of our consciousness are shaped by the “language of metaphysics” and therefore the ceremony must be found to overcome the privilege of presence afforded to consciousness-qua-being-qua-logos. On my reading, the breaching of the interdiction against bringing together the philosophical oppositions is informed by *différance*, as formulated by Derrida. In order to breach the opposition, which I have been at pains to demonstrate is situated in a metaphysics of presence, the Ceremony-finding must be the recovering of the *différance* which has been heretofore excluded from the philosophical oppositions that determine Western metaphysics.

For Derrida, the term “*différance*” is “unnameable”. But, because of its very unnameability, it “is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, ... [the] function of the system”<sup>40</sup>. Which is to say, *différance* makes possible the “classificatory principle of Sameness

---

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness”, *Writing and Difference*, pg. 38

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, “*Différance*”, *Margins of Philosophy*, pg. 16

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 27

and Difference, or systemic code about which each human system-ensemble ... effects ... autopoiesis"<sup>41</sup>. However, whereas the suppression of the trace is at work in onto-theology, the philosophical opposition that the Ceremony exerts a counter-interdiction could be what Derrida writes when he says the following: "the order which resists this opposition, and resists it because it transports it, is announced in a movement of *différance*"<sup>42</sup>. At once, we have both a counterforce which *resists* the order of oppositions and simultaneously makes them possible. The Ceremony-in-*différance*, then, becomes "irreducible to any ontological or theological - ontotheological - reappropriation"<sup>43</sup>. For Wynter, because the philosophical oppositions are always and already issuing an interdiction, the "de-structuring of the principle of Sameness and Difference which ontologizes us as specific modes of the I/We ... naturally entails the de-structuring also of the ratiomorphic apparatus or rational world view"<sup>44</sup>. The call for a "de-structuring", a ~~destruction~~ deconstruction of the structures of oppositions, is the call for "re-writing knowledge" in the heresy of the *New Studia*.

The Ceremony - and I run the risk of being too reductive with both Wynter's "Ceremony-finding" and Derrida's "*différance*" - is the very "theme of strategy or the stratagem"<sup>45</sup> that Derrida writes of. The strategy, the interdiction - which, by way of a long digression, could be thought of as the "inter"-*diction*"; that is, it a dissension which is *between* (inter) *speech* (diction), which, following Derrida, would entail a continuous movement of temporalization (the movement *between*) and spatialization (the distance between speech); "*différance* as temporization, *différance* as spacing"<sup>46</sup> and also, "*différance* would be not only the play of differences within language but also the relation of speech to language"<sup>47</sup> - is the very possibility of autopoiesis itself. The Ceremony, on my reading, is how we are able to interrupt the violence of a metaphysics of presence. A violence which Wynter, in "The Ceremony Found", demonstrates through the continual subjugation of all those below the Color-Line, who are defined as beings-without. In order to find the Ceremony, according to Paget Henry, "we will need a new or post-dialectical model of synthesis". Henry calls the new dialectic "a tidalectical synthesis" which "will not be epistemically grounded in a single fixed centre, but in multiple centres that are mutually displacing and re-

---

<sup>41</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found", pg. 22

<sup>42</sup> *Différance*, pg. 5

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 6

<sup>44</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found", pg. 22

<sup>45</sup> *Difference*, pg. 7

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 9

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 15

incorporating of each other"<sup>48</sup>. I would contend, however, that this "tidalectical synthesis" would be better understood through *différance*. For, as we recall in the beginning of the essay, by locating the inside/outside term of the philosophical opposition, the Hegelian dialectic is "displaced and re-inscribed". The Ceremony is a "certain mark ... that can no longer be included within a philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, inhabit[s] the] philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in a form of speculative dialectics"<sup>49</sup>.

I contend that this interpretation and extension of the Ceremony is not as radical as it seems. In addition, by understanding *différance* in conjunction with the Ceremony, we can come to understand the "beyond" of "beyond Man" that is so often ascribed to Wynter. Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely write, "[about the ceremony] the *undertaking* of Man demands new ceremonies able to give symbolic expression, to figuratively instate, our new ways of being together ... an unleashing which might finally allow us to create a shared common world *beyond Man*"<sup>50</sup>. The very necessity of *new* ceremonies, which will allow for an unblocking of the psychic order of things which has been trapped in a "language of metaphysics", is opened by *différance*. The call, by Cornell and others, for *new* ceremonies is a call for new ways of thinking about definitions of the human. These definitions, on my account, are *also* new "paleonyms", or "old names inherited from these oppositions and hierarches". That is, these *old new* names are "concepts (which are also new ways of thinking and living) [that] aim to move beyond and exit the terrain of the philosophical opposition"<sup>51</sup>, writes Leonard Lawlor. The finding of paleonyms is the finding of Ceremonies. And, furthermore, these paleonyms are the new ways of conceiving of going *beyond Man*. This concept of "beyond" has had important resonance for all of Wynter's interlocutors, but few have sought to investigate the metaphysical implications of this "beyond". I will turn to Derrida's interpretation of beyond in a limited context, *Voice and Phenomenon*, in order to think tidalectically Wynter and Derrida.

"As for what 'begins' then 'beyond' absolute knowledge [onto-theology], *unheard-of* thoughts are required, thoughts that are sought across the memory of old signs"<sup>52</sup>, writes Derrida. The work of Sylvia Wynter could not be better summed up by another quote. In looking to go *beyond Man*, we must first search for

---

<sup>48</sup> Paget Henry, "Wynter and Caribbean Thought", pg. 284

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Positions", pg. 43

<sup>50</sup> Cornell and Seely, "Undertaking Man, Making the Human", pg. 143

<sup>51</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *Voice and Phenomenon*, pg. xii-xiii

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, pg. 88

“unheard-of thoughts”. Or, in another register, we must look for silenced voices in the cracks of the annals of history. The importance of “demonic grounds” bears mentioning on this point. As McKittrick writes, “the *place* black of black women is deemed unrecognizable ...[.] their grounds are silent and their place uninhabitable within the frameworks of Man’s geographies”. However, this marked silence of black womanhood, “as demonic grounds, put forth a geographic grammar that locates the complex position and potentiality of black women’s sense of place”<sup>53</sup>. The demonic grounds are the possibility of disruption of a dogmatic grammar in a language of “metaphysics”. It is from these silenced grounds that Wynter writes of the possibility of a Beyond. By “hearing” the “unheard-of” voices of from the demonic grounds, the Ceremony can locate a “beyond of this world”, as compared to a beyond of “another world, not something transcendent”<sup>54</sup>. But, instead, Ceremony finding can move past the violence of colonialism, sexism, heteronormativity, racism, capitalism, not merely sublating into some third dialectical term. It is in the sense of an internal beyond, the silence that speaks, that the Ceremony is the finding of paleonyms. We must build a lexicon of paleonyms informed by the syntax of a new science of the word if we are to find ourselves anywhere at all.

### **Conclusion: A New Science of the Word? Or, Grammatology, Again?**

Emerging out of the failure of the ceremony-finding, the necessity of a “new science of the word” becomes an imperative for overturning the onto-theology in the history of Western metaphysics. The development of this “science of human systems” is integral to Wynter’s assertion of a “counter-Hersey” to the foundation of secular Humanism. As it has been set down, the “language of metaphysics” has historically been structured as an oppositional and zero-sum system. Furthermore, this *language* is not mere abstraction, the stuff of academics and high-minded-but-impractical-snobbery. Instead, the language constitutes our very understanding of who we are as both individuals and subjects. The extent of the saturation of the discursive logics amongst human peoples is one of the universally binding “topos” of our species. Wynter writes, “it is our putting into play the classifying principles that bonds us as such a Group-Subject that we define ourselves as such a normative mode of the Subject, about which each system-ensemble auto-institutes itself reciprocally, bring that specific normative template of identity into living being”. The very *principles of language* that we use to describe ourselves which

---

<sup>53</sup> Katherine McKittrick, “Demonic Grounds: Sylvia Wynter”, pg. 133

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon* (trans. Leonard Lawlor), pg. 94, fn. 22

structure our identities and our communalities. Over the course of her work, Wynter charts a history of human belong and self-knowledge. The purpose of this endeavor is not so much as to lay down a narrative of human progress, but to demonstrate the ubiquity of our methods and modes of auto-instituting. It is because our “principles” of language, the metaphysical structures of our discursive epistemes, that we come to define ourselves through the process of autopoiesis. Therefore, we cannot enact any tangible change in re-writing the knowledge of our time if we do not also address the methods of how we represent ourselves *to ourselves*. The “new science of the word” is aimed at deconstructing these normative principles so as to engender an autopoietic act of self-defining.

We may conclude our reading of “The Ceremony Must Be Found” by laying out a brief overview of the methodology of this “new science of the word”. It is my contention that this “new science” is explicitly aimed at deconstruction the onto-theological presuppositions of traditional Western metaphysics. The evidence for this derives, in part, from the operating assumption in Wynter’s work is based on a reading of the history of Western thought as if it were a “metaphysics of presence”. This much I have already argued. It is because of this assumption that we can make the claim that Wynter, therefore, targets these structures through a deconstructive approach based on the integral appearance of Derrida at the various key steps in her outline of “autopoiesis”, “principle of Sameness and Difference”, and the importance of “language” to her work. In particular, as I have already laid out, the structuring principles of our cognitive faculties and our acts of “defining rather than definition” are heavily informed by Derrida’s work. Wynter says, of the way we interact with the discursive structures of thought, “the ordering epistemes themselves are reciprocally ‘verified’ by those collective systems of behaviors which Derrida defines as ‘writing’ in the broader sense”<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, without addressing the very conditions of possibility of the “principle of Sameness and Difference”, we would be incapable of effectively engaging with what it is that defines our world. Our interaction with the world and each other is always already mediated by the structuring principles of our episteme. We need to address and critique the forms of representation and “the role that these representations play in the legitimation of multiple forms of coercion, of social and psychic dominion”<sup>56</sup>. It is this “autonomous frame of reference” that needs to be the framework of our *New Studia*.

---

<sup>55</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found”, pg. 22

<sup>56</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Liberal and Marxist Leninist Feminisms: Towards and Autonomous Frame of Reference”, pg. 39

The “autonomous frame of reference” is situated by the “external observer” and their “outer view”. This relationship, however, is not neatly defined as an inside/outside dichotomy. The external observer, which for Wynter are liminal groups and categories as defined by the dominate normative order, is “at once inside/outside the figural domain of our order”<sup>57</sup>. They are so capable of this topological displacement due to their lived experiences of the structural contradictions enacted by the system they are a part of. The normative group, those who are “in vogue as it were, is incapable of observing the regularities and principles of this system because their lived experiences are *isomorphic* with the system itself<sup>58</sup>. That is, they cannot experience the contradiction of the oppositions, without great difficulty, because they are under the effect of the “consciousness as self-presence”<sup>59</sup>. The *model* of the external observer “envisages the bringing together of that which is observed from many different observer positions, enabling each to extend and to cancel out elements of the other”. The result of this model is its capacity to help each group to “escape its own form of solipsism and to observer regularities and common features pointing to the functioning of the rules of discourse beyond the conscious awareness of the discursive Subject, rules which were ‘built in’ and therefore normally invisible”<sup>60</sup>. These “regularities” and “functioning of the rules of discourse” are the very metaphysical logics determined by Derrida as the metaphysics of presence. Their regularities *define* the history of Western philosophy and were hereto for *invisible* to the discursive Subject due to their quixotic pronouncements of “self-presence”.

What the proposed plan for a new science of the word entails, then, following the move toward marginality and liminal disruptive categories/figures, is to “decenter the systemic subject”. This decentering takes “as the object of its inquiry the modes of symbolic self-representation about which each human system auto-institutes itself”<sup>61</sup>. The new object of inquiry, from the autonomous frame of reference, is “the human rather than any one of its variations as Subject”. Which is to say, the focus becomes on interrogating the method of representation, autopoiesis, of the human as such, instead of the overrepresentation of Man as the European subject-qua-Rational, for example. This moment toward the Human, instead of Man, is to decenter the hegemony of European metaphysics and its role in

---

<sup>57</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found”, pg. 56

<sup>58</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Found”, pg. 39

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance”, *Margins of Philosophy*, pg. 16

<sup>60</sup> “The Ceremony Must Be Found”, pg. 48

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 44



universalizing the transcendental subject as *the* subject par excellence. Wynter, by analyzing the neurological and cognitive functions as mapped on to our discursive patterns of language, knowledge, and metaphysics, reveals the necessity of deconstructing a metaphysics of presence *because it structures the very way in which we understand ourselves, the world, and each other*. The “new system of human systems” is a deconstructive intervention upon the textual mappings of our brains neurological wirings. It is by deconstructing the hierarchical binaries/oppositions which define our lives that we may *overturn* the violence of the previous epistemic field. Wynter writes, citing John Peale Bishop’s “Speaking of Poetry” from which the title of her essay derives, “it is only ... through the counter-exertion of such a new science that Bishop’s ceremonies will be findable”<sup>62</sup>.

### **Conclusion: Many Paths Home**

I would like to conclude this essay by indicating several possible points of future research. The collaborative effort by which Wynter calls on all of us to engage with is a call that is often met deafness by the ears of the others. We would do well to re-read the history of Western philosophy with the call for finding new old words, paleonyms. This “unsilencing” of meaning becomes a process of undoing the violence by regular brutality of a system of Manichean mind control. It is a necessary process of healing and renewal. A process that others are far more qualified than me to lead. Instead, I will note a few important roads forward.

- (I) The importance of Derrida’s essay “The Ends of Man” and its bearing on Wynter’s work is a critical commentary for a future work of mine. This essay “The Ends of Man” and its question “but who, we?” inform most of the essay and acts as a slogan for the “manifesto” as a whole. As Wynter explains in an interview with Katherine McKittrick, “to me Derrida’s most radical essay was ... his talk called ‘Ends of Man’”. The significance of this essay – beyond the political importance she gives in the context of the 1960s and turbulent political era it was given in – is that “we have to replace the ends of the *referent-we* of liberal monohumanist Man2 with the ecumenically human ends of the *referent-we in the horizon of humanity*. We have no choice”<sup>63</sup>. “The Ceremony Found” could be read as a Wynterian critique of the Heideggerian question of being as also critiqued by Derrida in said essay. The differences between the two approaches – Wynter and Derrida – would center, in my

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 57

<sup>63</sup> Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, *Human Being as Praxis*, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?”, pg. 24

opinion, on the possibility of the *aufhebung* of the coloniality of Being in Derrida's work. The heavy usage of neurocognitive mechanisms and consciousness-based argumentation for instituting a hybrid definition of the Human indicates the next possible path.

- (II) A comparative analysis of Wynter and Catherine Malabou's work on neuroplasticity is a potential site for a fruitful understanding of the importance of Derrida's work as it manipulated in the synapses of our brain. In an essay entitled "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity" she indicates a possible point of convergence between the never-existed science of "grammatology" and the possibility of a science of the supplement. She writes, "plasticity, like writing, is only a supplement"<sup>64</sup>. Is writing, in the work of Wynter, a supplement to the re-writing of the *Studia*? That is, the *re-writing* is a process of supplementing what is already written. The process of autopoiesis is a re-writing, or a re-wiring of our neuropathways. This confluence of neuroscience, deconstruction, and autopoiesis indicates a possible new way of understanding the Ceremony, as well.
- (III) Lastly, a comparison between the "new science of the word" of Aimé Césaire and the project of grammatology would provide a deeper understanding of the brief sketches I laid above. Moreover, such a project would identify weaknesses and potential lacuna in Derrida's analysis of the trace of writing in Western thought. Such a reading would also engage with Wynter's extension of Fanon's "what it means to be human" and highlight elements of play between Derrida's work on colonialism, the archive, and arche-writing.

I hope this essay has contributed a novel understanding of Wynter's work in relationship to Derrida and deconstruction. Moreover, I would argue that my interpretation of the Ceremony, in some ways, subtends all other interpretations since: (1) its informed by Derrida's work on the metaphysics of presence, and therefore (2) all subsequent semiotic and symbolic ameliorations of the Ceremony must also conform to a certain strategy of deconstruction, and (3) it has explained the conditions of (im)possibility for the Ceremony, which all other definitions of the Ceremony must conform or be set against. I have treated the work of Derrida as a smoking gun. His work does not merely *appear* without leaving a trace through the rest of the work. Therefore,

---

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Malabou, "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", pg. 441

further research is required to examine and exhume, to breathe life into this new avenue of thought.

Wynter once spoke of the “Derridean Fool”<sup>65</sup> in her essay, “Culture as Actuality”. Instead of a Derridean Fool, I would choose to become a Wynterian Heretic<sup>66</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> Sylvia Wynter, “Culture as Actuality”, pg. 21

<sup>66</sup> One last point of resonance, the Greek root of the term “heretic” is *hairetikos* which means “able to choose”. It is no small wonder that Wynter *chose* this word. We can all *choose* to be Heretics. Our agency is our heresy.