

# JEO SEMINAR: Dr. Wynter Parks

---

## Yours in Intellectual Disobedience

The world is divided into humans and nonhumans. The "norm" of who is counted as Human exists through the counterbodies, that is, negations of that standard Human. -**Sylvia Wynter**

Culture and humanity resided in writing. Without writing there was a void. The oral culture of the indigenous civilization was a non-culture, was barbarous. By a process of repetition, "humanity" came to be synonymous with being European; with the "possession" of European culture. To be non-European was to be non-human. The myth of the cultural void of the non-West - The Other - was to be central to the ideology which the West would use in its rise to world domination.

-**Sylvia Wynter**, "The Sepulveda Syndrome and the Myth of the Cultural Void" in *Black Metamorphosis: Natives in a New World*, 10.

"Man" is not the human, although it represents itself as if it were. It is a specific, local-cultural conception of the human, that of the Judaeo-Christian West, in its now purely secularised form. Its 'Other' therefore is not *woman*, as I hope to show. Rather because *Man* conceives of itself, through its origin narrative or 'official creation story' of Evolution, as having been bio-evolutionarily selected, its 'Other' and 'Others' are necessarily those categories of humans who are projected, in the terms of the same Origin narrative, as having been bio-evolutionarily dysselected — i.e. all *native* peoples, and most extremely, to the ultimate zero degree, all peoples of African descent, wholly or partly (i.e. *negroes*) who are negatively marked as *defective humans* within the terms of Man's self-conception, and its related understanding of what it is to **be** human.

-**Sylvia Wynter**, 'Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man', in *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image*, ed. June Givanni (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

## Yours in Intellectual Disobedience

How do we think outside of the box towards new knowledge if the conceptual tools we use to think with are themselves *products of the box*? This is the conundrum Sylvia Wynter wishes us to see and work through as scholars and producers of knowledge.

In this seminar we will work in intellectual disobedience alongside Wynter engaging with her contribution to the critique of modern thought. Wynter's "genre of Man" analysis examines two moves of naturalization that took place in Renaissance and post-Enlightenment eras. Those two moves are 1: the secularization of rationality and 2: the representation of the human through the workings of natural selection, and they would position (Western) "Man" in such a way as to disavow other, coexisting modes of being human.

Wynter's intellectual disobedience is to break away from root metaphors of thought in Western and colonial knowledge systems, and in so doing, reveal the link between racial, gendered, and sexual belonging, differential ways of knowing and imagining the world, and the overarching governing codes that have created, maintained, and normalized practices of exclusion.

Breaking out of the box can contribute to creating (thinking anew) critical projects that address pressing political matters in our global present. Come, ye future knowledge producer rebels, let's disobey together.