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AND WE'RE ROLLIN' ON A RIVER:...THE POETICS AND MUSICAL DIMENSIONS OF
BREAKING WITH EUROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE AND DECOLONIZING HUMANITY

By

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A Thesis

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Abstract

American society to date is wearing a mask. Although claiming to secure rights and liberties for all, American society hides under the guise of Eurocentrism which over-valorizes the white male and under-valorizes minority bodies through reason, space, and place. Therefore, I assert there must be an epistemology which breaks with Eurocentric ideals. Utilizing poetics as a revalorizing logic, I will ask: How can poetics, as a legitimate source of knowledge decolonize humanity? Keeping within the American scope, I employ critical race theory and theorists to demonstrate the dangers of employing hegemonic knowledge. I will then utilize poetry, literary tools, jazz, and blues to demonstrate resistance poetics' revolutionary quality. Ultimately, I assert poetics is a personal and approachable method to reclaiming one's own humanity and allows for poetic licensure to continue the decolonizing process as politics is not an high education venture, but rather a personal and social experience.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. And Everyone Knows About Mississippi...Dissecting American Society and Opening the Door for Poetics	1
The Pragmatic Diagnosis: The Current State of American Society	4
Laying the Foundation and Building the Foundation: Understanding Eurocentrism and Eurocentric Society	6
Why Poetics?: How Resistance Poetics can Decolonize Human	14
Looking Forward: What Becomes of the Brokenhearted? And Remembering Emmett Till	17
2. What Becomes of the Brokenhearted?: Breaking Eurocentrism and Resistance Poetics	18
Understanding Poetics and the Importance of the Creative Mind: Dissecting Eurocentric Knowledge Production	20
Understanding Poetics Through Literature and Poetry	27
Looking Forward: I'm a Soul Man	38
3. I'm a Soul Man: Breaking with Eurocentric Reason and Revalorizing the Soul	40
Contemplating American Society: Eurocentrism and Colonized Reason	41
On What There Is and How Things Are: The Ontological Confinements	45
Getting to the <i>Why</i> of Soul Man: Revalorizing Existence	47
Hearing the Color Line Break: The Blues, Jazz, and the Epistemological Power of Sound	50
Conclusion: The <i>Why of Soul Man</i>	56
4. And We're Rollin' on a River: The Scope of Poetics and Continuing the Revolution	57
Understanding the Greater Impact of Poetics on Political Science	58
Understanding the Greater Impact of Poetics on Other Freedom Projects	61
Conclusion: Does This Get Back to Wynter's Clarion Call of an Unapologetic Radical Black Aesthetics <i>qua</i> Liberation?	62
Works Cited	65

And Everybody Knows About Mississippi...: Dissecting American Society and Opening the Door for Poetics

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Memphis made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi,
Goddamn
Don't tell me, I'll tell you
Me and my people just about due
I've been there so I know
-Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam"

Emmett Till was only fourteen years old when his life was cut short in Money, Mississippi after presumably offending Carolyn Bryant, the proprietor of a family owned grocery store. Several days after accusing Till of muttering obscenities, grabbing her by the waist, and whistling crudely, Bryant's husband Roy and his half-brother J.W. Milam abducted the young Chicago native and mutilated his body before shooting and drowning the body in the Tallahatchie River. It was later revealed the interaction between Till and Bryant was fabricated, and Till, who had a stutter after contracting polio at a young age, was instructed to let out a small whistle to aid the impediment. The young boy was simply attempting to calm himself, which is a very natural, human reaction. Till's body was then returned to Chicago where his mother had an open-casket, public funeral to call attention to Jim Crow's and anti-black racism's inhumanity and cruelty. Just as disturbing as the pictures of the posthumous Emmett Till was the fact Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were never charged with kidnapping or murder. The jury was composed of an all-white and all-male jury and only deliberated for an hour before they were acquitted of

all charges. Worse yet, both of these men were protected through double jeopardy. However, in 1956, a year after the murder took place, Bryant and Milam confessed their guilt in a *Look* magazine article; they showed no remorse. “Well, what else could we do? He was hopeless. I’m no bully...I like blacks [edited due to obscene language]—in their place—I know how to work ‘em...’Chicago boy,’ I said, ‘I’m tired of ‘em sending your kind down here...I’m going to make an example of you.”¹ Even today, Emmett Till’s murder is still seen as one of the most tragic murders in American history, and also seen as the case which fueled the Civil Rights Movement and anti-lynching laws.

It is this particular story and several others that can be found in the Civil Rights Museum, located in Memphis, Tennessee. However, the Civil Rights Museum is not the only place to glean histories. Midtown and Downtown are filled with murals and paintings, and blues music can be heard down Beale Street and B.B. King Tribute restaurants. The Bluff City is also the birthplace of Memphis juking, a style of hip-hop dance which has blended ballet and rap music, earning it the nickname “street ballet.” It is from these observations and my own experience as a ballet and contemporary dancer which has sparked my interest in the arts and its relationship to social science, particularly critical race theory. Therefore, I wish to explore how poetics as a legitimate source of knowledge help us liberate the colonized. In this thesis, I will explore how poetics, Eurocentric knowledge, colonization, and humanity intersect in four chapters.

This first chapter will introduce the vocabulary and authors I will be engaging throughout this project. It is in this section I hope to present my question in practical terms, illuminating the issues that surround the current American society, specifically how humanity can be colonized and narrowly defined. It is from these practical issues I will define the terms: Eurocentrism and

¹ William Bradford Huie. “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi.” *Look Magazine*, January 1956, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/till-killers-confession/>.

Eurocentric society, faux universalism, colonization, *a priori* human-being, ontogeny, sociogeny, phylogeny, and poetics. Mixed in the exploration of key concepts will be the introduction to the authors I will employ most and who I feel are integral in decolonizing humanity. These scholars include Sylvia Wynter, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, and Francis Adyanga Akena. At the end of this chapter, I will also produce a list of authors who I employ in the second chapter.

In the second chapter “What Becomes of the Brokenhearted: Breaking Eurocentrism and Resistance Poetics,” named after the hit Jimmy Ruffin Motown Ballad, I will dig deep into how Eurocentric Society perpetuates a faux universalism, which then creates limited knowledge. I will also present a key caveat: poetics² must escape Eurocentric norms. This is central to my research as not all poetics are decolonizing despite poetics having a destabilizing nature. Therefore, I assert resistance (revolutionary) poetics is one that breaks with the limited knowledge produced in the Eurocentric model and allows for blackness to be revalorized. The second half of this chapter will be devoted to poetics as a stemming from literature and how revolutionary poetics gives the reader or participant an active role in creating meaning. To illustrate this point, I will focus on Césaire’s, Jones’s, and DuBois’s work.

In the third chapter, “I’m A Soul Man: Breaking with Eurocentric Reason and Revalorizing the Soul ,” I will focus on how sound, particularly jazz and blues, are also poetics and help to contribute to the revalorizing process. This particular chapter is named after the “Sam & Dave” song. Isaac Hayes composed “Soul Man” after watching the 12th Street riot in Detroit,

² Throughout this thesis, I conceptualize poetics in Aristotelian terms. This looks at poetics beyond the literary model and conceptualizes poetics as a form of expressionism beyond hermeneutics. This indicates poetics does not need to be a form of literature, but rather a type of art form dedicated to creating meaning through emulation. “Like emulation, melody and rhythm are natural to us. Meter is obviously rhythmic. People with natural inclinations towards these things exercised their talent, and poetry evolved from their improvisations” (Aristotle, “Aristotle’s Poetics,” in *Untying Aristotle’s Poetics for Storytellers*, ed. Rune Mryland (Storyknot, 2018), 4 (48b4)). Thusly, dance, music, slam poetry, visual art, and sculptures are all valid forms of poetics.

Michigan. Similar to “What Becomes of the Brokenhearted?” I will re-engage Eurocentric reason and how reason has been colonized. From there, I will explore how sound can break the physical knowledge barrier. By breaking the knowledge barrier, I will demonstrate how a reliance on sound, not sight, helps to break the space/anti-space which is established through Eurocentric reason. Once this is done, it is possible to become a “soul man.”

In my conclusion, I will evaluate the overall scope of my thesis and dissect how this project can be carried into the future to be transformed to a dissertation and how it can be used to create space for arts in political science. Overall, this thesis is not simply exploring how poetics decolonizes humanity but also acknowledges the limits of purely focusing on academics themselves; therefore, I believe my ultimate goal is to open up epistemology and see “human” in a light beyond academics and include original, accessible forms of epistemology.

The Pragmatic Diagnosis: The Current State of American Society

In order to first understand poetics and how it relates to colonized humanity, it is necessary to outline the current, pragmatic issues American society faces. This is the main reason why I employ the Emmett Till case at the beginning of the introduction. It demonstrates just how inhumane American society treats black and minority bodies while the white bodies are seen as socially and legally protected no matter the actions. However, anti-black, anti-woman, anti-homosexual, anti-lower class, or any “anti-“ sentiment for that matter, are not always physically violent. Indeed, violence and killing are simply a bodily reaction to the larger schema at play: a normative racism that is socially structured. It is true Jim and Jane Crow Eras have passed, and while society has supposedly moved beyond biological racism (the idea biology is what dictates superiority), racist ideologies, prejudices, and stereotypes are constructed in our everyday

vernacular and dictate how we should interact with one another.³ For instance, the backlash against affirmative action, the negative racial stereotypes employers utilize to consciously construct their businesses, and the view the common criminal is black all demonstrate how the invisible racial schema is engrained in society.⁴ However, only focusing on these issues (which definitely deserve our attention) blinds us to how we generalize people groups so willingly and unconsciously; or rather, our own antipathy based on faulty generalization.⁵ This phenomenon is not novel or came to fruition after Jim Crow was abolished. I wish to pivot to Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice From the South* to illustrate my point further. I will be focusing on Cooper's diagnosis, as her diagnosis of American society is one of the more prolific works and pairs well with the literature I will be presenting in the "Laying the Foundation" section.

Anna Julia Cooper was an American author, educator, sociologist, and Black liberation activist during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow Era. Presenting a variety of issues that are not disparate from our time, Cooper acknowledges education's importance and its consequential lack of accessibility, segregation and prejudices, and women's rights. *A Voice from the South* demonstrates the foundations of racial and women's relations rarely change when society's foundations remain static. In other words, the way we relate with each other comes from a society that has not yet freed itself from the chains which binds it, and this does seem far off into the future.⁶ She speaks to this in concrete detail, stating there is a propensity to collapse all black people as slaves regardless of their actual position in society. The almost unconscious comparing

³ Jacqueline Johnson, Sharon Rush, and Joe Feagin, "Doing Anti-Racism: Toward an Egalitarian American Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, vol. 1 (January 2000: 97).

⁴ Ibid, 98.

⁵ Ibid, 99.

⁶ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Mineola: Dover, 2016), 2.

of white to black marks the clear desire to allow discrimination into society since acknowledging black as equal would mean white cannot be overvalored or retain the current societal hierarchy:

The ‘social equality’ implied by civility to the Negro is a very different thing from forced, association with him...Indeed it seems to me that the mere application of a little cold common sense would show that uncongenial social environments could by no means be forced on any one...Such things must and will always be left to individual election...Like seeks like; and I am sure with the Southern lady’s antipathies at their present temperature, she might enter ten thousand organizations sprinkled with colored women without being any more deflected by them than by the proximity of stone.⁷

Again, while Cooper is speaking to the Southern women at the time, we do tend to blind ourselves from the plight of others to the point we have become too comfortable with American society as it stands. If we wish to remain in such a state, then violent outbursts and unconscious generalizations will be commonplace. I contend this is not desirable for any race, gender, or class, and deep down, no one desires a faux relationship. Indeed, the present structure is grounded, and the ideal human presently will always serve to build the future.⁸ This is where the practicality of my argument shows itself: if we are truly committed to creating a better tomorrow in which the mists will clear and fully explore the meaning of human,⁹ then we must decolonize what it means to be human in American society.

Laying the Foundation and Building the Foundation: Understanding Eurocentrism and Eurocentric Society

What is Eurocentrism and Epistemology?

The first step to coming to terms with American society is dissecting what I mean by “Eurocentric.” Breaking down the word can reveal the meaning. The prefix “Euro” indicates the origin, which is predominantly Western values and people of Western European descent (The

⁷ Ibid, 50.

⁸ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press: New York, 1952), XVI.

⁹ Cooper, *A Voice*, 138.

United States, Western Europe, Australia, etc.). The -centrism, however, is the operative part of the word. Etymologically, -centrism derives from the word “centre” which derives from the Latin word *centrum* and the Greek word *kentron*. Both of these words refer to a fixed, sharpened point; a point of concentration. Therefore, the word “Eurocentrism” indicates Western values and people as the concentration point, lending itself to what I believe is the Eurocentrism’s core: synthesizing a colonizing (closed) epistemology for the purpose of overvaloring the Western man, thereby producing one descriptive genre of man as if it was the very definition of human.¹⁰ Ultimately, I argue Eurocentrism should not be viewed simply as historical movement like “Enlightenment,” but rather is omnipresent and targets modes of knowledge production regardless of the societal structure at the given time.

I have decided to focus on defining Eurocentrism through epistemology since I do not believe it is entirely helpful to dive into how it has historically developed. Rather, I find defining Eurocentrism through a closed epistemology allows for a clear picture. Therefore, I begin with the word “epistemology.” Epistemology refers to knowledge and is considered one of the four main branches of philosophy. Thus, it can be defined as the attempt to understand what it is to know, and how knowledge is good for the knower.¹¹ To break this down even farther, to know something is to also actively engage in reason, or to logically engage in understanding and justifying events. This is the very essence of understanding who we are and how we navigate the world around us. If we are to take these definitions at face value, nowhere is it written there is one particular type of epistemology which is correct. Cognitive success/the ability to reason,

¹⁰ Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Henry A. Giroux, Lewis R. Gordon, and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 117.

¹¹ Matthias Steup and Ram Neta, “Epistemology,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>.

therefore, can differ by virtue of world view and knowledge production practices (where and how someone gathers understanding); however, cognitive success should never measure a human-being's worth or value.¹² Yet, if Eurocentrism is a colonizing epistemology, as I suggest it is, then it would also follow Eurocentrism is a way of measuring a human-being's worth through how a person reasons, thereby creating a colonized epistemology.

Therefore, there can only be one particular form of knowledge production, and given Eurocentrism hinges on overvaloring Western values, legitimate knowledge production can be found in academics. Francis Adyanga Akena, the Ugandan academic who researches indigenous epistemology, states the West tends to value the hard, positive sciences over what would otherwise be described as indigenous epistemology. Adyanga Akena states that while indigenous knowledge does vary community by community, it is not seen as legitimate since it does not access the educational system Western societies highly value and does not fit the physicality of *who* can reason.¹³ It is here "value" can be seen as meaning the civilized white man, and this is true even today. It is in these university settings he has been allowed the opportunity to pursue legitimate reason. Paradoxically, this constrains knowledge itself. Adyanga Akena goes on to explain not only is this epistemological form dominating, it is also subjective and limiting. "Dominant groups [white, bourgeoisie males] produce subjective knowledge in order to produce more credible and effective socioeconomic and political perspectives."¹⁴ Thus, this produces a hierarchy based purely on racial relations and relates back to Cooper's assertion social equality will never occur until education is decolonized. Since epistemology is constructed for the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Francis Adyanga Akena, "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (September 2012: 601).

¹⁴ Ibid., 604.

purpose of building “relationship[s] based on exchange that binds together all groups...in that kind of society...this relationship can be exploitative, as in the colonial project.”¹⁵ It is here colonization and colonized humanity reveals itself. To have a colonized humanity, thusly, would indicate there is little way to revalorize one’s own humanity. Therefore, to be colonized indicates an outside being or epistemology dictating movement throughout society. This is what Wynter calls *désêtre*, or wrongness of being; to be colonized, then would mean the very act of living is wrong.¹⁶ Logically, it would follow since society is built around these dominant groups’ epistemology, then society itself would be colonized.

Building on the Foundation: Shaping the Eurocentric Society

I must now turn to what I mean by “true American Society” and “faux relationships.” On the surface, we could claim the issues revolving around the Emmett Till case and Anna Julia Cooper’s observations stem from anti-black racism. However, this is not seeing the forest through the trees. Rather, anti-black racism is only *a symptom* of what could be described as the diseased Eurocentric societal framework. There are several various ways I could describe Eurocentric society, but I wish to turn to a work of fiction (poetics) briefly. Although his work was one of satire, George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is representative of what it means to live in a Eurocentric world. In one particular scene, Benjamin sees the pigs commandment: “ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.”¹⁷ Benjamin’s next observation is quite astute. “After that it did not seem strange when the next day the pigs who were supervising the work of the farm all carried whips in their trotters...bought themselves

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 164.

¹⁷ George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide, 1944), 100.

a wireless set...strolling in the farmhouse garden.”¹⁸ The reason I bring up this classic quote is due to the fact it highlights Eurocentrism’s true nature and origin: everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others. Therefore, Eurocentrism favors the Western construction of the human and reason, hence the “Euro” prefix and the -centrism root. The Euro- prefix acknowledges the Western values and the -centrism root allows for the predominance of these values. The word itself is creating a central and a periphery, or rather, a self and then the other. This is what I term faux universalism and faux humanism.¹⁹

When I speak about the Western construction of man, I am referring to not only the biological, but the class, race, and gender of *who* fulfills these culture-specific notions of *Man*.²⁰ I must turn to Sylvia Wynter and Franz Fanon. Both of these authors spent a large part of their life dedicated to what it means to be “human” and how to decolonize the concept. Wynter, the Jamaican theorist and critic, combines history, literary analysis, economics, and Black studies to draw on what it means to overrepresent a human being. Fanon does likewise, however, he also draws from community psychology and mental health along with his personal experiences in Algeria, France, and Martinique. Both focus on what it means to construct and live in a Eurocentric society as periphery and are integral in understanding Eurocentric society’s development. Both scholars focus on liberal humanism’s hold. Stemming from liberal ideals

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ To clarify the conjoining of the two words, *faux* is the French term for false or wrong while *universal* derives from the Latin word *universalis* and *universus* meaning, “of or belonging to all” and “all together whole, entire.” Therefore, if a framework of relation promises freedom and full mobility for all yet fails to deliver on this promise, this framework pursues a “faux universalism.” Jointly, if a society promises full mobility to freely define one’s own humanism, yet fails to deliver on this promise, then there is a faux humanism. After all, a society should not be ontologically confined to one certain version of humanity. Once a monopoly begins, then there will be those who are labeled “non-beings” (Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 163). Thusly, faux universalism and faux humanity go hand-in-hand.

²⁰ Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 123.

(limited government, individual rights, capitalism, consent of the governed), liberal humanism is a faux universal humanism which hinges on a narrowly constrained genre of man. This means man is only conceptualized in the Western-bourgeois sense, meaning a human is only a human if he meets certain criteria.²¹ However, the dangers within liberal humanism is not Western-bourgeois's conceptualization of man, but the only representation is one confined to race, gender, and class descriptions.²² Therefore, man is defined ontologically, sociogenically, and phylogenically.

To be ontologically defined refers to ontology itself, which is how we view the world and the lived experience. Therefore, to be ontologically defined means to define ourselves in the world. However, if the only valid experience is that of the Western-bourgeois man, then the black, or any non-white, is defined in the negative. Fanon examines this further in *Black Skin, White Masks*, stating "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man."²³ Therefore, if the black man cannot validate his own experience because it is not seen as legitimate, then to be black also means to be defined sociogenically. Sociogeny relates to how humans are seen through other humans, or, as Fanon states the fact white people see themselves superior to blacks while blacks want to prove their intellect and ontological perspective is just as valid as whites.²⁴ This does not promote true, human relationships, but rather faux relationships which are only validated phylogenically. Phylogenic refers to the outwards expressions of genes, or rather, how man views his own body and skin

²¹ Ibid., 117.

²² Ibid.

²³ Fanon, *White Skin, Black Masks*, 90.

²⁴ Ibid, XIV.

color. Thus, ontogeny, phylogeny, and sociogeny now create and dictate how a human being is allowed to navigate society. I believe Zimbabwean poet Tendai Mwanaka illustrates the effect beautifully in his anthology *Revolutionary: Struggle Poems*: “The human skin is now the only existing surface/That has survived a history of cut and paste manifest destiny/ The dermis has become and interlocutor of presenting, as a surface/ It both jails, skyrockets the contours of the landscape and flesh.”²⁵ I believe Mwanaka’s poem “White Girl, Black Boy” demonstrates what it means to be ontologically, sociogenically, and phylogenically confined. When he states the dermis (skin/phylogeny) has become the interlocutor of presenting (ontogeny), then the landscape in which one lives is completely jailed (sociogeny). Therefore, non-whites and whites alike are cut and pasted into society, and this is not from their own volition or will. Rather, the cut and paste destiny is a result of the society creating the human before the human can create the society resulting in an *a priori* human being.

The Particular Human: Creating the A Priori Human Being and Epistemology

In political theory, the word *a priori* carries negative connotations. The original definition stems from Kantian logic. For something to be *a priori* means it is conceptualized preceding actual experience. In other words, we know something not because we actually experienced it, but because it must be so. “Therefore we will understand by *a priori* cognitions not those that occur independently of this or that experience, but rather those that occur *absolutely* independently of all experience.”²⁶ An example of this can be found in Oyèrónké Oyewùmí’s book *The Invention of Women*. In this particular work, the Nigerian gender scholar is speaking to

²⁵ Tendai R. Mwanaka, “White Girl, Black Boy,” in *Revolution: Struggle Poems* (Mankon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2015), 2.

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Allen W. Wood, Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 137.

how “woman” is constructed throughout Western society, and she offers a new construction of rethinking gender, pointing to how Yoruba culture²⁷ does not define gender based on sight, but rather sound. However, in doing so, she points to how the *a priori* construction of women is psychologically and morally devaluating to all women. In this sense, no one has to experience women are subordinate than men in Eurocentric society.²⁸ It is just a given and accepted as the regime of truth.²⁹ This only causes social entrapments.

This is what it means to be social constructed before existence. When a person is socially constructed, it reverses what should be considered a natural process (human begets society, not society begets human). Yet, Eurocentric society reverses the natural process, thus placing man as an ontological prior to his conceptualization, otherwise stated: his existence preceded his essence.³⁰ Therefore, man becomes entangled in a predetermined web and is left with little tools to break free. Indeed, “othering” and devalorizing human beings becomes the necessary solution to keep the European man as being the most civilized and glorified. Therefore, dehumanization and devalorization is not for its own sake, but to fight the ambivalence the European man faces. In the wake of an epistemological crisis, “dehumanization is best understood as a solution to a problem: the problem of ambivalence. It scarcely needs saying that it is sometimes advantageous for one group of people to harm another by exploiting.”³¹ The exploited group, and even the

²⁷ Yoruba culture and the Yoruba people live in Western Africa, predominantly in Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and Togo. The reason why Oyewùmí utilizes Yoruba culture is to demonstrate Western knowledge is not as pervasive or universal. Gender construction is not based on the body, but rather the tonal language in the society. (Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), X.).

²⁸ Ibid, 135.

²⁹ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 115-116.

³⁰ Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 46.

white man, is type-casted in society with little room to argue. This also negates the true purpose of society itself. “Man is ontologically prior to his conceptualization; his existence, that is, precedes his essence.”³² This would indicate man is socially constructed before even physically existing.

The roles dealt in society, the rich white man, the poor black man, the blue collared worker, the white collared worker, the housewife, etc. are roles we are meant to fulfill. The essence of man is thus constrained. The essence of man goes far beyond sociogeny and is what allows us to truly feel. “Shakes. Fear. Trembles. Desires. Resists. Fights” are all what makes up the metaphysical man.³³ However, when society is constantly being defined through the Western bourgeois class, life contains little promises of self-fulfillment and true human interaction. Truly, it creates what Sylvia Wynter calls alienation, which is the separation from essence, and worse, from revalorizing one’s role and life. “In order to contest one’s function in the enacting of this specific genre of the human, one is confronted with a dilemma. As a dilemma, therefore, that is not so much a question of the essentializing...but rather the fact that one *cannot* revalorize.”³⁴ Therefore, I assert the tools needed to escape Eurocentric society are the ones that go back to what it truly means to be human: poetics.

Why Poetics?: How Resistance Poetics can Decolonize Human

This is how I conceptualize American society’s status: colonized epistemology and false sense of sociality. Therefore, I believe there must be an epistemology that is interventionist and reconstructive in nature. In my purview, this is resistance poetics. However, I will first break

³¹ David Livingstone Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization,” *Social Theory and Practice*” *Special Issue: Dominating Speech* 42, no. 2 (April 2016: 425).

³² Gordon, *Fanon*, 46.

³³ Gordon, *Fanon*, 10.

³⁴ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 115.

down poetics before explaining its resistive nature. It here it is necessary to turn to Aristotle and Rousseau to comprehend how political science and other social sciences conceptualize poetics. Poetics, as I will also further explain in “What Becomes of the Brokenhearted,” can be taken from Aristotelian teachings. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, he defines poetics as one of the earliest surviving works of dramatics and philosophical treatises.

Some can, through craft or experience, imitate with colors and shapes, and create the likeness of many things. Others do so with voice. In the arts mentioned above the emulation (*mimesis*) is done with rhythm, language, or melody, either separately or in combination...Dancers use rhythm without melody. Dance emulates character, circumstance, and action through poses and rhythmic movement.³⁵

I also conceptualize poetics in this way. Poetics encompasses more than a literary critique and poetry; rather, it includes other artistic methods such as music, drama, dance, use of color/aesthetics, etc. These types of poetics (dance, visual art, drama, poetry, music) all dig deep into what it truly means to be human since it emulates what Aristotle claims is human nature. This is not to say humans are good or bad, but rather relates to what Rousseau states as one of nature’s impulses: pity. Pity is a part of sociality and is the desire to not see another fellow human being suffer (sympathy).³⁶ It is here both Aristotle and Rousseau point to poetics’ transcendental nature: the ability to break from the *a priori* man and dig deep into his or her essence. “We all find pleasure in the mimetic. This is revealed by our fascination for watching life-like imitations...The reason for this is that figuring something out is enjoyable, not only to philosophers but to everyone.”³⁷ Therefore, poetics helps us to comprehend the lived

³⁵ Aristotle, “Aristotle’s Poetics,” in *Untying Aristotle’s Poetics for Storytellers*, ed. Rune Mryland (Storyknot, 2018), 1 (47a8-20).

³⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Second Discourse: *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind*” in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (Binghampton: Yale University Press, 2002), 107.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Untying*, 4(48b4-19).

experiences, breaking the ontogeny, sociogeny, and phylogeny of Eurocentric society. This breaking is part of the decolonizing process.

The second important aspect of decolonizing is allowing for revalorization. It is not enough to recognize or pity another human in Rousseauian terminology. Poetics must revalorize the human. Poetics, specifically the Black Arts Movement³⁸, produced a glimmer of this process. In “The Master’s Tools,” Sylvia Wynter explains poetics in the Black Arts Movement disassembled the symbol of “black” from ugliness, evil, corruption, and death to having black exercise an immense emotional and ideological influence, allowing blackness to bristle with a sense of possibility.³⁹ However, Wynter is not the only scholar who has asserted poetics destabilizes and transforms the melanin, no longer jailing it. Édouard Glissant was a Martiniquais literary critique, poet, philosopher, and writer who studied under Aimé Césaire, who was also a Martiniquais author supporting poetic’s use as a legitimate form of epistemology. In his work *Poetics of Relation*, he explains the necessity of poetics, specifically the poetics of language. Although Glissant was critiquing French language, I believe understanding his argument will demonstrate the engrained prejudices and anti-black reason.

Glissant states working within a certain language covers up the faux relationships that have become the *sine qua non* of sociality—that is the social world.⁴⁰ Additionally, working within a certain language allows reason to remain colonized, which only produces a vicious, colonizing wheel. Yet, poetics of depth, those types of poetics which speaks beyond colonized

³⁸ The Black Arts Movement (BAM) was a black-led movement during the 1960s and 1970s which, through aesthetics and poetics, highlighted the culture and spiritual side of black pride. Amiri Baraka (actor, teacher, poet) was seen as the founder, and Harlem was seen as the citadel.

³⁹ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 111.

⁴⁰ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. and ed. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 23.

epistemologies, upset the Eurocentric terrain by dispossessing the sovereign subject and making the subject surrender its speaking ability.⁴¹ When the subject (Eurocentric man here) surrenders the ability to speak, he is no longer capitalizing the would be conversation. Instead, what is produced is an actual conversation where each person reverses roles from other to subject and from subject to other. There is a fluid, equal exchange of knowledge/understanding of being. This is the “relation” aspect of poetics. Indeed, it makes us realize we will always be someone’s “other,” but not necessarily in the colonizing definition, but in the individualistic purview. It is only thus we can be seen as completing and developing our essences. “For in reality, Relation is not an absolute toward which every work would strive but a totality...that through its poetic and practical and unceasing force attempts to be perfected, to be spoken, simply, that is, to be complete.”⁴² It is in this regard I find poetics as a natural decolonizing epistemology. If colonizing a human being means to fragment their own cognition (black stuck in blackness), then the dialectical opposite would be to make a complete person, but not through Eurocentric epistemology, but by reaching for a more *human* form of relations.

Looking Forward: What Becomes of the Brokenhearted? And Remembering Emmett Till

Overall, American society is bound to a Eurocentric understandings, and it is from these understandings we see horrific tragedies like Emmett Till’s death. Additionally, it is no longer enough to rely on stereotypical forms of epistemologies to set us free from Eurocentric reason. Therefore, we must discover another form of resistance, and I assert this can be found through poetics. Unlike academia, which is all too often caught in the ivory tower, poetics is directly related to human emotions and reflects the reality we live in: a colonized, faux universalism.

⁴¹ Ibid., 24.

⁴² Ibid., 35.

Poetics is one of the remedies for this. To engage in poetics, therefore, means engaging in an epistemology of freedom that not only deconstructs, but revolutionizes what it means to be human.

What Becomes of the Brokenhearted?: Breaking Eurocentrism and Resistance Poetics

As I walk this land with broken dreams

I have visions of many things

But happiness is just an illusion...

What becomes of the broken-hearted

Who has love that's now departed?

I know I got to find

Some kind of peace of mind

-Jimmy Ruffin, "What Becomes of the Brokenhearted?"

Jimmy Ruffin's ballad is considered one of the most well recognized ballads Motown Records ever produced; yet, it was not originally meant for him, but the Spinner Sisters. However, he was able to convince song writers to let him record it after stating he understands the heartbreak behind the song. When he passed away in November 2014, there was a revalorization around the ballad, with family members stating: "All of his songs were about love, so that spoke to the kind of spirited guy he was, and spiritual too."⁴³ It is this point of the spirituality I believe is what allows for the decolonizing of humanity. Reading, listening, and applying Ruffin's ballad sheds a light on why Sylvia Wynter deems poetics, and the Black Arts Movement in general, as necessary to redefine what it means to be human. In order to address how poetics can be revolutionary and thus decolonizing, I will first dissect dominant forms of knowledge production in Eurocentric society. This allows me to gain a greater sense of how and why poetics must depart from Eurocentric epistemology in order to be considered revolutionary.

⁴³ Philica Ruffin, interviewed by Brian McCollum, "Motown's 'Brokenhearted' singer Jimmy Ruffin dies at 78," *Detroit Free Press*, November 19, 2014, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/obituary/2014/11/19/jimmy-ruffin-dies-motown/19282521/>.

Secondly, I will engage in literary poetics, mainly prose, poems, and spirituals to demonstrate how resistance poetics allows for the reader to critically engage in what it means to be human.

To do this, I will be relying on Aimé Césaire, Claudia Jones, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

Understanding Poetics and the Importance of the Creative Mind: Dissecting Eurocentric Knowledge Production

Enter into a metaphoric science and technology exhibit; now enter into the metaphoric art and aesthetics exhibit. Imagine how these exhibits appear, taste, smell, feel, and the surrounding people. Apply the senses and the first vision that paints across the mind is likely one of dialectical opposites. Additionally, I guarantee one museum has more traffic than the other. This quick imagination exercise highlights how Western society has come to prize one source of knowledge over another and begs the question of what is considered legitimate knowledge.

Authentic knowledge production hinges on and assures harmonious existence without surroundings.⁴⁴ After all, human beings are inherently social creatures who are reliant on their senses (modes of knowledge): sight, smell, audio, taste, touch. If this is true and knowledge production stems from experiences, how has society come to prize one museum over another?

The State of Knowledge Production in a Eurocentric Society: The Epistemological Museum

Knowledge production should then be considered a function of social processes and structures on the one hand, and the pattern of intellectual life, including modes of knowing, to respond to challenges of the community on the other.⁴⁵ It is here knowledge production's main strength lies: its emancipatory value. Knowledge, no matter the form it takes, should be seen as way to liberate society, to allow humans be actors. This can be directly linked to societal

⁴⁴ Francis Adyanga Akena, "Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge and Its Implications for Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 6 (September 2012: 602).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

language, which shifts from society to society. Language is about a particular presence in the world—a world conceived of as a whole in which all things are linked together.⁴⁶ For example, in Yorùbá⁴⁷ culture, knowledge systems are based on both the oral and visual. However, what allows Yorùbá society to be free is not the same for Western society. Instead, Western society has prized vision: knowledge and reality are all based on the visualization of truth.

Acknowledging knowledge production's main virtue is its emancipatory power; the "truth" is visualized (i.e., the phrase "Can you see what I am saying?"). "Euro-Americans speak of knowledge as illumination, knowing as seeing, truth as light...implications of the privileging of sight over other senses for the conception of reality and knowledge in the West."⁴⁸ This, within itself, is not entirely false or wrong. This is how Western culture sets itself free. However, there is a proclivity to over-legitimize vision. This excludes a vast majority of those who rely on separate or combined senses.

It is here particularism⁴⁹ as inequality begins to take root. It is true each society has an unique way of synthesizing knowledge. However, it is when a certain society wishes to create a monopoly on production, or wishes to create the ultimate "truth," particularism evolves into inequality and delegitimizes others.⁵⁰ When sight is valued over other epistemological modes,

⁴⁶ Oyerónké Oyêwùmí. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 14.

⁴⁷ Yorùbá culture stems from the Yorùbá people. The Yorùbá people live in Western Africa, primarily inhabiting Nigeria, Benin, and Togo and there are about 47 million Yorùbá throughout the world. Their culture does not revolve around creating meaning through sight, but rather creating meaning through sound and language.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁹ I conceptualize particularism as an over-valorization of a specific type of human. While I do contend people have preferences, particularism takes the specific type of human and claim it is the *only* type of human that is socially acceptable. In my analysis, this is the European man.

then Western knowledge becomes Eurocentric. In my conception, Eurocentrism is an ontology where the hegemonic Western-bourgeois creates contrasting and unequal genres of human based on melanin. “In other words...the negative connotations placed upon black population group are a function of the devalorization of the human...biocentric descriptive statement of *Man*, over-represented as if it were by that of the human.”⁵¹ What Wynter alludes to here, and what Oyêwùmí speaks to as well, is the biocentric, or phylogeny of a human is the only way to view a person. Skin color, much like gender, becomes objectified through biological determinism. Through sight’s over-legitimization, biological determinism serves as a filter to organize society and is strictly enforced through formal educational systems, which allows this epistemology to become institutionalized. What is more, biological determinism does not come in one particular form; whether based in science, such as DNA unraveling or through beauty standards, biological determinism ensures social actors are presented as groups and not as individuals. That is, skin color is the hegemonic epistemology and dictates sociogeny. Human beings are seen through other human beings.⁵² As long as such groups are conceived to be genetically constituted, then there is no escape from biological determinism.⁵³ Therefore, Eurocentric epistemology becomes particular yet mistaken for a universal truth.

Stating Eurocentric epistemology is spread throughout society is rather vague. Indeed, it must have homes where it can blossom. I agree with Adyanga-Akena when he states colonizing

⁵⁰ Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Henry A. Giroux, Lewis R. Gordon, and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 116.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵³ Oyêwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, X, 10.

epistemology is cultivated and legitimized in the formal educational system. Participants at all levels of the educational system contribute to knowledge production. Beyond interpretation and diving deep into books, external experiences and understanding are a complement to literature. This leads to quite the particular cocktail because not only is an outside experience present (biological determinism), this external imposition is disempowering and colonizing.⁵⁴ This is due to the fact biological determinism not only dictates social mobility, but it also dictates what rationality is rational. In other words, only one epistemology should be studied and that epistemology is not accessible to everyone. This can be highlighted when understanding how science is perceived in society. Although speaking through a predominantly gendered understanding of biological determinism, the quote below highlights how different forms of oppression (race, class, and gender) often speak to each other and determine *who* is allowed to contribute to society.

Rather my concern has been with the ways Western [Eurocentric] science has historically emerged out of a metaphor coupling science and masculinity, and thus the ways in which science has been shaped...Francis Bacon advocated a science that would establish the control of mind over nature. The image that he had of what this partnership was to be was drawn explicitly from prevailing notions of marriage between men and women...Western conceptions of science had been shaped by this historical coupling between Mind, figured as male, and Nature, figured as female...A better science, I argued, would inevitably be more inclusive science, more accessible to women...This is a human aspiration.⁵⁵ Stating who is allowed in the educational setting and then who is considered to be rational not only uplifts biological determinism, but also devalues other epistemologies and modes of knowledge, thereby colonizing and colorizing rationality and “truth.”

⁵⁴ Adyanga-Akena, “Critical Analysis of the Production,” 606.

⁵⁵ Emerita Evelyn Fox Keller, interviewed by Rana Danjani. “What Do We Mean When We Talk About Gender and Science? An Interview with Professor Emerita Evelyn Fox Keller (MIT),” *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 44, no. 2 (May 2019): 222.

The Many Rivers of Freedom: Poetics and the Black Arts Movement

This circles back to the museum metaphor I first presented. Remembering the original thoughts between the two museums and understanding museums as a metaphor that conveys knowledge and how we prioritize it, I would also like to add one more dimension to this vision: the type of art and science and their creators. Was Kara Walker presented along with Gwendolyn Bennett? Was Garrett Morgan, inventor of the traffic light, on display in the metaphoric museum? This imaginative exercise digs deep into the psyche and demonstrates how often Western society plays into Eurocentrism. “The Eurocentric ideal was supposed to give to humanity all that spells meaning, form, and purpose. It is still necessary to understand the nature of this cultural context and the tenacious hold it had it has on the Western psyche.”⁵⁶ Now, there are several rivers of freedom I could take to demonstrate the break with Eurocentrism. However, I choose to focus on the Black Arts Movement because it is one of the oldest forms of epistemological knowledge. Additionally, poetics is such as constituent part of our historical and everyday lives there is a tendency to underestimate it as a revolutionary discipline.⁵⁷ This does not suggest I believe those that are lacking in poetics are not revolutionary; this would be counter-intuitive. I do not wish to cut off any form of emancipatory epistemology that might be available. For instance, Angela Davis is exceptionally revolutionary despite not engaging in art forms. Therefore, I am not over-valorizing poetics, but rather drawing attention to its often ignored revolutionary value.

⁵⁶ Rex M. Nettleford. “Black Classicism and the Eurocentric Ideal: A Case for Integrative Inquiry into Black Expressive Arts?” *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 2 (1996): 27.

⁵⁷ Edouard Glissant. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. by A. James Arnold and Kandioura Dramé (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 110.

It is true not all poetics is revolutionary. Art, especially in the Eurocentric Aesthetic Movement in the late 19th century, was art created for art's sake. Art must escape the trap of temporal narcissism. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community and therefore a victim of biological determinism (biologically, men should only engage physically and emotionally with the opposite sex), Oscar Wilde understood the need for a liberating art movement. Having to conform with Eurocentric ideals, Wilde republished *The Picture of Dorian Gray* after being told it was originally unsavory due to its homoerotic themes. Despite this, Wilde wrote "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass."⁵⁸ It is here he digs deep into the heart of Eurocentric art and art created for art's sake: it does not engage with what is meant by "human." Eurocentrism has a warped conception of what is even meant by the physical category of human. Biological determinism is simply a way to legitimize the result of a botched humanity to the point it cannot recognize itself in art. This is why Wilde continues to state "we can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely...all art is useless."⁵⁹ This admiration of the visual renders art, no less poetics, useless since it chains the artist. Therefore, poetics must escape the Eurocentric epistemology and beauty conception not by taking away, but by injecting it with a missing piece or color: resistance and refusal.

Hence, I follow Cabral's logic; regardless of the river of freedom, a resistance culture must be constructed in order to rebuild a universal.⁶⁰ Therefore, this desire to push forward and

⁵⁸ Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Philip Smith and Stanley Applebaum (Mineola: Dover Thrift Editions, 1891/1993), vii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, viii.

resist must be implanted in the minds, relations with nature and the self, and even relations with each other. “We can’t set out from the principle that the forest is pure...No, there are bad things and good things as much in the city as in the forest...And we have to make our countryside progress more and more each day, as much in the cultural sphere as in other spheres.”⁶¹

Therefore, I believe what will allow the countryside to progress is instilling culture into poetics.

Art must be for life’s sake. “Poetics is a disciple, though a flexible one...is a way of allowing creative writing dialogue with itself beyond the monologic...they redress and address...is a secondary discourse, but is not after the event.”⁶² The consequential phrase in this description is “permission to continue.” Revolutions do not conclude. The moment a revolution is placed on the shelf is the moment the human project ceases to exist. Poetics is a flexible enough discourse to remind society humans are first emotive, and Eurocentrism has caused pain for everyone entrapped in its “truth.” This includes whites and men who are often seen from benefiting from the system. In this sense poetics reinforces *melancholia Africana*, that is, the ability of everyone who has been oppressed to relate to through a specific loss but yet a refusal to accept the particularism. It is an aesthetic of suffering born from annihilation, displaying an ability to pinpoint references essential to what keeps them alive in the womb of death.⁶³ This immediately rejects Eurocentrism given Eurocentrism calls for a false emotive experience. Therefore, resistance poetics is revolutionary.

⁶⁰ Cabral, Amilcar, *Resistance and Decolonization*, trans. by Dan Wood (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 118.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶² Robert Sheppard, “The Necessity of Poetics.” *Birkbeck University of London*, last Modified February-March 1999, <http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/1/Robert%20Sheppard,%20%27The%20Necessity%20of%20Poetics%27.htm>.

⁶³ Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana: The Indispensable Overcoming of the Black Condition*, trans by Bill Hamlet (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 11.

Understanding Poetics Through Literature and Poetry

Poetics is different than hermeneutics. Unlike hermeneutics, which originally derived from law and religion and attempts to understand novel interpretations, poetics in the literary model directly links to meaning and how these meanings are possible. This forces readers to actively engage with the author's message and forces the reader to ask "What makes this passage seem ironic? What makes us sympathize with this particular character or theme? Why is the ending of this poem so ambiguous?"⁶⁴ These questions also demonstrate how readers can engage in literary competence. Literary competence is deeply rooted in the theoretical discourses that not only include how the reader interprets the reading (i.e., asking the "What is this poem about?" or summarizing to work to peers), but also places the literary work in its proper social and cultural frame. This directly ties into what is meant when a teacher or peer attempts to unravel the work's "theme" or "message." However, only attempting to answer "what the author meant" plays into a limited scope. "Restricting the meaning of a work to what an author might have intended remains a possible critical strategy, but...such meaning is tied not to an inner intention...suggesting that the work answers the concerns of its moment of creation and only accidentally the concerns of the subsequent readers."⁶⁵ Therefore, breaking with the limited scope is detrimental to understanding how poetics can be revolutionary.

It is important to note here the burden does not only lay on the reader's shoulders, but the artist's as well. Fanon indicates this duty when asking "the white man is locked in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness...some Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth

⁶⁴ Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

of the black man's intellect...How do we break the cycle?"⁶⁶ In this question, Fanon is referring to an author's accidental appeal to European epistemology and biological determinism based on the "primacy of the issue of the Rights of Man as *the* defining premise which underlies both our present order of knowledge, as well as its correlated mainstream aesthetics... 'the Rights of Man cannot include the Rights of the Negro.'"⁶⁷ Hence, in order for an author's message to be revolutionary, it must not appeal to a system that is already guilty of social entrapment since literary poetics is still appealing to vision as the main source of knowledge transfer and formation. Therefore, in order to successfully turn vision into a form of resistance, the author must uproot what is meant by "human" sociogenically. Understanding a person's phylogeny (purely biological makeup) is created through descriptive, constructed terms that attempt to outline his or her experience in society. This is not only destructive, it also affects a person's ontogeny (how a person sees his or her own existence) and then then in turn creates genres of man and lessening the black man sociogenically (human beings seen through other human beings).⁶⁸

Therefore, visualizing prose and poems must call into question what it means to be *human*, not merely what it means to be black or white. "The systemic revalorization of Black peoples...by means of the no less systemic revalorization of human being itself, *outside* the necessarily devalorizing terms of the biocentric descriptive statement of *Man*, over-represented as if it were by that of the human."⁶⁹ This is the true power of poetics. Poetics is the way authors

⁶⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xii-xiv.

⁶⁷ Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map," 112.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

are able to question the power of language, which is too often fixed. Simply understanding the scientific fallacies of racism not only plays into how knowledge is primarily spread in Eurocentric culture, but also takes race as being a matter of melanin and genetics rather than seeing how skin differences “jails, skyrockets the contours of the landscape and flesh.”⁷⁰ Rather, resistance poetics allows for a relation to be seen socially and asserts verbs, nouns, subjects, objects, “are not fixed in their places because, in the words of Glissant, ‘in Relation every subject is an object and every object a subject.’”⁷¹ In order to study this closer, I wish to critically engage with Césaire, Jones, and Du Bois. However, Du Bois will be placed at the end of this paper as he combines both prose and music to create an unique epistemological freedom.

Literary Poetics, the Main Rhetorical Devices, and Césaire

When employing poetics and the speaking about the Black Arts Movement more generally, it is important to note there are several paths an author can take. Césaire utilizes prose and its rhetorical nature. The four major poetic tropes that accompany the prose rhetoric are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Although treated as a basic literary device taught in high-school English courses, metaphor (when carefully and wisely utilized) should force the reader to pause. The metaphor’s main rhetorical power, however, lies both its identifiability and its justifiability, that is, it can carry an elaborate proposition without losing its meaning to the intended audience.⁷² While closely related to the metaphor, metonymy is slightly different. Instead of linking abstract objects together, metonymy “produces order by linking things in

⁷⁰Tendai R. Mwanka, “White Girl, Black Boy,” in *Revolution: Struggle Poems* (Mankon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2015), 2.

⁷¹Betsy Wing, “Translator’s Introduction” in *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) xx.

⁷²Culler, *Literary Theory*, 71.

spatial and temporal series, moving one thing to another within a given domain.”⁷³ The last two tropes are closely related with synecdoche being a replacement for the whole (saying “boots on the ground” for soldiers) and irony being a device to juxtapose appearance and reality.⁷⁴

Therefore, when utilizing these four devices, the art of rhetoric is revealed. Rhetoric and placing it in a particular narrative (“emplotment”) gives meaning not only to a set of historical events, but also to the language types the author employs to *describe* the elements of his or her narrative.⁷⁵ This can be seen in Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*.

Throughout *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire utilizes powerful and colorful language in order to demonstrate his understanding of the colonial movement. When this was published in 1950, a particular narrative circulating around colonialism was the colonizers were simply attempting to aid the colonized and help them build a proper society. Had Césaire simply stayed within the Western grammar, stating the colonized did need help building a civilization, then he would have fallen into the trap Wynter lays out, and it would be simple for readers to fall into the this trap since there was nothing to make them pause or question society. However, Césaire was able to avoid devalorization through poetics and calling into question the colonizer’s own humanity.

The main rhetorical trope Césaire utilizes is irony, and it is through this irony he demonstrates the issues surrounding the colonizers. The biggest form of irony utilized is his critique of what it means to be civilized. If the true colonizing mission is to civilize a group of people, then it logically follows the colonizers are civilized themselves. That is, there is a deep

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁵ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 94.

desire to spread what it means to be human and the proper way to engage with other people. However, what is ironic is the fact the colonizers are not acting civilized or human at all in Césaire’s view. Rather, the colonizers are becoming what they seek to destroy: animals. “The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.”⁷⁶ While this might not be the most shocking use of irony to many students of the Africana Political Thought today, Césaire’s message remains powerful to those who still abide by this false colonial narrative or racism in general. By stating the European becomes an animal, Césaire is beginning to chip away at liberal universalism, understanding the process of delivering morals for all and rights for all actually strips away the colonizers’ morals. This forces the reader to ask: How can the liberal universalist project exist if those that deliver the morals cannot even abide by their own logic? The truth is Césaire highlights a certain paradox: universal liberalism does not deliver anyone from the pitfalls of a provincial humanity. Rather, it reduces all parties, including white Europeans.

Césaire even goes as far as to point out Hitler and Nazism was not a matter of accident or a rogue case. Indeed, it was this warped perception of European humanity that caused the violence to turn on the Europeans. “That it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism...that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them.”⁷⁷ Not only does Césaire utilize irony, he also relies heavily on symbolism. “Nazi” does not only carry a historical impact, it also carries a heavy symbol. This symbol is typically viewed as the ultimate evil, the absence of morals, and one that

⁷⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972/2002), 41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

was a strike against all humanity. However, to place the same weight on colonizer and Nazism causes the reader to become somewhat uncomfortable with the fact Westernization and all its “successes”⁷⁸ have also led to much death and destruction. Most importantly, Césaire’s juxtaposition calls into question Western morals and what it means to be human. “Europe will have deprived itself of its last *chance* and, with its own hands, drawn up over itself the pall of mortal darkness.”⁷⁹ This within itself is vastly revolutionary as Césaire uproots the very notion Western society was founded on and forces readers to place unjustifiable evils, colonization and dehumanization, in its proper place into society. Truly, there is a need to redefine “human” outside of universal liberalism.

A Lack of Information and Poetry: Jones and Hurdling Over the Intentional Fallacy

In literary criticism, one of the main tools utilized to arrive at intentional fallacy as an argument is to engage with poetry and less an emphasis on autobiographical information. Indeed, in the introduction to Jones’ text, the author writes “She always kept a journal throughout her life and would read it from it from time to time. This is perhaps heartening for the future researchers...its absence leaves us without the full story of her life.”⁸⁰ When a person reads the words “autobiography,” it would be assumed every aspect of life is uncovered to an almost exhaustive level. Yet Jones never left the world with a journal or a way to penetrate all aspects of her life; instead, she left the world with essays and poetry.

While the essays and reflections offer several points of entrance, I wish to take a further dive into the poetry she left behind. In Eurocentric literary critique, there is an emphasis to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁰ Claudia Jones, *Beyond Containment: Autobiographical Essays, Essays, and Poems*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies (Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2011), 3.

access the three main jobs of stewardship in any given field: generation, conservation, and transformation.⁸¹The goal of these three jobs is to form constructive alignment, that is, both the importance of linking new material to concepts and consciously searching for clear objectives. However, this leaves little room for literature and poetics to persist beyond a given time frame. Constructive alignment is also highly scientific and keeps the reader in the intentional fallacy and solidifies Eurocentric educational culture, which is a culture of sense-making bounded by generic expectations and rules.⁸² However, poetry and revolutionary prose (found in Parts I and II of *Beyond Containment*) breaks with these scientific norms due to its words and information structure. To truly analyze a poem requires a new frame of consciousness, probing at something more generative and potentially transformative, a reminder that questioning Eurocentric models of reference open up new ways of thinking.⁸³ Therefore, while it can be lamented Jones did not leave a detailed archive of her life, it can be argued she left much more: a new form of humanity not wrapped in her appearance or her personal decisions, but rather a humanity expressed through the emotive soul.

Life outside of Eurocentrism involves much more than a hunting for facts in a person's life. Indeed, Davies states Jones mentions her marriage and divorce as footnotes along with other romantic ventures.⁸⁴ However, had Jones included more about her personal life, Eurocentric scholars could have utilized her autobiography and framed it through biological determinism. Indeed, Jones' resisted being defined, thereby forcing us to realize life goes beyond a timeline.

⁸¹ Holmes, Trevor M. and Kathryn A. Sutherland. "Deconstructive Misalignment: Archives, Events, and Humanities Approaches in Academic Development." *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 6, Issue 2, Article 11 (November 2015): 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ Jones, *Beyond Containment*, 4.

Rather, true life can be found in emotion and experiences. “Claudia Jones used poetry as Audre Lord suggest ‘to give form to her feelings...’poetry...gave outlet to her pain and expressed her feelings around emotionally charged situations.”⁸⁵ This relates to *Melancholia Africana*. Jones refuses to be a victim of her situation, instead choosing to cry out into the oblivion, “stating I am because we are.”⁸⁶ She is trapped because minorities and repressed groups are trapped. She is trapped in hopes for the day she will not be, as her poem “Morning Mist” suggests. “Deep in my heart I know beyond the mists/Lies Morning.../Will waken free from list of rest.”⁸⁷ Although coated in a metaphor, her intense use of imagery suggests there is going to be a time in which universalism will exist and the mist of Eurocentrism will clear. In this sense, the lack of information is revolutionary in itself because she resists being analyzed to a timeline. Rather, her poems combined with her essays allows for the reader to engage with her psyche.

W.E.B. Du Bois’s Use of Spirituals

In his book *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B Du Bois opens up each chapter with a spiritual, a poem, or a section from the Old Testament along with a bar of music. By combining this with the artful prose, it seems only fitting he should name his work *The Souls of Black Folks*. First, Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* around 1903. Historically this was published during Jim Crow Era, and black people were vastly seen as less than whites. However, Du Bois reminds readers there is only a difference because society has suggested one exists, and he shares this revelation through the Veil. What is significant about the Veil is the fact the Veil never seems escapable or is allowed to be taken off throughout this society. Rather, blacks wear it,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 185.

⁸⁶ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*, 18.

⁸⁷ Jones, *Beyond Containment*, 187.

viewing the opportunities whites are given, but never receiving the privilege themselves. “The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,---a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.”⁸⁸ By carrying this metaphor throughout his essays, the Veil’s impact becomes quite clear when reaching the death of his son. This is where DuBois employs a metonymy.

For DuBois, double-consciousness is a rhetorical device used to question society. “One ever feels his two-ness, ---an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁸⁹ For most readers, a certain image appears in their minds when the word “America” is mentioned. America and American can be considered a metonymy for freedom. If someone is claiming to be “American,” then there is a pretty heavy connotation with freedom and opportunity, at least for the Eurocentric mind. However, Du Bois creates dissonance within the reader when he asserts this is a false correlation to make; this goes against the liberal universalism model and demonstrates a particularism engrained in American society. Indeed, to be American has little to do with freedom in general, but rather a freedom for some.

To love Americanism and Negroism causes cognitive dissonance. “He would not Africanize America... He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism...He simply wishes to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.”⁹⁰ As shocking as

⁸⁸W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1994), 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

this is to the reader and already forces the reader to second guess what is considered basic logic, Du Bois questions society through identifying a tragic irony: childbirth death leading to life. After already establishing blacks live under a Veil and have to battle double-consciousness, Du Bois in a separate essay laments his newborn's son's passing. Traditionally, child-birth or infancy indicates a new life; it is cheerful and exciting for the parents. However, in the black community Du Bois points this is not so. Indeed, he is not the first nor the last to make this claim. Etoke in *Melancholia Africana*, which was written about a century latter states the contemporary Black person much accept herself as an aporetic *I* born from destruction brought on by the encounter with Eurocentrism.⁹¹ Yet, this is the unfortunate reality that is faced. Childbirth, by all means, should not end in an infant's death. Death and life are seen as mutually exclusive concepts outside of religion, and Du Bois in this essay does not allude to the religious "life after death concept." Rather, he utilizes irony (albeit tragically) to demonstrate his son was given freedom and life because he was able to escape the Veil, despite the pain it caused Du Bois and his wife. "Fool that I was to think or wish that this little soul should grow chocked and deformed within the Veil!...Well sped, my boy, before the world has dubbed your ambition insolence...your ideals unattainable...taught you to cringe and bow."⁹² Due to the fact his child did not have to live inside the Veil and see liberal universalism's falsities and half-truths, his child was free from a society that would have kept him chained psychologically and (possibly) physically. Understanding there is life through death is ironic and strong use of poetry as it not only should give the reader pause, but also illuminates how deep racism is engrained into society. Truly, no one should have to find this type of solace through death.

⁹¹ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*, 16.

⁹² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 130.

However, prose is not the only source of analysis Du Bois utilizes throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*. Indeed, the prose only digs into the first part of the revolutionary poetics. The second calls for a need to redefine humanism, hence why Du Bois incorporates spirituals and poems set to music introducing his chapters. Truly, to be revolutionary and incorporate poetics is not from the author's point of view, but also from black people as well. In order to truly tap into how a person is experiencing double consciousness, the Veil, and cognitive dissonance, the people's emotions must be expressed as well. By utilizing spirituals, which slaves historically sung, what Du Bois understands to be human is to be a part of a dynamic whole, which can be represented through music and poetry. Spirituals suspend the notion of time that is often found in the anti-space. Although anti-space has no conception of time, spirituals sing of a future while engaging with the present. Spirituals speak to an immense joy and a deep sadness yet also pinpoint what cannot be destroyed: the soul.⁹³ Indeed, this relates to the cognitive dissonance Du Bois and others create between life and death. The human's cosmological makeup exists beyond space and anti-space. The cosmological human cannot be bounded by time nor bounded by a lack of time. It takes a great amount of imagination to break beyond time that is commonly transferred in the Eurocentric system. Therefore, if it exists outside of the Eurocentric ontological framework, then no person can entrap a soul.⁹⁴ While Du Bois uses several essays, the one most striking is from the last essay. To me, this is a fitting end to the book. From the beginning of the book, the reader sees the journey of the black soul, from the Veil to the aftermath of the Civil War to other prominent Black Leaders to the Black Belt to the passing of the first son to the Coming of John.

⁹³ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*, 31.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

While these essays are not necessarily bright, the literary journey they take the reader on is exhaustive. It is only then the reader can see the souls of black folks. There is a certain desire to “lay this body down...and my soul and they soul shall meet that day/When I lay this body down.”⁹⁵ There is a powerful resolve seen here, and that is reuniting with the souls that came and went that also shared this struggle. DuBois recognizes this stating “Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet once I knew them as of me and of mine.”⁹⁶ This demonstrates that the souls of black folks are not individual souls, but souls that are interconnected throughout history. Despite the veil, there is a shared struggle and spirit that exists between all of them, with music being the glue. More importantly, these songs dig deep into the exclusive black experience. These songs cannot be taken away. “What are these songs, and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are articulate message of the slave to the world.”⁹⁷ Indeed, these songs and Du Bois’s work are a testament to the revolutionary power of poetics and its deeper call to broaden what is meant by “human.”

Looking Forward: I’m a Soul Man

In all, there are several rivers an author and scholar can take to create a revolution. Whether that be through prose or songs or poems, poetics highlights not only Eurocentrism’s fallacies, but also forces the reader or listener or both to call his or her own humanity into question. Truly, in order to understand how melanin can jail and entrap in Mwanaka’s words, it

⁹⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, 155.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 157.

is detrimental to understand the need to infuse poetics with a culture of resistance. There is no set script for what this should appear and sound like, however, the main goal is resistance poetics continues to push forward, to transform, and for/give. Whether it is through a mystery and poems as in Claudia Jones' case or mixture of both in Du Bois' understanding, these epistemological forms demonstrate the human being cannot be defined monolithically, therefore, resistance poetics should not be either.

I'm a Soul Man: Breaking with Eurocentric Reason and Revalorizing the Soul

I was brought up on a side street, listen now

I learned to love before I could eat

I was educated at Woodstock

When I start lovin', oh I can't stop

I'm a soul man (I wanna tell you), yes I am

-Sam & Dave, "Soul Man"

Each year, the National Recording Preservation Board (NRPB) of the Library of Congress selects 25 recordings which are seen as historically and aesthetically important. In 2019, the NRPB selected "Soul Man," written by David Porter and Isaac Hayes and performed by Sam & Dave. The song was created in response to the 1967 Detroit Riots (12th Street Riot). The riots began early in the morning between the Detroit Police Department and black residents, and it has been considered one of the most violent race riots in American history. Yet, in the mass destruction, there seemed to be a saving grace reminiscent of the story of Passover. Those black business owners who marked "soul" on their buildings were spared from being burnt; the specter of destruction had mercy on those who were "soul men and women." After reading this, Hayes desired to compose a song which would instill black pride. In an interview with CBS in 2019 after the induction, Sam Moore states "[Soul Man] identifies what I believe from here... There was Steve Cropper sitting in front of me. He turned around and I said, 'Play it Steve.'"¹ Yet, despite accolades, the story behind "Soul Man" is relatively unknown, at least

¹ Sam Moore, "'It Identifies what I Believe from Here': Sam Moore Reflects on his Hit 'Soul Man,'" interviewed by Jim Axelrod, *Columbia Broadcasting System: Evening News with Norah O'Donnell*, March 20, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/soul-man-song-sam-moore-reflects-on-his-hit-soul-man-as-it-enters-the-national-recording-registry/>.

amongst certain social strata. However, this should not speak to the song's significance, but rather the type of reason which captures American society: Eurocentric reason. Therefore, I assert music like "Soul Man" demonstrates the need to break with Eurocentric logic to revalorize humanity. To demonstrate this claim, I will first engage Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Sylvia Wynter to illuminate how Eurocentric reason is cultivated and colonizing. Secondly, I utilize Mary Wollstonecraft and Frederick Douglass to highlight how recognizing the "soul" revalorizes blackness. Lastly, I will speak to how jazz and blues through can revalorize the colonized human.

Contemplating American Society: Eurocentrism and Colonized Reason

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Sylvia Wynter: Dangers of Sight-based Reason and Perfectibility

To truly contemplate the *why* of Soul Man, and blues/jazz music in general, it is first necessary to engage American society as it is, not its idealized form. Pulling from scholars such as Sylvia Wynter and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I argue American society is one which espouses Eurocentrism. As a sweeping definition, Eurocentrism is a "belief system" which embraces Western/Enlightenment values to the point of over-valorizing them, thereby creating a universal reason. It is only from this particular reason human growth and understanding blossoms.² On the surface, this does not appear to have colonizing qualities. Science, mathematics, positivists, and sight-based reason are not wrong and have intrinsic value. Yet, it is erroneous to state these knowledge forms are the only way to gain morality and a clear picture of the world; for morality, or true human desires, cannot be boiled down to a particular thought process. In his *First Discourse*, Rousseau states this produces no virtue amongst men. "They stifle the sense of

² Enrique D. Dussel, Javier Krauel, and Virginia C. Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, issue 2 (2000): 471.

freedom that people once had and for which they sensed that they were born.”³ What Rousseau is observing here is if there is only one particular form of reason, then there can only be one form of sociality. We never know each other or know one’s friend; we must wait for a critical occasion, and it is precisely on those occasions that knowledge is essentialized.⁴ Yet, this is only scratching the surface.

If Eurocentrism has already presented one type of lens to view the world, then what logically flows (following Rousseau) is knowledge’s value and purpose. Again, we do not actively seek epistemological freedom for epistemology’s sake. Rather, and I agree with Rousseau, understanding stems from human passions, mainly happiness. This is why he implores the readers to escape the narrowly constructed knowledge perpetuated throughout society, for true happiness can be found in self-reason; in other words, self-reflection requires acknowledging the differences amongst people.⁵ It is only here we can perfect ourselves for *self-sake*. When the self is perfected, true sociality emerges. Rousseau utilizes the French term *perfectibilité*, which means the capacity to make progress.⁶ Yet, this is only an uncolonized blueprint. Rousseau, at least in his *First Discourse*, does not claim there is a colorized map to perfectibility. Rather, he only provides one warning: “But as long as power remains alone on one side and enlightenment and wisdom alone on the other, the learned will rarely focus on great things...nations will continue to be wretched, corrupt, and unhappy.”⁷ Eurocentrism, by only

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourse*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶*Ibid.*, 96.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

focusing on certain modes of knowledge (sight as the privileged form of knowledge) ignores Rousseau's warning, producing what is termed the *ego cogito*, or the "I conquer" mentality.⁸

Thus the Eurocentric epistemology and society is born.

The *ego cogito*, in my purview, is what defines the Eurocentric society. Eurocentric society, like all communities, strive for perfectibility. Yet, to be purified means to subscribe to only one epistemology (the *ego cogito* epistemology). As I mentioned above, reason is predominantly based on sight, or the physical. The body is what holds the key to reason, ergo, happiness. Since Eurocentrism speaks to Western reason, a fine, geographical boundary is automatically established, separating Euro-America from the "underdeveloped" world. "Foucault makes the point that *Man* is an invention not of recent date but one that had been specific to a 'restricted geographical area'—namely, that of 'European culture.'"⁹ Therefore, if reason stems from this area physically, then its logical conclusion is those who are from this area (Western-bourgeois man) are the intellectual bodies. Thus, Western intellectuals are able to reinvent terms—as well as real-life categories because of their capacity to reason. Therefore, the physical boundary (Euro-America and "underdeveloped" world) produces social categories: the "I" and "the Other." "A category of Otherness...logically classifiable and thereby only seeable and behavable [sic] toward as the Lack of this ostensibly only possible conception of what it is to be human."¹⁰ It is here a colonized reason is revealed, and this reason is largely conflated to mean human.

⁸ Dussel, Krauel, and Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 471.

⁹ Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 124.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Therefore, a dysselective process begins: the white man is seen as being the hegemon who is adept while the non-white are kept from progressing and should logically be discouraged. Sylvia Wynter explains this phenomena as being similar to Social Darwinism. Some humans can be, as ostensibly naturally dysselected by the process of Evolution in the same way other humans can be ostensibly selected.¹¹ Much like Darwinism, however, is the fact some phylogeny (the way the biological influences the social) is deemed more valuable than others, thereby limiting the sociogenic (the relationship between the self and others) movement throughout society. The white man, the “I” of society, is the one who can reason while the “other” is seen as being unevolved.

Hence, also, the power and force of negation of the term ‘black’ [edited for obscene language] as ostensibly the dysgenic negation of what it is to be an autonomous, fully evolved human being in the ethno-class terms of Darwinian *Man* over-represented as the human. Hence, too, the logical correlation between blackness and poverty; given that...the ostensibly selected most “able”, who were economically successful.¹² Therefore, the Eurocentric society is fundamentally built around the negation of the black human. Turning to poetics to further expound on Wynter’s argument, Tendai Mwanka examines this fickle relationship in “Black Boy, White Girl.” His verse reads “The human skin is now the only existing surface/That has survived a history of cut and paste manifest destiny/ The dermis has become and interlocutor of presenting, as a surface/ It both jails, skyrockets the contours of the landscape and flesh.”¹³ It reveals the over-emphasis on the melanin as a true indicator of humanity, thereby perpetuating the “wrongness of being” narrative.

¹¹ Ibid., 126.

¹² Ibid., 127.

¹³ Tendai R. Mwanka, “White Girl, Black Boy,” in *Revolution: Struggle Poems* (Mankon: Langa Research & Publishing CIG, 2015), 2.

On What There Is and How Things Are: The Ontological Confinements

However, social Darwinism does not speak directly to the emotional backlash which accompanies being black. In Eurocentric society, it cannot be enough a human is trapped phylogenically and sociogenically; the human must also be trapped ontologically. Ontology, in its most broad definition, is a study of what there is, and how the things there are relate to each other in metaphysical ways.¹⁴ To relate metaphysically demonstrates the need to go beyond the physical and penetrate the “soul” of a man. “That our minds really developed in light of pressures [plausible facts] is a question that is not easily to answer from the armchair.”¹⁵ In other words, the black human must believe he/she is inferior; unfortunately, the buy-in process is founded on *a priori* knowledge the black is unreasonable and therefore, trapped in a wrongness of being. To further this, a human who is an *a priori* is one that is constructed prior to their essence. In a Eurocentric view, black is derived outside reason’s physical boundary, thereby black is not sufficient to be human. This social construct transcends generations, making it almost impossible for a black human to define his or herself before birth. “Man is ontologically prior to his conceptualization; his existence, that is, precedes his essence.”¹⁶ This is where race’s impact is felt because without it, there could be no social construction of the white experience. It is necessary to define the black *a priori* since the black negation makes the white experience legitimate. “The term ‘social construct’ only identifies society as a constitutor of race...Here we

¹⁴ Thomas Hofweber, “Logic and Ontology,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified March 21, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/logic-ontology/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of the European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge Press, 1995), 46.

find complete agreement between individual and societal reality.”¹⁷ It is here black ontology, and thus a faux understanding of being is revealed.

Melanin, thusly, is what dictates social mobility, but is also what causes the black to loathe black skin since it is a symbol of entrapment. In “Things we do not know about death,” Mobolaji Olawale, who is heralded as one of Africa’s best poets, highlights the damaging sense of self. “Its color/Is death the color of burnt bodies or fire?/ I get home and pull off my black shirt and trousers/But my skin remains dark and feels like another layer of clothing.../A soul too black inside.”¹⁸ It is this lamenting of not being able to pull one’s skin from the body which reveals Eurocentric ontology’s damaging, repressive nature. Therefore, if human relations are dictated from what Hofweber dubs “the armchair,” then it cannot truly be said a society allows for ontological freedom, for true freedom allows for a valorizing of the self and autonomy.¹⁹ Eurocentric ontology does not allow us to understand the black experience for two main reasons: not only must the black man *be* black, he must be black *in relationship to* the white man.²⁰ The point of reference for the black, therefore, is not self-valorizing, but rather caters to sight; seeing the difference between melanin and social standing. This is why Fanon claims there is a bodily image, and all around the sight of blackness reigns an atmosphere of uncertainty.²¹ This uncertainty should not be conceptualized as an uncertainty in social standing, but an uncertainty in the self.

¹⁷ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸ Mobolaji Olawale, “Things we do not know about death,” in *Best “New” African Poets 2018 Anthology*, ed. Tendai Mwanaka and Nsah Mala (Chitungwiza: Mwanaka Media and Publishing, 2018), 59.

¹⁹ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 164.

²⁰ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, ed. and trans. Richard Philcox (New York City: Grove Press, 2008), 90.

²¹ Ibid.

Unlike the song, there is no way to claim “I’m a soul man,” because man is an essentialized genre. There is a wrongness in blackness which only serves to uphold the white man, and this phenomenon is essential in maintaining Eurocentric society. The black is seen as the object which allows society to function. It is through blackness whiteness can be defined, and this use of a person as a definitional object forces Douglass to realize “my good, *kind master*, he was the author of my situation. The revelation haunted me, stung me...opened my eyes to the horrible pit, and revealed the teeth of the frightful dragon.”²² Although Douglass is writing during a time chattel slavery was legal, the epistemology has never changed. To remain the societal hegemon, the Eurocentric society must ensure the white man remains in the “armchair” position and has discursive rights. To do this, the master’s tools, or the tactical colonizing logic must remain accessible. Irrational humanity is the key to the Great Chain of Being where “others” remain the missing link between extreme unreason and the “I” remains at the apex.²³

Getting to the *Why* of Soul Man: Revalorizing Existence

Breaking with the Wrongness of Being: Utilizing Wollstonecraft and Douglass’s “Last Flogging” to Understand “The Soul Man”

Therefore, if we are dedicated to creating a society in which anti-black racism does not exist, there must be a break the Great Chain of Being. To break with Eurocentric epistemology means there must be what Wollstonecraft calls a revolution of female manners.²⁴ While Wollstonecraft is mainly speaking to women, I believe “A Vindication” can be utilized to

²² Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. John David Smith (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 118.

²³ Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 125-126.

²⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication on the Rights of Woman, A Vindication of the Rights of Man, and An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113.

revalorize human, no matter sex, race, or class because a true revolutionary project does not focus on just one type of human. To revolutionize manners, therefore, means to inject dignity into all human relations. Therefore, a revolution in manners allows for a “time to restore to them their lost dignity—and make them, as a part of the human species, labor by reforming themselves to reform the world.”²⁵ What is most valuable in Wollstonecraft’s argument is the break with the *a priori* man. If we are to truly reconceptualize manners without the master’s tools, then we must cease to engage the language built around race. We should not all into the trap of “giving every object a particular name, without any regard to its genus or species; things which these first originators of language were in no condition to distinguish.”²⁶ This is not to state we do not see color, but rather we are willing to see beyond it, to dig deep into the souls of black folk.

Therefore, redefining manners/relations requires denial and refusal. It requires a type of refusal Frederick Douglass shows in his chapter “The Last Flogging.” On the surface, we can read this chapter as a physical fight and nothing more. However, this would be a rather shallow reading. Rather, the Douglass and Covey altercation is revalorization of the self. Douglass refused to see himself as property, and as a respectable *human*, with a soul. “At any rate, *I was resolved to fight*, and, what was better still, I was actually hard at it...The very color of the man was forgotten...I told him ‘*I did mean to resist, come what might.*’”²⁷ It is here Douglass is entering the social conversation as a subject and not as an object. He is refusing to let someone dictate his existence, and is in line with Wollstonecraft when she asserts the soul does not have sex; inferiority is purely constructed. “Nature, or to speak with strict propriety, God, has made all

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 102.

²⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 177-178.

things right; but man has sought him out many inventions to mar the work.”²⁸ Douglass’s fight demonstrates this sentiment, only instead of gender, Douglass is defending skin color.

I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but, my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I have reached the point, at which I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, while I remained a slave in *form*...He has a domain as broad as his own manly heart to defend, and he is really ‘*a power on earth*.’²⁹

To be a slave in form is only speaking to the physical and only appealing to the body logic

Oyêwùmi describes in *The Invention of Women*. Again, although she is speaking about women here, body reasoning/bio-logic is referring to phylogeny and dualism (“other” and “I”).

However, Douglass refused. He refused to have his ontogeny colonized and refused to live in a framework and appeal to skin color. For the truth is, as Wollstonecraft, Rousseau, Wynter, and Douglass would say, it is of no avail to respond to the relationships the Eurocentric framework produces in a Eurocentric way. “Were we created so that we would die staring into the well from which truth has fled?”³⁰ Of course, the answer would always be negative, and relates to the fact why “when we are busy arguing about the questions which appear in a certain framework, the frame itself becomes invisible; we become enframed within it.”³¹ This is why Douglass finds freedom in fact. While Eurocentric society gives birth to an enslaved humanity physically,³² Eurocentric society can never enslave the soul. The essence of man belongs to the human, not the bio-logic dictates of society. Acknowledging this escapes from a dualistic framework of being. True reason, therefore, is self-empowering, and is distinct amongst each

²⁸ Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication,” 95.

²⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 181.

³⁰ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 57.

³¹ Oyèrónké Oyêwùmi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 13.

³² *Ibid.*, 156.

person since reason has nothing to do with the body, but the mind. “The lightning glance of genius, an argument on which I build my belief of immortality of the soul. Reason is, consequentially the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself.”³³ It is this acknowledging the “world in itself” which Frederick Douglass understood and sought to defend.

Hearing the Color Line Break: The Blues, Jazz, and the Epistemological Power of Sound

We wanted it to Boogaloo (like them Deacons for Self Defense down in Boogaloosa, La., when they routed the Klan). Yeh, Boogaloo out the class rooms and elitist dens of iniquitous obliquity and speak and sing and scream abroad among Black people! We wanted a mass popular art, distinct from the tedious abstraction our oppressors... We thought it was Ain't! White Ain't. And we wanted Black Art.³⁴

Another particular form of poetics is music. Although not traditionally used as a lens to understand and redefine what it means to be human, music has a rather interesting place in poetics since it is typically more accessible than books or other forms of literature. Additionally, music is audible, which also plays a large part in creating meaning. Appealing to a sense separate from sight allows for an exposure beyond Eurocentric epistemology. More than this, music reminds the listener what it means to be human mainly because resistance music is beyond any time-honored body of knowledge and reason.³⁵ Therefore, music not only breaks the Eurocentric reliance on sight, but it also reconceptualizes space, time, and landscape. Resistance rhythms do this through the reclaiming of space once considered an anti-space. Borrowing from architecture, space is the dialectical opposite of anti-space. Space itself is a form in which it is presumed to

³³ Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication,” 122.

³⁴ Amiri Baraka, “The Black Arts Movement,” in *SOS—Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*, ed. by John H. Bracey Jr., Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 16

³⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. by A. James Arnold and Kandioura Dramé (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 187.

exist; it connects to our framework of perception of the world. Most importantly, space conceptualized is the intangible qualifier of our vision of form, of location, and dimension, establishing the relative measure amongst the physical things.³⁶ Since Eurocentrism tends to operate in extremes, anti-space, on the other hand is not only the lack of space, but a formless, timeless, and infinite continuum. However, one of the most damaging antagonistic descriptions is “space as opposed to *anti-space* has identity and value—it is charged with a presence. It seems to exist in itself and have properties which are tangible.”³⁷ Etoke adds onto the dialectical opposites stating anti-space is the zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region where an upheaval can occur.³⁸ Therefore, when contemplating vision and the main form of epistemological knowledge, there is an obvious differentiation where blacks live and whites live and function as human beings, which plays into biological determinism’s hands.

Once blacks enter into a white space, it can be seen as corrupted or damaged. This space is well defined, often accompanied with thoughts of class and progress. Affluent space is tautological in the sense it continues to remind whites of their superiority not due to class but because they are allowed to gain “all” society has to offer thereby solidifying an “ontological given.” Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism is seen as state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death *in distinct yet densely interconnected political geopolitics*.³⁹ Therefore, if Eurocentrism, cemented through space, legitimizes a particular human being, anti-space causes a societal death.

³⁶ Steven Kent Peterson, “Space and Anti-Space.” *Harvard Architectural Review* (1980/2018): 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸ Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana: The Indispensable Overcoming of the Black Condition*, trans by Bill Hamlet (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 18.

³⁹ Wendy Cheng and Rashad Shabazz, “Introduction: Race, Space, and Scale in the Twenty-First Century.” *Stanford University Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages* 8 (2015), 5.

Therefore, a solid color line exists, which refers to the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the island.⁴⁰ Physically, the color line can be seen and dictates where bodies can live and how bodies should relate to one another. Although Du Bois is specifically talking about the twentieth century, this equally applies to the twenty-first century. There is still a color line seen today, especially in poor neighborhoods, school building, and Eurocentric aesthetics. “Cold War geopolitics, global economic restructuring, and the aftereffects of colonial exploitation and neocolonial wars created dynamic routes of mobility and exchange, alongside enduring trauma for entire communities...race is lived through space.”⁴¹ This relates directly to Glissant’s phrase “Martinican space is an anti-space, limited to the point of gnawing away at one’s being, but diverse enough to multiply into infinity.”⁴² Understanding anti-space can be seen as a type of limbo; no human progress is made in this area. This leaves the marginalized groups frustrated; there is a lack of power and tangible resources to control their surrounding yet out of their possession.⁴³ Therefore, there is a need to combine literary devices with sound.

Combining visual with sound allows for the oppressed peoples to surpass the color line. Again, understanding Eurocentric thought is so limited, sound allows for space to be deconstructed since it causes such dissonance and repossession of what it means to be human. “We know that we must exhaust the rhythms of the land and expose the landscape to those various kinds of madness that they have put us.”⁴⁴ However, the type of sound itself does not

⁴⁰W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1994), 9.

⁴¹ Cheng and Shabazz, “Introduction: Race,” 4.

⁴² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 159.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

matter here, as any music style stemming from struggling communities have the ability to create cohesiveness across groups. As Baraka mentions, this music goes against xenophobic behavior because it screams (whether that be vocally or through a horn) “white ain’t!”⁴⁵ Rather, it revalorizes universalism and gives those who live in an anti-space a place to freely reside, making rootlessness more tolerable and the present void more negotiable.⁴⁶ However, in order to be revolutionary, music must force the listener to continually question the space they exist in.

The proper question to ask does not involve asking about a metaphor or understanding how a certain metonymy causes dissonance. Lyrics and chord progressions go by too quickly for this type of engagement. Rather, when attempting to understand music’s poetic and rhetorical power, the question of meaning is not so direct. It is more appropriate to ask, “What is the purpose of that action...what is she doing?” This type of question digs deeper into how the listener experiences the music.

When a person understands a piece of music in the way of experiential formal meaning, he understands it in the sense of hearing it as “making sense.” It progresses in his listening in a way that is coherent (and pleasing?) to him....”We experience the musical parts as connected into a dynamic whole”... We “understand” the music---but not as the theoretician or analyst understands it, under concepts and descriptions that he can convey in words. Rather, we “understand” it in the sense of being able to apprehend, follow, and appreciate the musical events we are hearing...It is, in other words, the unconscious understanding, appreciation, each member of a given musical culture acquires, without being aware of it.⁴⁷

This is the challenge of music as poetics, but it could also be a strength as well. Putting music in its historical context is not necessarily difficult. That is, when hearing a classical piece, the odds of it being from the twenty-first century is not high. Therefore, when Du Bois utilizes the

⁴⁵ Baraka, “The Black Arts Movement,” 16.

⁴⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 112.

⁴⁷ Kivy, Peter. “Another Go at the Meaning of Music: Koopman, Davies and the Meaning of “Meaning.”” *Music, Language, and Cognition: Another Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 145.

spirituals, the odds of it being placed in the proper time period is likely. However, these spirituals are important to include because not only are they able to be placed in the proper historical period, which links directly to finding the social context of the spiritual in question, but also, “My language is understood all over the world.”⁴⁸ While language is not necessarily being dissected here, it is this awareness that allows listeners to understand the message in the music. For Du Bois, the mixture of music and prose highlights his poetic nature and his revolutionary call for a new humanity.

From Chicago to Memphis to New Orleans and Beyond: Jazz’s and Blues’ Impact

From spirituals, another form of music evolves: Jazz and Blues. Relating back to geography, jazz has developed from anti-spaces and are spirituals being reborn. Black music, within itself is constantly being reborn, shifting according to community and the struggle the certain community is facing. This is what makes jazz and blues universalistic. “The universalism of jazz arises from the fact that at no point is it an abstract music, but the expression of a certain situation.”⁴⁹ While it might appear a certain situation is too specific, this is not the case. Indeed, jazz and blues link directly to *melancholia Africana*. Sometimes labeled diasporic consciousness, jazz connects to an existential fullness. Instead of reminding the listener of victimization, that is, understanding they are living in an anti-space and wishing to only focus on the issue without progressing forward, this music allows for the listener to take victimization as a form of freedom. Diasporic consciousness is flexible and open. “It integrates pain as a catalyst of freedom and not as a factor of victimization.”⁵⁰ Therefore, if diasporic consciousness is flexible and open, it can

⁴⁸ Ibid., 215.

⁴⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 110.

⁵⁰ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*, 15.

dig into what is meant by human being. While color is diverse, all humans have suffered the at Eurocentric ideals.

Therefore, while the blues and jazz do offer a call into the humanitarian spirit, they directly puts for/giving into sound. For/giving is an epistemological form of resistance focusing specifically on asserting humanity through not only looking past victimization and who was doing the victimizing, but understanding there is a “strange happiness” reconciliation offers.⁵¹ First, it recognizes there is a self to be uncovered when living in an anti-space. While the anti-space lacks definition, for/giving grasps onto the fact the anti-space, and Eurocentric space, is a constructed ideal. It then gives power to the “self” to speak to the European “you” by rebuilding the space the European lives in. “For/giving confides in *you* that *I* may occasionally move away in order to better come closer.”⁵² Jazz and blues specifically do this through appropriating European music while mixing African heritage and spirituals into its sound. Utilizing European instruments, mainly the brass, reminds the listener the musician is playing what should only be *for you* yet is *giving* a new sound to not only valorize the oppressed *I* but how it unites *us*; hence for/giving. In this way, music persists into the future without ever leaving the present moment since it paths the road towards freedom and promises life. “Dissonance...the *coeur à corps* of harmony and disharmony dissolving into one another...call and response...the moments of tensions...breathless in the (ir)regular lulls, elusive intervals where ‘giving and receiving meet.’”⁵³ In this way, jazz and blues, whether it be from Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans, Count Basie’s big band, bebop, or free,⁵⁴ jazz and blues allow for the access into the human soul and

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 110.

demonstrates the color line is purely constructed. Trumpets, saxophones, and trombones squeals are a revolutionary cry for humanity to practice for/giving, a project that never ends. Therefore, the soul man is born.

Conclusion: The *Why* of Soul Man

Eurocentric reason is rather constricting. It hinges on the physical colorline, space and anti-space, and vision. Therefore, I insist the poetics of music, specifically blues and jazz, breaks the epistemological barrier. Music, as opposed to literature, is surrounds us every day and naturally goes beyond the visual since it does not appeal to sight-based reason. This is the reason I named this chapter “I’m a Soul Man.” There is a self-revalorization that occurs naturally throughout the song. To claim one’s own existence in the face of adversity allows for the decolonization process to begin. Recognizing worth beyond the physical and peering into the soul is resistance poetic’s power: understanding each person has a soul, not just the white bourgeois construction of man. Lastly, this is why Sylvia Wynter emphasizes the Black Arts Movement. Music, as a form of poetics allows for the reinvention of *Man* beyond the “wrongness of being.”⁵⁵ In other words, blues and jazz digs deep into what it means to be human, to be a legitimate form of *human*. This, in all, is the *why* of “Soul Man.”

⁵⁵ Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map,” 163.

And We're Rollin' on a River: The Scope of Poetics and Continuing the Revolution

If you come down to the river

I bet you gonna find some people who live

Big wheel keep on turning

Proud mary keep on burning

Ans we rolling on a river

-Ike and Tina Turner, "Proud Mary"

In the past couple of chapters, I have explored how the inclusion of poetics as a legitimate source of knowledge help liberate colonized humanity. To expound on poetics and colonized humanity, I have presented the basis of my theories in "And Everyone Knows About Mississippi." As the introductory chapter, I defined the terms which are necessary to engage in epistemology, ontology, Eurocentrism, colonized humanity, and poetics. I have also outlined the practicality of my argument, stating it is necessary to engage in a different type of knowledge beyond the traditional Eurocentric reason.

In "What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?," I employ several Africana Political Thought scholars, such as Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, Nathalie Etoke, Claudia Jones, Francis Adyanga-Aken, and W.E.B. Du Bois to explain how Eurocentric knowledge production capitalizes on the biocentric formulation of man. Therefore, in order to combat this, I assert we must inject poetics. In this chapter, I focused on how literary poetics can create meaning by forcing the reader to engage in what it means to be human. However, this only works if the author is able to escape Eurocentric knowledge production.

In "I'm a Soul Man," I speak to how Eurocentric reason is not only colonized, but there remains a clear, physical boundary between the haves and have nots, the human and the negation

of the human. To demonstrate how reason becomes colonized, I employed Mary Wollstonecraft, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Frederick Douglass, and Sylvia Wynter. However, I also utilize these theoreticians to demonstrate how this reason must be decolonized. From here, I engaged jazz and blues and Nathalie Etoke to highlight how jazz and blues plays into *melancholia Africana*, the epistemology of suffering. In the rest of the conclusion, I shall be answering questions that might arise after reading my thesis: What's the implication of poetics to political theory?, How does this help make sense of the discipline's relation to knowledge?, What's the implication on black aesthetics?, and Does this get back to Wynter's clarion call of an unapologetic radical black aesthetics *qua* liberation?

Understanding the Greater Impact of Poetics on Political Science

What's the Implication of Poetics to Political Theory? and How Does This Help Make Sense of the Discipline's Relation to Knowledge?

Political theory as a vocation is seen as an a secondary, ivory tower vocation. Unlike Methodism, which is the branch of political science which dedicates itself to a certain list of procedures which help gain insight into human behavior, political theory is seen as an outdated and historical way of analyzing politics today. Additionally, the theorist is often painted as “preoccupied with a particular magnitude of problems created by actual events or states of affairs...rather than with problems related to deficiencies in theoretical knowledge...the former has taken precedence among epic theorists and has been determinative of the latter.”¹ Therefore, problems which arise in today's society is often looked at as a set of distinctive facts; facts which are then able to be quantified and then answers and techniques are disseminated from the ivory tower. This remains a circular issue and thus a substantial portion of energy is dedicated to this

¹ Sheldon S. Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1969): 1079.

didactic world view.² More than this, if societal issues are seen as purely facts, and if facts are the only legitimate way we can understand the world, then tacitly political theorists are also agreeing to Eurocentrism and anti-black racism as being a fact of society. Prepackaged concepts of empirical theory loses the appreciation for multi-faceted and unconventional ways of exploring crises and phenomena.³ Therefore, political theory as a vocation begins to slip slowly away from its original purpose: providing a range of epistemologies to examine and promote societal change.

I assert in order to rescue political science and political theory from its current status, there must be a renewed interest in the *social* aspect of political science. Ultimately, political theorists' must be invested in the sociality of politics itself. Truly, some phenomena cannot be quantified; certainly, anti-black racism stemming from Eurocentric society cannot be understood through Methodism and "science." This is the reason I open with the Emmett Till lynching. Methodism alone cannot explain the motives behind kidnapping Till nor can Methodism engage in the social consequences and music which has arisen from Emmett Till's tragedy. It is here Methodism and political theory, which is attached to Methodism, fails itself: there entails responsibility to society and those who are colonized—that is, what conforms to reality insofar as we can discover it by combining imagination and intellectual thought---cannot function in isolation from reality.⁴ Poetics gives licensure to escape the ivory tower and desire to comprehend the underlying societal particularisms.

² Ibid., 1064.

³ Ibid., 1073.

⁴ Gutrom Gjessing, "The Social Responsibility of the Social Scientist," *Current Anthropology* 9, no. 5 (December 1968): 397.

Indeed, poetics allows for a new theoretical framework in which a continual change or rather, a continual striving to deeply connect to constructed reality, becomes valid. This is due to poetics' very nature. Reflecting on Aristotle's *Poetics*, it must be reminded music, dance, theatre, paintings, and all different types of art *are* an expression of the human condition.⁵ Hence, to engage in poetics as a legitimate source of knowledge not only displaces political theory from the illusion of the ivory tower, but also reminds the theorist his or her duty is not to academia, but rather to serve mankind as a whole.⁶ Therefore, by engaging poetics, a door is opened to legitimize multiple epistemologies that do not only stem from academic practices, but are directly from the colonized who are directly thrown into the Eurocentric Society:

This is why we stay with poetry. And despite our contesting all the indisputable technologies; despite seeing the political leap that must be managed, the horror of hunger and ignorance, torture and massacre to be conquered, the full load of knowledge to be tamed, the weight of every piece of machinery that we shall finally control, and the exhausting flashes as we pass from one era to another...at the bow there is still something we now share: this murmur... We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone.⁷

Therefore, it becomes immediately necessary to listen to the poetics of social relations, especially the poetics the colonized produce since not only are they living in the torrid reality that is American society, but because they are also engaging in a theoretical venture that is far removed from Methodism.

⁵ Aristotle, "Aristotle's Poetics," in *Untying Aristotle's Poetics for Storytellers*, ed. Rune Mryland (Storyknot, 2018), 1 (47a8-20).

⁶ Gjessing, "The Social Responsibility," 402.

⁷ Eduard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, ed. and trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 9.

Understanding the Greater Impact of Poetics on Other Freedom Projects

Since poetics is a door to escape limited knowledge processes and bind political theory back to the public, it also comes to reason poetics allows for another door to open: other freedom projects. Ultimately, poetics is intersectional. This is the logic behind naming this thesis after “Proud Mary” by Ike and Tina Turner. The song could have been named “Proud Mark” or “Proud John,” but there is a significance behind naming the piece “Proud *Mary*.” By utilizing the feminine name, Ike and Tina Turner are engaging colonized humanity not only from an anti-black lens, but also an anti-women lens. Poetics is not just a form of emancipation only accessible to the black community, but accessible to all who wish to engage it. This is the reason why Glissant states the “Poetics of Relations” principle is not an internal venture, but rather “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”⁸ This digs deep into the heart of what it means to use poetic licenses to relate to others: all have been under-valored through Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism does not only target some groups, but targets all and pulls the under-valored into isolation.

However, poetics reminds us we are not alone. Women, the LGBTQ community, blacks, Native Americans, and all of those who are oppressed have been told politics is an unobtainable venture; their voice remains unheard in the ivory tower. Yet, poetics is the open sky which allows us to sail our boats towards freedom. “Our boats are open and we sail the for everyone.”⁹ It is the *we* Glissant points to that allows for poetics to give way to other forms of sociality to be explored. It relates directly to *melancholia Africana* and how epistemologies of freedom open up to other epistemologies. As we are all sharing in a form of annihilation, poetics allows for

⁸ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

humans to access the ability to act, to think for one's self, and to struggle against oppression; whether this be spirituals, jazz, aesthetics, etc., all forms of poetics and aesthetics that go against Eurocentric consciousness speaks to all who wish to feel immense joy and have experienced deep sadness.¹⁰ In this sense, poetics is not the most formable epistemology, but one with great possibilities. Therefore, poetics allows aesthetics to gain momentum much like black aesthetics gives poetics its own permission to continue its revolutionary momentum. Therefore, all forms of poetics allows for "Proud Mary" to keep rollin' on a river. As the steamboat pulls out onto the river for freedom, so too do other boats. May they keep setting sail for a better tomorrow.

Conclusion: Does this get back to Wynter's clarion call of an unapologetic radical black aesthetics qua liberation?

Ultimately, I began this project with Sylvia Wynter and therefore, it is only fitting I shall end with Sylvia Wynter. Wynter's main critique against Eurocentric society is its ability to synthesize a reality where *human* is conflated with the bio-descriptive statement of Eurocentric *man* as the only legitimate type of man in society.¹¹ Therefore, the black, the woman, or anyone who does not fit this description becomes ontologically confined in their own blackness, womanness, etc. There is no way to become unapologetic in their own skin and existence, rather forced to apologize for their existence. "As a dilemma, therefore, it is a question not of essentializing or non-essentializing of one's racial blackness...but rather of the fact that one *cannot* revalorize one's biological characteristics."¹² Therefore, Wynter's clarion call of an

¹⁰ Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana: The Indispensable Overcoming of the Black Condition*, trans. by Bill Hamlett (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 31.

¹¹ Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 117.

¹² *Ibid.*

unapologetic radical blackness becomes one of the ways, if not *the* way, to destabilize and revolutionize Eurocentric reality.

While, again, there are several epistemologies that will accomplish this, such as Black Studies, I utilized poetics throughout this thesis. I assert poetics indeed answers Wynter's clarain call because I ultimately attest the Wynterian argument is not entirely different from the Wollstonecraftian argument. What must be asserted that Eurocentric society does not incorporate is the spirit. The Human Project is one that is inseparable from the assertion of the spirit and the destruction of genre-biased institutions.¹³ Therefore, the ultimate basis of the Human Project is the need to recognize the soul and spirit of the person as unchained from *a priori* existences. Therefore, this involves the need to recognize the "love of thy neighbor" is transitory; love is not confined to the outward appearance, but the very recognition we are all exist as human.

Nature, or to speak with strict propriety, God, has made all things right; but man has sought him out many inventions to mar the work....Love, from its very nature, must be transitory. To seek for a secret would render it constant, would be as wild a search as for the philosopher's stone, or the grand panacea: and the discovery would be equally useless...The most holy band of society is friendship. It has been well said, by a shrewd satirist, 'that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer.'"¹⁴ Poetics does exactly this. Whether it be blues, jazz, dance, poetry, or spirituals, poetics promotes true friendship. Pure friendship, therefore, is revolutionary.

Friendship as asserted through poetics, is not reductive as it does not contain a specific set of guidelines on how to recognize the person. It remains ambiguous and forces the participant to reflect both inward and outward. True love, true friendship, is born from recognizing the suffering of another person and finding that suffering from within the self. It is the pursuit of

¹³ Ibid., 164.

¹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication on the Rights of Woman, A Vindication of the Rights of Man, and An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95-96.

knowledge *a posteriori* rather than knowledge *a priori* of existence that fills the human heart with love. “Let the honest heart shew itself, and *reason* teach passion...let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds.”¹⁵ This, then, is the heart of my thesis. Poetics allows for the sweetness of the life desired to be realized and work towards. Truly, a revolution never ends, but continues to define itself throughout time. Therefore, let us not give in to the Eurocentric society, but break the chains that imbitters the heart; we must allow “Proud Mary” to not be song, but actualized. Thus grows the heart of poetics. May we all pursue what allows us to be free.

¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

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