

Africana Philosophy as Prolegomenon to Any Future American Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: The whiteness of American philosophy must be appreciated as an epistemological and ontological achievement. Thus, I contend that the only way forward for American philosophy entails an Africana philosophical critique, which consists of two methodological ventures—one deconstructive and the other radical. I will briefly present six voices that exemplify this Africana philosophical critique. The deconstructive voices include (1) Sylvia Wynter’s genealogy of “MAN,” (2) Leonard Harris’s insurrectionist challenge to Pragmatism, and (3) Charles Mills’s and Chandra Mohanty’s rejection of Ideal Theory. The radical voices include (1) Lewis Gordon’s Africana-existential-phenomenology as a decolonial “antidote” to Eurocentrism, (2) Tommy Curry’s culturalogical solution to the “derelictical” and “methodological” crises of African American philosophy, and (3) Africana literature as “new” philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Africana, American, racism

There is a paradox at the heart American philosophy that demands confrontation: while it implicitly purports to be a progressive cultural phenomenon—increasing knowledge and thereby contributing to the moral universe’s “arc toward justice”—a racist discourse, as inextricable as a shadow, silently subtends the intellectual landscape.¹ This is not merely a

political concern, a lament about the demographics of the academy (though this trend is also disturbing²). The *generous* scholar, of course, might concede that there exists a body of figures and texts that make up something like an American philosophical *countercanon*, which for historically contingent reasons has been excluded or forgotten.³ Nevertheless, the *character* of American philosophy—namely, its *whiteness*—must be appreciated as an epistemological and ontological achievement.

Consider, for example, which texts *are* included in the “countercanon” and according to what criteria. The included selections from the history of black thought are often only those that do not disrupt the status quo. As Lee McBride notes, “Excluded from the [American philosophical] narrative are those associated with denouncing America as such, those agents of philosophies grounded in denying that the ‘founding principles’ or an ‘American character’ ever existed, especially those who proffer bellicose means of liberation” (2013, 30). And Tommy Curry argues that “while many scholars, both Black and White, continue to celebrate the ‘integration’ of Black thinkers into the curricula of philosophy, it is undeniable that these amelioratory discourses are had as a surrender to the terms that comprise white philosophy’s position on race” (2011, 141). So we include Martin Luther King and even Malcolm X, who even at their most incisive did not sincerely advocate violence, but not George Jackson (1972), Huey P. Newton (2011), or Robert F. Williams (1962), each of whom contemplates “bellicose means of liberation.” Yet these illiberal considerations are also part of the “American narrative.” Thus, I contend that the only way forward for American philosophy entails an *Africana* philosophical critique, which consists of two methodological ventures—one deconstructive and the other radical.

On the surface, *Africana* philosophy is simply, as Lucius Outlaw explains, a “‘gathering’ notion under which to situate the articulations (writings, speeches, etc.), and traditions of Africans and peoples of African descent collectively” (1992, 64). Superficially, this describes an almost hopelessly disparate set, especially given the range of the included cultures and concerns, not to mention the cultural and philosophical “cross-pollination,” so to speak, that would include some white thinkers and exclude some black ones. Yet, like any other “discipline,” *Africana* philosophy coheres as a school of thought and a critical vantage point by virtue of a set of discursive practices and a series of characteristic questions.

These practices and questions emerge for the deconstructive venture from the sociohistorical condition that Enrique Dussel (1998, 2000) and

others describe as “the underside of Modernity,” a function of the “invention” (Appiah 1993; Mudimbe 1988), so to speak, of the co-constitutive ideas of Europe and Africa (see also Hyatt and Nettleford 1995). The objective of the deconstructive venture is to illuminate the Western, colonizing mechanism of inquiry. It seeks to disclose the ways in which the racism of Western thought in general, and American philosophy in particular, is not simply a reactionary charge levied from the political margins but an *apokalypsis*—that is, a revelation or disclosure—dialectically prefigured in the foundational *parergon* of the current cultural *episteme*.⁴

Lewis Gordon (2008) distills the deconstruction of this sociohistorical point of departure down to three interrelated inquiries: a theoretical or philosophical anthropology, a commitment to freedom and liberation, and metacritiques of reason. An Africana philosophical anthropology poses permutations of the question: What does it mean to be human such that some humanlike bodies are excluded? Or in other words, what does it mean to be black (see Wynter 2001)? An Africana commitment to liberation asks: What are freedom and equality in the modern and contemporary periods such that these ideas are consistent with, even dependent on, modern slavery, European global colonization, American mass incarceration, capitalist underdevelopment of the Global South, and other forms of modern political subjugation (see James 1989; Lowe 2015)? And Africana metacritiques of reason ask: What are reason and thinking such that they can produce and justify the inconsistencies and tensions entailed in the first two questions (see Gordon and Gordon 2006; Henry 2000)? This aspect of the critique—which we might call “sullyng the veil”⁵—is the minimum criterion for future American philosophical inquiry, dispelling with pretensions to innocence under the guise of ignorance (see Sullivan and Tuana 2007).

As a brief aside, and by way of further explanation, Toni Morrison offers a criticism of English literature that applies analogously to American philosophy as well. In *Playing in the Dark* (1993), Morrison argues that a racial discourse subtends all of American literature. She says that in spite of the common assumption that “traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States . . . [t]he contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (1993, 4–5). Morrison explains further

that there are many readers, nonacademics and critics alike, who “have never read, and are proud to say so, *any* African-American text” (1993, 13). Initially, as a *reader*, Morrison herself did not necessarily consider this tendency to be a problem. She says, “My early assumptions as a reader were that black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers” (1993, 15). Similarly, in philosophy, while very few people have the audacity to publicly announce their *pride* in their ignorance of Africana texts, most people do not believe that such ignorance is inherently problematic. Reevaluating this assumption as a *writer*, however, with a refined understanding of how stories are written, Morrison realizes that American literature, even if the author is not black, “could not help being shaped” (1993, 16) by the place and proximity of black people. Between, for example, black racial imagery serving as metaphors for otherness and the uncritical construction of “the ‘normal,’ unracialized, illusory white world that provided the fictional backdrop” (Morrison 1993, 16), American literature—and also American philosophy—has always been about race in some sense, even when it is not *explicitly* about black people.

The radical venture of the Africana philosophical critique proposes, more ambitiously, a revolution in thought and method, the institution of a new philosophical “ceremony” (Wynter 1984, esp. 27–28). The objective is to construct and employ an *anticolonial* mode of inquiry, that is, a form of black thought that “unfix[es] the notion of Blackness from the traditional color symbology of the West” (Wynter 2006, 111, paraphrasing Dubey). This revolution consists in (a) the “teleological suspension” (Gordon 2006, 26) of philosophy, that is, the bracketing of “the authority of the extant disciplines in order to build new concepts” (Knies 2006, 94), and (b) the acceptance of the quotidian, cultural representations, and other “ergonomic expressions of that people’s existence” (Curry 2011, 163) as sufficiently *acts of philosophizing*. New “philosophical” articulations will include “in important cases, practices and traditions of discourse which were not themselves conditioned by an explicit sense on the part of those involved that they were engaged in something called ‘philosophy’ or ‘Africana philosophy’” (Outlaw 1992, 73). This new “ceremony” calls for the heretical traversing—rather than merely the “redrawing”—of the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy (see Gagne 2007).

In the remainder of this article, I will briefly present six voices that exemplify this Africana philosophical critique. The deconstructive voices include (1) Wynter’s genealogy of “MAN”: philosophical anthropology; (2) Harris’s

insurrectionist challenge to Pragmatism: a commitment to liberation; and (3) Mills's and Mohanty's rejection of Ideal Theory: a metacritique of reason. The radical voices include (1) Gordon's Africana-existential-phenomenology as a decolonial "antidote" to Eurocentrism, (2) Curry's culturalogical solution to the "derelictical" and "methodological" crises of African American philosophy, and (3) Africana literature as "new" philosophy.

The Whiteness of Modernity and the Emergence of MAN: Sylvia Wynter

In the year 1492—"when Columbus sailed the ocean blue"—whiteness was born, thus precipitating the sociohistorical condition of modernity. As we learn from Sylvia Wynter, Columbus's colonial expedition to the West Indies is the historical and geographic point of origin for a series of metaphysical developments that characterize our current order of knowledge. First, the authority according to which Columbus laid claim to the "New World" was based on a "theocentric metaphysical category of Otherness . . . whose real-life referent categories were those groups classifiable as being, *inter alia*, *heretics*, *infidels*, *pagan*, *idolators*, or *Enemies of Christ*" (Wynter 2006, 124). Within this metaphysical system, the Christian subject serves as the default human, universalized as simply "Man₁" (Wynter 1995, 36; 2003, 264; 2006, 123), while all non-Christians "served as boundary markers that represented the transgressive chaos" (Wynter 1995, 21) of the various valences of nonhumanity. The practical, colonial effect was that the New World was "uninhabited," which is to say, not occupied by "humans," per se, since "they" lacked a Christian soul. Those humanlike Others that "Man₁" encountered could be either killed with impunity or "converted"—which is to say, enslaved or enserfed in the service of building the "City of God," though attaining, at best, the status of a childlike, primitive quasi-human, given the inextricable mark of their "conversion," namely, their non-European physiognomy.

This theocentric anthropology mutated into a secular, capitalist, quasi-scientific "Man₂" (Wynter 2003, 309) following two parallel developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. First, Man₁ and his Others were grafted onto the Darwinian evolutionary narrative where Man₁ represents the pinnacle of the "Chain of Being" and the Others represent the primitive, deselected stages of evolution. As a parallel development,

the “City of God”—toward which all Christians had purportedly contributed—was rearticulated as the decentered global economy that negotiates the natural scarcity of resources. Consequently, this new “Man₂” sitting at the pinnacle of the Darwinian Chain of Being was defined over and against a *natural* global poor—rather than the savage non-Christian—for which the real-life referent in the context of slavery and its aftermath converged upon Indians and Negros (see also Lowe 2015).

The emergence of this secularized Man₂ is an integral component of what Edward Morgan describes as the “American paradox” of slavery and freedom, where the secular “dedication to human liberty and dignity” in the eighteenth century was *consistent* with a “system of labor that denied human liberty and dignity every hour of the day” (1972, 6). It is paradoxical, rather than contradictory or hypocritical, precisely because of its particular rationalizations. For example, Jefferson’s concept of freedom, Morgan explains, was not “a gift to be conferred by governments, which Jefferson mistrusted at best. It was a freedom that sprang from the independence of the individual” (1972, 7). Importantly, the “individual” is not a singular being, despite its individuating connotation, but the class of humanlike bodies included in the moral community: the *Individuals*, as distinguished from the class of collective Others, in other words, the *Thems*. The previously theocentric anthropology implicit in “Man₁” is preserved in this concept of the “individual” by mapping the “boundary markers that represented the transgressive chaos” onto a spatial metaphor of embodiment. The evidential, historical moment, Morgan argues, is Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676, an uprising of frustrated immigrant Europeans that curiously ended indentured servitude but instituted *racialized* slavery. In this historical moment it becomes clear that freedom is *not* a civil right, a “liberty” *between* citizens pragmatically curtailed by the equality of each citizen in the eyes of the law—a political, “equal freedom.” Rather, it characterizes the Individuals’ lack of inhibition vis-à-vis Others, a vestige of the state of nature ironically inscribed into the Constitution (see also Losurdo 2014).

The Insurrectionist Challenge: Leonard Harris

The insurrectionist challenge is a criticism of American Pragmatism initially put forth by Leonard Harris. The challenge is as follows: “A Philosophy that offers moral intuitions, reasoning strategies, motivations, and examples of

just moral actions but falls short of requiring that we have a moral duty to support or engage in slave insurrections is defective. Moreover, a philosophy that does not make advocacy—that is, representing, defending, or promoting morally just causes—a seminal, meritorious feature of moral agency is defective” (Harris 2002, 192). Pragmatism, Harris concludes, fails this challenge. Jacoby Carter explains further that Pragmatism qua Pragmatism “lacks the *conceptual* resources for liberation” and “fails to provide the requisite *motivation* for persons to engage in liberation struggles” (2013, 63; my emphasis; see also Dotson 2013; McBride 2013). Of course, one can be both a pragmatist and an insurrectionist; yet “it is not clear that pragmatists are on the world historical stage as insurrectionists *as a function of their pragmatism*” (Harris 2002, 201). The upshot of this failure is that Pragmatism, in the best case, can serve as an implicit endorsement of the status quo, if not functioning as an obstacle to justice under the guise of progressivism.⁶

The Whiteness of Ideal Theory: Chandra Mohanty and Charles Mills

The “ideology” (Mills 2005, 172) of Ideal Theory is one of the epistemological mechanisms by which the centrality and dominance of the white, imperial concept of MAN—which, as we will see in a moment, is not exclusively “male”—has been maintained. “Ideal Theory,” Mills explains, is a form of fallacious,⁷ philosophical modeling that excludes or marginalizes potentially disconfirming or countervailing evidence; Mills refers to this kind of evidence as “the actual.” He says, this process of idealization “either tacitly represents the actual as [1] a deviation from the ideal, [2] not worth theorizing in its own right, or [3] claims that starting from the ideal is at least the best way of realizing it” (2005, 168). In short, you prejudicially assume that Others are—or should be thought of as—(inferior) variations of yourself and hence not worth studying in their own right. Mills (2009) argues that this emphasis on Ideal Theory is one of the chief failings of Rawls’s theory of justice, principally evidenced by his shocking silence on issues of American antiblack racism.

Similarly, in her classic piece “Under Western Eyes,” Chandra Mohanty argues that Western feminist discourses fail to appreciate the difference between “‘Woman’—a cultural and ideological composite Other . . . and ‘women’—real, material subjects of their collective histories” (1984, 334).

In lieu of a sociological study of actual “Third World” women, from which one might extract actionable ethical and political concerns, Western feminism posits an ideal “Woman,” an image of the Other implicitly derived from a generalization of *Western* women and their attendant concerns. Furthermore, “Woman” is presumed to be “an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires” (Mohanty 1984, 336–37). This is how, Mohanty explains, “ethnocentric universalism is produced”; it “sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e. the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others” (1984, 336).

The ideology of Ideal Theory is characteristically “whitely”—to borrow Paul Taylor’s (2016, 48) conciliatory term—because, as Wynter argues, the epistemological decolonization for which Mills and Mohanty advocate is “the issue whose target of abolition is the ongoing collective production of our present ethnoclass mode of being human, Man: above all, its overrepresentation of its well-being as that of the human species as a whole, rather than as it is veridically: that of the Western and westernized (or conversely) global middle classes” (Wynter 2003, 313). In short, proponents of Ideal Theory posit whiteness uncritically as a universal—ethically, politically, and ontologically—and since the experiences of “whitely” identified subjects come closest to this “ideal,” they experience “the least cognitive dissonance between it and reality” (Mills 2005, 172).

Africana Postcolonial Existential Phenomenology: Lewis Gordon

Africana-existential-phenomenology, Lewis Gordon argues, is a mode of inquiry “linked to the lived experience of black folk in the modern age” and functions “at the level of method” as an “antidote to epistemological colonialism where blacks are expected to depend exclusively on white thinkers for philosophical reflections on black experience” (2006, 26). Gordon explains that it “comes out of the convergence of black existential thought and creolized forms of phenomenology” (2006, 20). As a species of existentialism, on the one hand, it consists of reflections on and through “the *lived experience* of blackness” (Gordon 2000, 8; my emphasis). And as a species of phenomenology, on the other hand, it “examines the relationship between [black] *consciousness* and the world of meaning” (Gordon 2006, 26; my emphasis). In *Existencia Africana* (2000, see esp. 16–21), Gordon provides an extensive but necessarily “incomplete” list of exemplary figures

and texts; these include Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Angela Davis, Naomi Zack, Joy James, and many others.

Africana-existential-phenomenology operates as a liminal strategy between the deconstructive and the radical ventures, functioning, thus, as a methodological bridge of sorts. In its deconstructive capacity it makes an invaluable contribution; it reteaches us how to *read*. In attending to Africana-existential-phenomenological concerns, we acquire a new, or “shifted” (see Gordon 2006, 30, 46; 2008, chap. 5), analytic lens through which to render visible certain modes of black thought. In its radical capacity, however, Africana-existential-phenomenology effects only a partial decolonization.

Consider, for example, that with our shifted analytic lens, we can appreciate how and why Richard Wright is a “philosopher” (see Haile 2014); yet, without getting hung up on labels, Richard Wright is not an “Africana existential phenomenologist.” There is even reason to be suspicious of describing his work as Africana “philosophy of existence.” First of all, despite scholarly efforts that compare Wright with “existentialists”—and indeed, “existentialists” Sartre and de Beauvoir were among Wright’s contemporaries and interlocutors—existentialism itself is, as Gordon notes, “a fundamentally *European* historical phenomenon” (2000, 10; my emphasis). Wright’s questions necessarily entail the historical situation of American slavery and its legacy, which significantly alters the content and the method of inquiry. Furthermore, all philosophies are essentially philosophies of existence, since all questions begin from the condition of *ek-sistence*. Existentialism, however—and by a similar mechanism, “philosophy of existence”—renders existence an object of “philosophical” attention. The metaphilosophical effect is that other contexts of inquiry that do not similarly bracket *ek-sistence* become, reductively, “philosophies of experience.” This is “epistemic colonization” (Gordon 2006, 32).

In light of this we must ask ourselves: Following our newfound capacity to *read*, should we *do philosophy* like Richard Wright or like an Africana-existential-phenomenologist? This is a serious dilemma for the radical venture because, as Curry argues, “European thought cannot simultaneously be criticized as the myth of white supremacy while concomitantly valorized as actual knowledge about the world and the capacity of humans in it” (2011, 156). Whereas Africana-existential-phenomenology opens a window through which to glimpse black thought, it does not itself become a black mode of inquiry unfixed “from the traditional color symbology of the West”

(Wynter 2006, 111). It remains situated *within* the Western philosophical tradition as a qualified, inflected version of extant European schools of inquiry (see also Curry 2009, esp. 15–20; Headley 1997).

Culturalogics and the Crisis of Black Thought: Tommy Curry

Culturalogics shares the anticolonial motivation of Africana-existential-phenomenology, but its methodological and epistemological point of departure is different in important ways. Curry explains that culturalogics “exists as a two-tiered system of analysis. In the first aspect, culturalogics is decidedly conceptual. By that I mean to say it is concerned with the ways by which historical groups of people use culture—those meaning endowing practices that grasp onto, inject into, and contour reality—to cast into the world its shadows, those inevitable imprints onto the world offering testament to that people’s existence. . . . The second aspect of this approach is historical, a philosophical genealogy of a people’s thought, so to speak” (2011, 162).

On the conceptual level, *acts of philosophizing* now include the range of cultural representations—concepts, symbols, thoughts, and practices. As Proust’s “Marcel” notes, “Everything is fertile, everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries no less precious than in Pascal’s *Pensées* in an advertisement for soap” (1999, 732). Whereas Africana-existential-phenomenology employs a “creolized” philosophical lens through which to view black experience as “philosophy”—an interpretive distancing that traps us in “the paradox of being unseen by whites” (Curry 2011, 159)—culturalogics simply takes the undetermined and abundant evidence of existence as *philosophy*; it is, thus, “existential” in its mode as well as its analysis, assuming that we would use such a loaded term, in spite of its paleonymic potential.

Africana Literature

Finally, Africana literature is radical for reasons similar to culturalogics, but it is self-consciously philosophical in ways that are not always the case for the full range of cultural representations. For example, as historian David Kazanjian observes, *quotidiana* are philosophical—or as he says,

“theoretical”—in rich and illuminating ways, providing what he calls “scenes of speculation” (2015, 81). The black fiction writer, by contrast, must invent—or distill from various experiences—his or her own quotidian. Like fiction in general, this creative gesture entails an implicit thesis on how the world is synthesized. Consider that the radical venture of Africana philosophy will include many “texts” that have been excluded. This exclusion may happen for at least two reasons. On the one hand, as Outlaw notes, the actors did not think of themselves as engaging in “acts of philosophizing”; they were simply existing or *surviving*. On the other hand, some thinkers *were* engaged in a self-reflective, critical, or persuasive act but were actively “kicked out of the Republic,” so to speak. Africana literature is of this latter sort.

Methodologically, fiction is particularly well suited to address Africana philosophical concerns. Recall Gordon’s three questions that orient the deconstructive venture. Concerning the commitment to liberation, in order to rigorously examine the apparent paradox of the ideas of freedom and equality *justifying* slavery, we need a method that (a) can accommodate apparent contradictions and (b) for empirical reasons, is sensitive to the historical and social circumstances out of which this particular question emerged. This may be accomplished by a text that either draws heavily upon historical records, which are narratives themselves, or deliberately employs temporal structures for the purposes of clear articulation.

Concerning philosophical anthropology, in order to rigorously examine what it is like to be black, that is, to live within a body characterized by institutionally determined hypervulnerability, then the living corollary—a black *voice*—must be present in the text (or its absence must be explicitly accounted for). This may be accomplished with the presence of black “characters” who speak and think or a self-consciously raced narrator and/or narratee. For example, consider the recent piece by John Lysaker, “Giving Voice to Philosophy” (this issue). What we find here is a series of brief meditations that do not resolve like a sum. Rather, they resound like a community of considerations on the page. At one point, Lysaker notes that at least one of these voices is that of a “Norwegian American.” The reader might be inclined to identify this Norwegian American as Lysaker himself, qua narrator. Yet, bracketed as the speaker of only one of the meditations, the “Norwegian American” becomes, more interestingly, a character among other characters, one voice among many. Lysaker intimates that the model for this structure, which allows a certain kind of multiplicity—and possibly

diversity—to exist on the page, comes from Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk*. Each chapter in *Souls* is like an extended meditation.

Concerning the metacritique of reason, in order to rigorously and *sincerely* examine how thinking works, we need a form of discourse that does not beg the question. In other words, if we are to entertain the possibility that the tools of analysis that we currently employ are not the only or best tools, then we must at least acknowledge the hermeneutic difficulty of answering the question by means of the object of inquiry. This may be accomplished—as many Africana theorists have done—by shifting the geography of reason. Extending the metaphor of geography, this displacement gives us a vantage point from which we can notice, not to mention evaluate, the ground upon which we formerly stood. Concretely, this means thinking and writing from another epistemic locale, or in another voice, or engaging in what Lori Gallegos de Castillo describes as “ethical” translation. Gallegos explains that translation in this sense is not the rendering of concepts or linguistic terms into another language. Rather, translation is the engagement with thought that is not culturally familiar, but without “forcing that thought to make sense in terms of that which is already familiar.” It implies “traveling from *one’s own* frame of reference rather than” transforming speech (Gallegos de Castillo, this issue; emphasis added).

Conclusion

The Africana philosophical critique—which functions as the basis for a future, antiracist, American philosophy—consists of several voices that remain distinct but speak in concert. Also, it is worth noting that the ones outlined in this brief article are not the only voices that serve this purpose. Here I have presented in all-too-brief outline the deconstructive venture, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for antiracism, and the radical venture, which gestures beyond our current cultural episteme and its attendant “traditional color symbology of the West” (Wynter 2006, 111).

NOTES

1. Recall Linda Alcoff’s assessment of the field in her 2013 presidential address, “Philosophy’s Civil Wars,” at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophy Association.

2. The numbers of faculty of all ranks across all disciplines by race and sex: 316,912 white men, 258,529 white women, 24,283 black women, 18,905 black men. “Table 315.20: Full-Time Faculty in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, Sex, and Academic Rank: Fall 2009, Fall 2011, and Fall 2013,” March 2015, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Winter 2009–10, Winter 2011–12, and Spring 2014, Human Resources component, Fall Staff section, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_315.20.asp?current=.

3. There are many worthwhile projects that aim to introduce readers and scholars to this “countercanon.” A few examples: Gordon 2008; Harris 2000; McKenna and Pratt 2015.

4. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida says of painting, for which we might substitute the Wynterian imbricated quartet “being/power/truth/freedom” (Wynter 2003): “[The parergon] is no longer merely around the work. That which it puts in place—the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc.—does not stop disturbing the *internal* order of discourse on painting [read: being/power/truth/freedom], its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies. On what conditions, if it’s even possible, can one exceed, dismantle, or displace the heritage of the great philosophies of art [read: being/power/truth/freedom] which still dominate this whole problematic, above all those of Kant, Hegel, and, in another respect, that of Heidegger?” (Derrida 1987, 9).

5. I invoke the metaphor “veil” in a number of its historical, scholarly, and literary connotations. First, Ralph Ellison’s narrator observes in *Invisible Man*:

It’s so long ago and far away that here in my invisibility I wonder if it happened at all. Then in my mind’s eye I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding. And as I gaze, there is a rustle of wings and I see a flock of starlings fighting before me and, when I look again, the bronze face, whose empty eyes look upon a world I have never seen, runs with liquid chalk—creating another ambiguity to puzzle my groping mind: Why is a bird-soiled statue more commanding than one that is clean?” (1995, 22)

The Negro is, as we recall from *The Souls of Black Folk*, a “sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world”; yet this veil is not one that Du Bois has any “desire to tear down” (1996, 102). For as Fanon notes in the opening chapter of *A Dying Colonialism*, “Algeria Unveiled,” the veiled “woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no

reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself” (1994, 44). Distinguished Professor Edward S. Casey says in his closing remarks, “The Veil’s Edge”:

Veils: we assume that they mainly cover up and cover over, conceal: that they hide something from view. Certainly so. Yet they also reveal—at their edges. . . . Veils exist between two extremes: complete transparency and complete coverage. Complete transparency reveals the entire body in its nakedness: as provocative, sexually enticing, but also as exposed and vulnerable. To be fully covered, with “nothing showing,” is to retreat from the realm of appearance: it is to become a mere object (whose extremity is the corpse, fully shrouded). In relation to these extremes, a veiled body is something intermediate: translucent, semi-exposed. (2008, 182–83)

The veil, however, is only intermediate when viewed by others: Underneath the veil one sees while not being seen; both extremes occur simultaneously. The *sullied* veil calls attention to the game.

6. E.g., on the racism of the Pragmatism of John Dewey, see Margonis 2009; Taylor 2004.

7. My word, not Mills’s.

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