

we gain from reconsidering our ontological relationships with our archaeological subjects? Our narratives about the past can only be improved by dismantling this human/less-human divide across time.

Kathleen Sterling
Binghamton University
Department of Anthropology
Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program
Binghamton, NY 13902
USA
Email: sterling@binghamton.edu

References

- Ahmed, S., 2007. A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory* 8(2), 149–68.
- Erasmus, Z., 2020. Sylvia Wynter's theory of the human: counter-, not post-humanist. *Theory, Culture & Society* 37(6), 47–65.
- Fanon, F., 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- Painter, N.I., 2010. *The History of White People*. New York (NY): W.W. Norton.
-
-

On Striving as Readers: A Response to Greer

Christopher Witmore

The capacity of northern European gentlemen scholars educated in the love of wisdom, human dignity, friendship and rationality to treat their fellow human beings with irreconcilable prejudice and hold to ghastly beliefs of racial superiority, which legitimated violence, exploitation and extermination elsewhere, is one of the great tragedies of humanism. That the images of the human cultivated in texts were at variance with the lived experience of those who were treated *as other than human* was rarely noted in the books they read. I appreciate Matthew Greer's efforts to bring these concerns to the fore. I am grateful for the opportunity to read Sylvia Wynter, among others, and to think about their work in counter-humanism. I stand with Greer who reminds us that, as archaeologists, we must do more than critique ideologies, fight for inclusion, and engage in dialogue as demanded by a radical pluralism (Shanks & Tilley 1992, 246). Equity, social justice, openness, and decolonization demand the sustained effort of us all, both in our capacity as archaeologists and as readers of texts.

By rendering humans as rational animals, modernist humanism, as argued by Bruno Latour (1993), did not do sufficient justice to the human, because the *cogito*, the thinking subject, was defined in opposition to the *extensa*, non-human objects. The point, of course, was that this word 'human' was not a self-evident category, it just happened to be, in the words of Bayo Akomolafe (2020), 'simmering with

tensions, elisions, disputations and troubling departures' other than its exclusion of non-human things. Defining what it was to be human, 'Man1'—eventually naturalized into 'Man2'—relied taxonomically on the invention, and omission, of those considered to be other than human, that is, Black and Indigenous peoples taken by prejudicial humanists to lack wisdom, dignity, rationality, etc. (Wynter 2006, 125; Wynter & McKittrick 2015). This modern humanism, as Greer argues, was 'created specifically so white, economically privileged, cis-gendered, heterosexual men could colonize, enslave and extract wealth without being affected by the *Homo sapiens*, animals, plants and things they colonized, enslaved and extracted wealth from.'

Greer does us a major service in drawing our attention to the linkages between posthumanism and counter-humanism. By failing to notice humanism's emergence 'in and through colonialism and slavery', and not questioning the default '*monohumanist* conception of the human' (Wynter & McKittrick 2015), posthumanism, according to Greer, 'unintentionally reproduces harmful elements of humanism'. Here, Greer's critique, that symmetric approaches have failed to recognize that 'by adhering to a rather idealized European, masculine image, [humanism] did not "render sufficient justice" to the human' (Witmore 2021, 484 n.4), is overstated. Indeed, for Latour the 'human' was impossible to define and when taken on its own, neither possessed a stable

homogenous form 'nor existed as a constitutional pole to be opposed to the nonhuman' (Latour 1993, 136–7). The 'Human', as Latour declared in meiotic fashion, 'suffered from being a little ethnocentric, if not a trifle imperialist, or even merely American not to say Yankee' (2002, 9). Not unjustly did Wynter recognize importance of Latour to Frantz Fanon's challenge of setting 'the human free' (Wynter & McKittrick 2015, 63).

Greer locates the birth of humanism in and through colonial slavery of the sixteenth century. Neither the *humanitas* of Cicero, nor the fourteenth-century writings of Petrarch who spurred the birth of the *studia humanitatis* of the fifteenth century (Mann 1996), nor the earlier Islamic 'humanism' or humanist Islam of the ninth and tenth centuries are mentioned. It was out of these cults of the literate, whose solidarity was based on who could read Latin and Greek texts and write to each other about them, that humanists began seeking, with all its obscurity and risk, a 'human essence' (Sloterdijk 2009). A humanism with unclear aims leaves the door ajar for questionable practices (Sloterdijk 2009)—precisely the variety of dangerous corruptions that emerged, in Greer's words, 'in and through the racialization of Africans, Indigenous Americans and Europeans'. If the history of humanism is 'terribly complicated', then, as Donna Haraway has observed, 'the prefix "post-" is a kind of marking of an examination and an inquiry into the histories, and meanings, and possibilities, and violences, and hopefulneses of humanism' (Franklin 2017, 50). That demarcations based on race did not go uncontested (they were among the pseudodoxia or vulgar errors of Thomas Browne: 1646, 332), adds to humanism's 'terribly complicated' history, which in the face of its legion injustices and ambiguous aims cannot be defended. Still, examination and inquiry demand more than archival prowess among old texts; we must learn how to talk to each other, which requires effort of us as readers who enjoy the privilege of writing to others.

Greer's aim to dismantle humanism leads him to neglect his readerly responsibilities with misrepresentation and exaggeration as its by-products. Þóra Pétursdóttir has never claimed to be a symmetrical archaeologist, and has even criticized the term (2012, 56; Olsen & Witmore 2021, 78), but that does not keep Greer from subsuming her to the label. By choosing to assert the presumed supremacy of the human perspective on other objects, given the urgency of the moment, Greer ignores the questions Pétursdóttir asks, which relate to how those non-human things that have gathered as and among the

ruins of Eyri remember pasts *in their own idiosyncratic ways*. Ignoring her rejoinder not to obfuscate the otherness of things by imposing human perspectives *a priori*, Greer obfuscates the otherness of things by imposing his perspective *a priori*. It is as if moral superiority trumps all other rationales for why we do what we do (Harman 2022). With one voice Greer argues against reducing *Homo sapiens* to 'white, economically privileged men'; with another he reduces the nuanced perspective of an Icelandic woman in her home region to the generic, academic gaze of an outsider. After urging readers to thoughtfully consider the work of counter-humanist scholars, Greer fails to fairly access Pétursdóttir's work in terms of the questions she asks by cavalierly judging it in terms of what he asks. These are largely questions for which he already has the answers, for to arrive at past definitions of the human built upon othering is the destination that he expected. Whether or not spears, swords, house remains, bodies, or bogs actually hold such an expectation remains unquestioned. By investing in the kind of theory that likes to answer questions without properly asking them, Greer is less well equipped to do right by the very issues that he hopes to address; namely, understanding the 'human' as an *emergent* category. The irony is that for Greer to feel it necessary to blanket non-human objects with human perspectives in advance—thereby also neglecting authorial purpose—is itself tied to the very legacy of humanism he seeks to counter.

Christopher Witmore
Classical & Modern Languages & Literatures
Texas Tech University
CMLL Building
2906 18th St
Lubbock, TX 79409
USA
Email: christopher.witmore@ttu.edu

References

- Akomolafe, B., 2020. Coming Down to Earth, March 11, 2020. <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>
- Browne, T., 1646. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths*. London: Printed by T.H. for E. Dod.
- Franklin, S., 2017. Staying with the manifesto: an interview with Donna Haraway. *Theory, Culture & Society* 34(4), 49–63.
- Harman, G., 2022. Moral superiority as first philosophy: in response to Andrew J. Chung. *Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture* 3(2), 194–213.

- Latour, B., 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern* (trans. C. Porter). Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B., 2002. *War of the Worlds: What about peace?* (trans. C. Brigg). Chicago (IL): Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Mann, N., 1996. The origins of humanism, in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. J. Kraye. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–19.
- Olsen, B.J. & C. Witmore, 2021. When defense is not enough: on things, archaeological theory, and the politics of misrepresentation. *Forum kritische Archäologie* 10, 67–88.
- Pétursdóttir, Þ., 2012. Small things forgotten now included, or what else do things deserve? *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 16, 577–603.
- Shanks, M. & C. Tilley, 1992. *Reconstructing Archaeology*. London: Routledge.
- Sloterdijk, P., 2009. Rules for the human zoo: a response to the Letter on Humanism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(1), 12–28.
- Witmore, C., 2021. Finding symmetry? Archaeology, objects, and posthumanism. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 31(3), 477–85.
- Wynter, S., 2006. On how we mistook the map for the territory, and reimprisoned ourselves in our unbearable wrongness of being, of desêtre: Black studies toward the human project, in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in theory and practice*, eds L. Gordon & J.A. Gordon. New York (NY): Paradigm Press, 107–69.
- Wynter, S. & K. McKittrick, 2015. Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to give humanness a different future: conversations, in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. K. McKittrick. Durham (NC): Duke University Press.
-
-

Reply: Citational Politics and the Future of Posthumanist Archaeologies

Matthew C. Greer 

I want to begin by thanking Craig Cipolla, Lindsay Montgomery, Susan Pollock, Kathleen Sterling and Christopher Witmore for their responses. I am honoured to be in conversation with such thoughtful and insightful scholars. In my reading, two main themes emerged from their comments—citational politics and what the future of posthumanist archaeologies might look like. To conclude our discussion of archaeology, Black studies and posthumanism, I will address each in turn.

Citational politics is a recurring theme in Montgomery's, Pollock's and Sterling's comments. As Montgomery states, the question of 'which social theorists ... archaeologists [are] referencing in their efforts to craft relational approaches to humans, things, animals, and plants' lies 'at the core of' my 'argument'. Montgomery and Sterling address citational politics in posthumanism and posthumanist archaeologies, and both ask why archaeologists have not chosen to engage with Black studies while noting that I failed to address this topic in the article. As Sterling states, assessing these 'motives [is] an important part of the critique' of posthumanism, and, ultimately, she 'conclude[s] that systemic racism

is a key factor in the lack of awareness, interest, or engagement with Black studies' (also see Rosiek *et al.* 2020). Montgomery argues that this lack of engagement is due to the fact that 'archaeology remains a "white public space"' and the existence of 'an artificial division between analysis and activism', between works that are ostensibly colour-blind and those that address the fundamental ways racism and colonialism have shaped the world (also see Ravenscroft 2018; Watkins 2020). I thank Sterling and Montgomery for noting this glaring omission in my work and for their insightful diagnoses, which I wholeheartedly agree with. Reckoning with and dismantling the citational politics that maintain whiteness and colonialism in (posthumanist) archaeology is an important task (also see Craven 2021; Davis & Mulla 2023; Smith *et al.* 2021)—one that must be undertaken in tandem with the discipline's increased collaborations with Black studies. Pollock, alternatively, notes that my article did not draw on 1) the works of scholars from western Asia and north Africa and 2) intersectionality and Indigenous studies. The former was out of ignorance, and I thank Pollock for pointing me towards these works.