



What is Species Memory? Or, Humanism, Memory and the Afterlives of '1492'

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*Are we on the same page here? Because we too are also now struggling to move beyond the knee-jerk limits of the Us and the Them.*¹

One key historical 'site of memory' in which the Jamaican novelist, dramatist and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter places the emergence of the modern figure of Man *and* the possibility of its contestation is '1492'. In her seminal essay, '1492: A New World View' (1995), she approaches the '1492 event' as a historical entanglement that not only lays bare the systemic omissions – especially of blackness – within figurations of 'Man', but also affords an outline of a new 'species-inclusive' account of humanness.² Wynter argues that such a 'new world view' upon the 1492 event and its unfolding afterlife has to move beyond the binaries of colonizer/colonized or perpetrator/victim that continue to dominate memory practices. This oppositional model of remembering (based on a logic of 'us *versus* them') presents '1492' *either* from a celebrant ('European') perspective as a discovery and 'glorious achievement' *or* from a dissident (what Wynter calls 'Native') perspective as a violent invasion that precipitated five centuries of colonization, 'genocide and ecocide'.³ Perhaps surprisingly, yet decisively, Wynter acknowledges aspects from both perspectives, stressing the atrocities *and* the accomplishments of the planetary five-centuries-long event of '1492'. Her main point here is that arguing from any one of the oppositional stances still remains a 'product of the intellectual revolution of humanism', i.e. neither of them yet leaves the colonial order.⁴ In '1492: A New World View' she points out that such binary framing of 'European'/'Native' in the Caribbean and the Americas *always/already*⁵ ignores the formerly enslaved peoples of African descent, a third element which, however, profoundly shapes the antagonistic and dualist dynamic at play in the colonial set-up and still also informs its reversal: 'It was on the basis of this triadic model and its dually antagonistic and interactional dynamic that the new syncretizing cultural matrix of the now-emerging world civilization of the Caribbean and the Americas was first laid down'.⁶ The oppositional model, still effective at the quincennial memorial event, then once more reiterated the fundamentally dualist ordering principle of humanist Man, positing Amerindians and Europeans (despite significant inequality) on the side of life/Man/free and invisibilizing Africans on the side of death/nonhuman/enclavable. While the act of remembrance was meant to counter the oppression and injustices of colonial history, its oppositional 'Native vs. European' confrontation failed to tackle the systemic violence and

racialized onto-epistemological order that '1492' put in place. It is now high time, Wynter argues, for a *third* perspective, from which to commemorate, i.e. to give meaning to '1492': an 'ecumenically human'⁷ or 'species' view – a perspective decisively *beyond* humanism, such as 'we' know it.⁸ It is a project that aims to account for the human species *beyond* the exclusivist, exceptionalist and speciesist understanding of human as 'Man'.⁹

'1492' is in this sense a significant case of probing connections between critical posthumanism and memory studies. Questioning the remembrance of 1492 as Wynter does exceeds the analysis of the dynamics of collective memory around historical events and their aftermaths. To be sure, ground-breaking work has been done on the dynamics of cultural memory, its transnational interconnectedness and violent amnesias, especially also highlighting the particular position of African and African-descended communities. These aspects already came into focus – especially for the Caribbean – in the differently nuanced intellectual, cultural-political movements of *Négritude*, *Antillanité* and *Créolité*, but also prominently in Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993). As Gilroy notes, 'the black Atlantic as a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the *manichean logic of binary coding*'.¹⁰ Bringing African and Black experience into memory in the Americas has been a crucial, prominent focus of cultural and Black studies. Likewise, not least since Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), memory studies has stressed the dynamism and multidirectionality of memory practices, breaking away from merely binary models. What Wynter adds to these and other crucial cultural and memory studies achievements, however, is her insistence on the *systemic transformation* of our conception of humanness.¹¹ Less concerned with the conflicts and confluences of narratives from different communities, her work brings to the fore the Euro- and anthropocentric 'initial conditions'¹² from which humanness has been thought and which even a dynamized and multiplied paradigm of memory leaves largely unquestioned.¹³ Wynter takes '1492' as a key site for foundational questioning of what 'we' mean by being human. Her project of a new 'species-inclusive' account of humanness – 'the single issue with which global warming and climate instability now confront us'¹⁴ as she argues in a recent interview – urges for ecumenical *and* ecological, posthuman(ist) *and/as* non-anthropocentric origin narratives that *intra-link* a recasting of being human in hybrid species terms *with/in* the planetary habitat.¹⁵

At the beginning of '1492: A New World View', Wynter phrases her project as follows:

Can we therefore, while taking as our point of departure both the ecosystemic and global sociosystemic 'interrelatedness' of our contemporary situation, put forward a new world view of 1492 from the perspective of the species and with reference to the interests of *its* well-being [...]? The central thesis of this essay is that we can.¹⁶

In what follows, we will pursue the stakes of this proposition and the question we derived from it in our title: ‘what is species memory?’ We want to ask if ‘we’ – to be read as a ‘species-inclusive’, ‘ecumenical and ecological’ pronoun – can move beyond ‘the knee-jerk limits of the Us and the Them’ that have dominated memory-claims and political collectives. What would ‘species’ mean in such a project, and how would it revise the dominant conceptions of humanness and memory? We will address these questions mainly via Wynter’s critical analyses of the concept and world view of ‘Man’. However, given the centrality of *narrative* – i.e. the production of origin stories *otherwise* than ‘Man’ – we will interlace our discussion with her own poetic probings of these questions in her 1962 novel *The Hills of Hebron*. To do this seems appropriate also in view of the strong emphasis in Caribbean thought on the transformative powers of *poetic knowledges*.¹⁷ *The Hills of Hebron* confronts the history of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, and makes palpable the particular challenges that memory faces there. It makes visible the effects of ‘1492’ for us today, exploring the potentials of a new perspective to revise the established order of Man and to tell, and hence remember, ‘our’ history (and future) differently. First, we will briefly turn to the novel itself, before presenting the relevant steps of what we consider Wynter’s specifically *post-humanist* argument (‘species memory’). Finally, we will return to the implications for processes of memorizing and/as narrativizing of such a ‘new/third perspective’, again with more direct focus on the novel.

The Racial Economy of the Archive

The Hills of Hebron is written in the context of the anti-colonialist nationalist movements in the Caribbean in general, and in Jamaica in particular (Jamaica gained political independence in 1962). Yet, as Natasha Barnes concludes in her reading of the novel: ‘*The Hills of Hebron* is remarkable for the manner in which it portends the crisis of nationalism and feminism [...]. [It] makes Sylvia Wynter, whether she intends it or not, the progenitor of a forceful *feminist* critique of our greatest modern foundational moment’.¹⁸ Set in colonial Jamaica in the early twentieth century, the novel portrays the community of ‘New Believers’ (inspired by Alexander Bedward’s Jamaican revivalist movement) who withdrew to the mountains, following their self-proclaimed prophet Moses out of the economic misery and racial oppression of the city of Cockpit Centre. The novel begins with the community in upheaval, roughly two decades after their exodus and some time after Moses’s death by self-imposed crucifixion, now awaiting the return of Isaac, Moses’s son, who has been educated in the city and who his mother, Miss Gatha, claims is Hebron’s legitimate new ‘Elder’.

In their quest for human dignity, community and memory, the people of Hebron confront a profound problem: as descendants of ‘slave ancestors’,¹⁹ they face what Katherine McKittrick calls the ‘racial economy of the archive’²⁰ – that is, the fact that archival memory of the slave trade displays only the ‘violated body, the corpse, the death sentences, the economic inven-

tories of cargo²¹ or the fact that in the official records also of post-slavery colonial Jamaica, the descendants of slaves find themselves ‘only in the blank spaces between the lines’.²² They live in the ‘interstices of every date on which a deed was done, [...] imprisoned in mute anonymity, the done-to who had made possible the deed’.²³ Their individual and collective pasts have been erased in the Middle Passage and even long after the official abolishment of slavery (in Jamaica in 1834) the slave-descended communities continue to suffer economic and social marginalization. It is this crux, to remember and envision human dignity if all has been lost, being written out of the records and out of humanness itself, that Wynter’s novel confronts. If the archives mark blackness as death or absence, any recuperation or remembrance would, as McKittrick suggests, consequently have to ‘*imagine* those lives that are so inconceivable, so unworthy of documentation, so radically outside the archives, that they are merely psychic impressions of life and livingness’.²⁴ *The Hills of Hebron* contributes in such poetic manner to this task. Seeking a way forward, the New Believers had followed Moses into the mountains. In Hebron, he had ‘promised them those things that had been lost in their trespass across the seas, across the centuries’; there they could recover ‘the loss of gods and devils that were their own’.²⁵ In its portrayal of a black community that retreats to the mountains, the novel thus also evokes the Caribbean stories of *marronage*: of the free communities formed by *maroons* during the period of slavery, those who escaped the plantations and took refuge in the dense forests of the islands’ hinterlands.²⁶ The novel recalls the rebellions of those ‘nonassimilated Antillean[s]’ who escaped the plantation/urban white economy and withdrew to what Wynter with reference to Glissant calls the “non-domesticated” mountains’.²⁷ It revisits aspects of the ‘hitherto repressed historical beginnings’²⁸ of the Jamaican past: slavery and its *marronage* resistance, colonial racism, Bedward revivalism; and it therefore *remembers* key elements of the African experience in Caribbean/Jamaican history.

Importantly, Moses had promised his people a way out of the deep-rooted injustice by their move into the mountains and by proclaiming himself the son of the Christian God. Well before the flight to Hebron, Moses already aimed to prove this claim by publicly staging a first ‘exodus’, which, however, ended in defeat, with his internment in a mental asylum. There, however, in conversations with his Irish doctor, he comes to understand that the ‘Englishman made God in his own image’²⁹ and he realizes that his prophecy had failed so far, because he wanted as a ‘black man [...] to be welcomed as Son by a white God’.³⁰ Moses concludes that to exit this colonial frame of mind, God in *his* own image must mean that ‘God was black’.³¹ Thus, after his release, he founds Hebron on those premises, making it a project to ‘build a black heaven on earth’³² – a vital move to resist racial oppression. And yet – this is what we consider Wynter’s significant twist in the context of nationalist movements as Barnes has also argued – the novel does not end here. Instead, it shows how this is only a first step in anti-colonial struggles. The substitution of white with black is a reversal, but not yet systemic transformation.

The reversal of whiteness into blackness is, according to Wynter, only a 'mere negation of "white power"'.³⁴ It is not yet the transformation of the hegemonic onto-epistemological order – or of what we have called with McKittrick 'the racial economy of the archive' that precisely lives off the silences of those voices the novel turns to. From a memory studies angle, Wynter's crucial point is that the omission of Blackness is *not* an issue of 'merely' forgetting the African-descended communities in narratives of the Caribbean post/colonial setting; it is not an amnesia that could be redressed by turning the tables or by including forgotten voices as a now acknowledged group. The problem to be faced is of a much more foundational nature: the omission is constitutive of 'our' worldview as a whole, so that *adding* new voices into the current anthropo-scene is insufficient in the sense that – speaking with Audre Lorde – it continues unreflectively to use the 'master's tools'.³⁵ Wynter's work stresses the *systemic* dynamic of exclusion and colonial violence and she shows that while the distinction victim/perpetrator or colonized/colonizer has found a position in intelligible spaces, be it in history or memory studies, the systemic omission of Blackness remains constitutive of or is systemically tied to the western tradition of humanism.

We need to dig a little deeper here into Wynter's historical analysis. In the fourteenth/fifteenth century – with the humanist revolution in the Renaissance, the emerging new sciences and the colonization of the Americas – a new 'descriptive statement' of humanness took form which, Wynter argues, is still hegemonic today, despite shifts and adjustments over time. In great historical detail Wynter's oeuvre describes how, at this specific historical threshold, the European formerly theocentric, Latin-Christian, Scholastic order of knowledge was trans-scripted onto what is now called a 'modern' or human-centric one, and how in the process of this onto-epistemological shift the figuration of humanness itself moved from an earlier 'Latin-Christian Self' to the modern genres of what she has termed Man1 and Man2. Drawing on Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's notion of autopoiesis and the systems-theoretical notion of code (as an ordering principle along which symbolic life/death is distributed), Wynter shows how the figure of *political* Man1 emerged post-1492 along the code 'rational/irrational', crucially including Amerindian peoples in the New World and excluding peoples of African descent. Man1's coding then shifted in the nineteenth century, when – with the global spread of the 'new' bio-centric figure of *homo oeconomicus* or Man2 – bio-evolutionary thinking replaced classical theo-rationalism. The code rational/irrational was thereby rescripted as 'evolutionary selectedness/eugenicity and/or dysselectedness/dysgenicity'.³⁶ It revised the systemic ordering principle, now newly aligned with the emerging bio-sciences in the wake of Darwin's biological theory of evolution and Malthus's economic model of population regulation.³⁷ With Darwin, Wynter explains, being human became part of biological species evolution. However, while situating the human thereby as a *biological species* within evolution and the principles of natural selection, the new 'laws of nature' nevertheless again secured the

(hierarchical) *nonhomogeneity* of humankind by encoding bio-centric Man2 within a newly racialized order – the ‘new symbolic construct [...] of “race”’.³⁸ Unlike hierarchies established along the code rational/irrational, people of ‘deviant’ behaviour (in Wynter’s words not only Blacks and colonial Natives, but also homosexuals, the jobless and the poor, i.e. encompassing those in this category which Fanon termed the ‘wretched of the earth’³⁹) were now written out of humanness as evolutionarily dysselected or genetically deficient, *despite* the allegedly species-encompassing biological concept of Man. While this shift certainly produces a difference in how we think (and live) humanness, the systemic dehumanizing operations of racism and systemic expulsion remain intact.

Given this historical analysis, Wynter urges us to look for a ‘third perspective’, a ‘new world view’. She argues that only a foundational rewriting of knowledges will eventually initiate a transmutation of the *entire knowledge/being/power constellation of ‘1492’*, and only then a perspectival shift can affect everything. To stress this once more, and also in view of memory practices, the third means neither a simple inclusion of an additional element, nor is it a dialectical sublation where a synthesis overcomes the antagonism. In conversation with anti-humanist western thought (e.g. Bateson, Foucault, Derrida, Maturana/Varela) and most prominently with decolonial thought (Fanon, Césaire), Wynter argues that the racialized foundations of Man1/Man2 can never be redressed by merely including within the category of Man what this very category *requires to be kept outside*. Systemic omissions are non-recuperable within the system itself, because as ‘dysselected’ they already belong to it as its very motor. This understanding follows the systems-theoretical logic, yet reads it from a critical perspective that allows for an awareness of significant power differentials which are often forcefully neutralized in western systems-theoretical or cybernetic thought. Wynter’s *third perspective* then gestures towards an *otherwise than oppositional dynamic* in order to transform *systemically* the onto-epistemological order of the colonial setting that is in place since 1492. Her argument states clearly that what has been (understood as) human so far has never accounted for the entire species; it only ever was and is the ‘overrepresentation’ of one ‘ethnoclass or Western-bourgeois’ version of being human.⁴⁰ And while transmuting Man1/Man2 into a ‘new’ perspective might seem like a contradiction in terms – after all, does Wynter’s painstaking analysis not precisely show how the binary codes never disappear but only ever become transcribed with/in a new system? – putting forward an *ecumenical* praxis of being human, i.e. a ‘species-inclusive’ perspective *beyond* the dualist/triadic dynamic, will make a difference. And it will do so also in view of today’s multifaceted ecological devastations on a planetary scale by initiating a different ‘*referent-we*’ and *propter nos*, after ‘the ends of the *referent-we* of liberal monohumanist Man2’.⁴¹

‘We’ have never been human: this is one of Wynter’s key interventions. Her work highlights the theoretico-political obligation to first attend to the reduction of the human to Cartesian-cum-biocentric-Man, before any moving *beyond* – posthuman(ist) or after humanism – can be seriously considered.

While striving beyond Man1/Man2 is indeed – also for Wynter – most urgent, current posthumanist discussions need to beware not to take ‘the map for the territory’ once more.⁴² By suggesting a reading of Wynter in conjunction with posthumanism, then, we are not easily fitting any such label or striving to transcend the earthly condition of ‘us’ as human.⁴³ Rather, we regard her critical analyses of what is called human as a most fruitful contribution to current attempts to undo human exceptionalism and speciesism; attempts in which, however, ‘Man’ often too quickly disappears into ‘Nature’ or ‘Life Itself’, from which a systemic interconnectedness is then claimed.⁴⁴ We want to join Claire Colebrook in arguing that any such straightforward move ‘beyond’ cannot do the job thoroughly enough. Colebrook cautions against any posthumanist tendency that ‘renounces human privilege or species-ism but then fetishizes the posthuman world as man-less; “we” are no longer elevated, separated, enclosed, detached from a man-less world, for there is a direct interface and interconnection – a mesh or network, a living system – that allows for one world of computers, digital media, animals, things and systems’.⁴⁵ By leaving unquestioned what it means to be human to begin with, such approaches fail to deconstruct ‘Man’. They further an *ultra*-humanism that once more leaves intact the violent structures (for humans and non-humans alike) on which existing humanist ‘Man’ is built and by which ‘he’ is written. If the human is assumed to be nothing but an interface, already at one with a world that is one living system, then posthumanism would be nothing more than the negation of a humanism that never was. It becomes an ultrahumanism precisely because once man is abandoned as a distinct system or inflection, he returns to characterize nature or life in general.⁴⁶

Although Colebrook and Wynter certainly speak from different theoretical angles, Colebrook’s argument for us resonates well with what we laid out above. Wynter’s concern is crucially how to break with Cartesian-cum-biocentric-Man and heal his socio-ecological devastations. It is – with Fanon – the question, ‘How do we extricate ourselves?’⁴⁷ Yet in contrast to positions that then move Man into Nature, Wynter insists on a non-speciest-specificity of the human as a hybrid biological/symbolic species. It is this significant specificity that we want to turn to now in our concluding section.

New origin stories

According to Wynter, earlier transmutations of onto-epistemological orders of knowledge were always triggered from positions liminal to the existing order.⁴⁸ So also now, ‘newness’ can only come heretically from ‘this “gaze from below” Western world-systemic, ultimate underside, periphery ex-slave archipelago’s liminally deviant perspective’,⁴⁹ or what McKittrick calls *demonic grounds*.⁵⁰ Hence, any transmutation of Man2 also has to be made conceivable from such a ‘heretic’ position, and in Wynter’s view it is Fanon’s thinking which effectively ruptures Man2’s restricted, biocentric conception of humanness. From the liminal position that he occupied within Man2

(condensed prominently in *Black Skin, White Masks* in the interpellation 'Look, a Negro!'), Fanon derived the central insight that 'besides phylogeny and ontogeny, there is sociogeny'.⁵¹ Sociogeny, Wynter argues, implies that humans are not merely biological beings, but an 'auto-instituting [...] self-inscribing mode of being, which is, in turn, reciprocally enculturated by the conception of itself which it has created'.⁵² And from this sociogenic, i.e. in a sense *foundationally culturalist* perspective, she draws another figure: *homo narrans*. She argues that the specificity of humanness, our very 'species-specific cognitive mechanism',⁵³ lies not merely in *bios* (purely biological organicity ('the mesh')), but in 'a hybrid *nature-culture, bios/logos* form of life bio-evolutionarily preprogrammed to institute, inscript itself'.⁵⁴ Or, to say the same with Fanon: humans are always-already *both skin (bios) and mask (mythoi)*, and Wynter turns this into her proposition that humans live in biological/cultural, auto-poietic collectives that are upheld via retrojected origin stories. They/we are 'a hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species'⁵⁵ emerging out of the neuro-chemical evolution of the human brain *and/as* the symbolic-semantic evolution of language. Her conception of a non-biocentric species – to which we link 'species memory' here – designates then still a mode of life with/in its *bios* existence (i.e. she works *with* evolutionist and neurobiological insights),⁵⁶ yet as neuro-bios-cum-languaging existence (all at once), or as a biological *and/as* symbolic life-kind. In this move, Wynter brings two things to the fore: first, as outlined earlier, that biocentrism and its Man2 version of the human have foundational racial fault lines, thereby urging us *not* to discard the figure of the human as surpassed in posthuman(ist) debates, but to return to it *otherwise* than in terms of Man2; and second, she also shows that being human as such a hybrid praxis (instead of being human as noun) would imply 'a *mutation* of the species beyond Man'⁵⁷ by fundamentally taking into account the ways 'we' narrate ourselves.

Narrative is central to Wynter's suggestion of *homo narrans*, as our hybrid praxis of being human that is pre-programmed to invent *mythoi* (divinity, nature, life, origin stories), which in turn are wired into *bios* (our cognitive, opiate-rewarding kin-recognition). In this light, let us return again to *The Hills of Hebron*. The novel is not very recognizable as what is currently seen as posthuman(ist) literature. It is neither about non-human agency nor does it provide us with figurations of a new humanity. It does, however, remember (dimensions of) the omitted Black communities and stories on the one hand, *and*, on the other, as we will show in this concluding turn, it demonstrates the dangers that arise when these stories remain within the order of knowledge that white supremacy has established (Man/God). The novel in this double sense then calls for new origin stories, yet it does not tell them. And for a good reason: to begin with, they will have to be plural, and furthermore, from within Man2, 'we' do not yet know what this being human will mean. Once ecumenical *and* ecological, posthuman(ist) *and/as* non-anthropocentric origin narratives will have been fabricated and retroactively projected onto a past, only then can new modes of knowing, minding, and

acting – hopefully along codes that do *not* replicate the ever-same eco-geno-suicidal wor(l)ding strings – emerge. The future will first have to be remembered, *imagined*.

As the novel shows, retreating to the hills and implementing a black Christian God still inscribes Hebron into the same registers of the word of Man that sustain the colonial system and its aftermath. Hebron, seen as an antechamber to the Kingdom in Heaven, is ‘only’ the other side of the plantation, its reversal, where Moses had ‘promised that the masters would be slaves, and the slaves masters. Stars and new continents would be theirs to rule over, and their subjects would be angels, white angels’.⁵⁸ At the pivotal moment of his crucifixion, Moses, however, realizes that Hebron’s legacy of Christianity has changed little: ‘God is white after all... God is white!’,⁵⁹ he exclaims before he dies. Hebron had reversed things, but it ended up ossified; a still poor, secluded, and illiterate community in which his son Isaac turns out to have raped the current Elder Obadiah’s wife, Rose, and runs off with the money that his mother had scraped together to ensure Isaac’s Eldership and her personal legacy. During the community’s ensuing search for the perpetrator – a search that spans the novel’s entire length – Hebron literally dries up in this (post)colonial constellation. Not a drop of rain falls for an entire season, with the community’s survival ‘up in the mountains’ at stake. The novel shows Hebron to inscribe black Jamaicans into the Judeo-Christian-transmuted-into-humanist story of Man – but as a necessary ‘third’ in *addition*, and not yet a ‘third’ as *perspective*; as the search for one’s own story, but not yet a systemic transmutation of Man1/Man2. The reader of *The Hills of Hebron* only senses a pushing through when, finally, Obadiah comes to terms with the truth behind Rose’s pregnancy (Isaac’s rape) and accepts the child, turning to the project of now ‘build[ing] a good road, a broad road out into the world’.⁶⁰ Then the rain starts to fall again, and Obadiah reflects that he can now ask the people for ‘a new response to a new ritual, a new morality, a new right and wrong, a new God’.⁶¹ Now the time is ripe to arrive, we might say with Wynter, at a *human(e)* story of Jamaica: a new *propter nos* beyond group-specific narratives, a perspective of the species that also re-members/narrates itself as species.

What Wynter argues in relation to Glissant therefore holds equally true for her own novel: the descendants of the maroons must ultimately ‘leave the certainty of [their] ancestral retreat in the mountains in order to join in the struggle for the future that was being fought out in the lowland plantation plains’.⁶² There – in proximity to the plantation system, its ruins *and* presences – the ‘psychic costs’ of the contradictions and exclusions of the humanist-colonial order are most intensely experienced.⁶³ Obadiah’s refusal in *The Hills of Hebron* to keep the community bound only to past violence (racial oppression, rape, the believers’ acceptance of drought as divine curse), as well as his refusal to refuse mixed genealogies (refusal to refuse the child as his), makes it possible to embark on a search for new responses – a new ceremony. Wynter’s novel and her work in general gesture towards such new *propter nos* that takes into account the irrecoverable past of the (hitherto)

systemically excluded; a past that needs to be fabulated for the future, and that needs to intertwine the heritage of *marronage* with those in the ‘plains’, of both slaves and slaveholders. Her invitation for further discussion seems to be this: come down from the mountains to make new *liminal* positions possible, to enable a different ‘maroon refusal’, one that can produce a *systemic* transformation; break open the binary code/coding that structures ‘1492’, take account of the systemic omission *and* move what counts as human into new directions. It is an invitation to re-write oppositional claims of memory and work toward the *human(e)* story, a *propter nos beyond* group-specific narratives, a ‘species memory’. Any such *human(e)* story will, it seems to us, remain perspectival and fractured, i.e. it does not gesture towards a new universal. Yet, it can highlight the complicated relationalities and co-implicatedness that make ‘us’ as species, and as such, it can help to transmute how ‘we’ relate to – and therefore narrate – what it means to be human, with/in our habitats.

Notes

¹ Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe,” 49.

² In this article we cannot do justice to the breadth of Wynter’s oeuvre. We take ‘1492’ as our main anchor point, a particularly pertinent essay for us in view of questions of (post)humanism and memory. The quotation marks around ‘1492’ indicate the discursive-political complex (‘the 1492 event’) unravelling in the wake of the historical date of 1492. We call it also a ‘site of memory’ in the sense of a ‘nœud de mémoire’ (see Rothberg et al.) to highlight multidirectionality and transnationality as essential dimensions of memory processes that also underlie Wynter’s understanding in ‘1492’.

³ Wynter, “1492,” 5 and 7; referring to Cerio’s and Harjo’s contributions to *Newsweek* 1991.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ For this specific use and (quantum) temporality of ‘always/already’, see Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 11.

⁶ Wynter, “1492,” 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ ‘Beyond’ is in italics to mark the non-teleological character and non-linear deconstructive temporality, close to the ‘always/already’ as mentioned above in note 5. Also, ‘we’ is put in scare quotes in order to problematize the exclusivity of the humanist tradition and ask after more plural modes of ‘we’.

⁹ Let us note right away that we thus read Wynter’s work as neither speciesist nor human-exceptionalist. For us, Wynter considers the *specificity* of being human; she does not deny – to borrow a phrase from Karen Barad – that we are ‘of the world in its dynamic specificity’ (*Meeting*, 377). For a slightly more critical perspective on possible resonances between Wynter’s work and posthuman(ist) scholarship, see Alaimo, *Exposed*, 229.

¹⁰ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 198 (emphasis added). In a similar vein, Stuart Hall notes the triadic model of *présence américaine – présence africaine – présence européenne*, “Cultural Identity,” cf. Wynter, “1492,” 9.

¹¹ Elsewhere in this issue, Nathan Snaza also draws on Wynter in relation to multidirectional memory in his reading of posthuman(ist) education after Auschwitz.

¹² On the importance of inquiring into ‘initial conditions’ in posthuman(ist) endeavors, see Kirby, “Initial Conditions.”

¹³ A currently pressing case in point is The Black Lives Matter Movement and the facts that called these protests in the U.S.A. into existence. See, e.g., <https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Black-Lives-Matter.pdf> and <https://blacklivesmatter.com>, accessed June 11, 2017.

¹⁴ Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe,” 24.

¹⁵ The formulations ‘intra-link’ and ‘with/in’ follow Karen Barad’s interventions on intra- rather than inter-action and her use

of ‘/’ in her ‘agential realism’ (Barad, *Meeting*).

¹⁶ Wynter, “1492,” 8.

¹⁷ Wynter’s work in many places draws explicitly on Aimé Césaire’s oeuvre, and most strongly on his address “Poetry and Knowledge.” The stress on poetic knowledge reappears in many Caribbean authors, e.g. Audre Lorde, Édouard Glissant or Derek Walcott. Our reading of Wynter’s novel is informed by the insightful earlier essays on Wynter’s novel by Barnes, Liddell, and Toland-Dix.

¹⁸ Barnes, “Reluctant Matriarch,” 47.

¹⁹ Wynter, *Hebron*, 52.

²⁰ McKittrick, “Mathematics,” 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Wynter, *Hebron*, 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, 54. Earlier, Wynter writes: “Some weight of memory in their blood carried the ghosts of dark millions who had perished, cofined in the holds of ships”, 52.

²⁴ McKittrick, “Mathematics,” 22 (emphasis added).

²⁵ Wynter, *Hebron*, 52.

²⁶ The maroon, Édouard Glissant writes, is ‘the one who refuses’ (*Fourth Century*, 127). The term was originally derived from the Spanish *cimarrón* (non-tamed animal) (see Wynter, “Beyond,” 638). For further references to resistance strategies of refusal and *marronage* in radical Black Studies, see also Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*; and Ferreira da Silva, “Toward.”

²⁷ Wynter, “Beyond the Word,” 638.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 642.

²⁹ Wynter, *Hills of Hebron*, 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 73. Crucially, the reader only learns at the end of the novel that Moses was able to secure the rights to the land for Hebron by very worldly means: aware of the Reverend’s rape of a young Believer, he uses that information to receive the land title.

³³ This title is inspired by Donna Haraway’s rephrasing of Latour’s ‘We Have Never Been Modern’ in *When Species Meet*, 1.

³⁴ Wynter, “Creole Criticism,” 13.

³⁵ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112. We want to insist, however, that ‘insufficient’ does not mean unnecessary. The remembering of those voices that are silenced by/in the archives is an *indispensable task*, not only politically and ethically, but also in order to

arrive at a new understanding of human-ness.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

³⁷ We focus on Darwin here because biocentrism is central to our argument. Yet, Malthus’s contribution is important, too, as it was he who replaced rational *political* with rational *economic* man. For Malthus, see e.g. *ibid.*, 320.

³⁸ Wynter, “1492,” 34.

³⁹ For an analysis of these shifts in and for the late twentieth century, see especially Wynter’s ‘open letter’ to her colleagues, titled “No Humans Involved,” an essay sparked by the 1991 police beating of Glen Rodney King.

⁴⁰ Wynter, “Unsettling,” 317. Wynter’s is a rather classical understanding of Darwin’s evolutionary thought. For a different re-reading of Darwin from a feminist materialist perspective, see Grosz’s discussion in *The Nick of Time*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24. For the relation of ‘referent-we’ and *propter nos* see also Wynter, “1492,” 27.

⁴² Wynter, “On How.”

⁴³ As in so-called transhumanism. The subtitle to transhumanist icon Ray Kurzweil’s *The Singularity* is indicative: *When Humans Transcend Biology*.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Timothy Morton’s idea of ‘the mesh’ (*Ecological Thought*, 15).

⁴⁵ Colebrook. *PostHuman*, 160. For a reading between Colebrook and Wynter that also inspired us here, see Cornell and Seely, *Spirit*.

⁴⁶ Colebrook, *PostHuman*, 163.

⁴⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 12.

⁴⁸ Wynter follows Asmaron Legesse’s insight that a coded system of knowledge and its ‘reflex automatic functioning of rules of figuration’ (Wynter, “Ceremony,” 43) can only be breached from liminal existential positions. And in “1492,” Wynter describes Columbus’s ‘heretic’ position within the Latin-Christian order after circumnavigating Cap Bojador as a moment of realization that the earth was inhabitable beyond what that order of knowledge made conceivable.

⁴⁹ Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled,” 50.

⁵⁰ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*.

⁵¹ Fanon, *Black Skin*, 13; see Wynter, “Unparalleled,” 23.

⁵² Wynter, “Africa,” 26 (quoted in Kamugisha, “Caribbean,” 55).

- ⁵³ Wynter, "1492," 8.
⁵⁴ Wynter, "Africa," 26.
⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.
⁵⁶ For some even *too* affirmatively; see e.g. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 29.
⁵⁷ Cornell and Seely, *Spirit*, 121–22.
- ⁵⁸ Wynter, *Hebron*, 113.
⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.
⁶⁰ Wynter, *Hebron*, 307.
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 306.
⁶² Wynter, "Beyond," 646.
⁶³ *Ibid.*, 643.

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