

## **The ends of newness, now**

**Birgit M. Kaiser**

Is critique tied to ethical dimensions? Does ethics give direction to criticality and/or is criticality inherently ethical? And how can this inform critical analyses of our planetary condition? These were some of the questions we proposed as prisms for our meeting, to which – after having read Wynter and Derrida – we immediately might have to add: whose planetary condition? In view of those questions, three intersecting lines emerged for me from the readings, which I've decided to give as tentative responses to the two texts; despite my best efforts, I did not feel that they ended up amounting to a "position" so I turned them into something like a collage or constellation.

*line one : now*

Now [*Or*], we must ourselves be responsible for this discourse of the modern tradition. We bear the responsibility for this heritage, right along with the capitalizing memory that we have of it. We did not choose this responsibility; it imposes itself upon us, and in an ever more imperative way, in that it is, as other, and from the other, the language of our language. How then does one assume this responsibility, this capital duty [*devoir*]? How does one respond? (Derrida, *The Other Heading* 1992, 28)

The "now" at the head of the quote is double: temporal (this instance) and relational (given a certain state of affairs, after a moment of pause, expressing that a turn or realization is needed). In this vein, in *The Other Heading* Derrida explicitly reflects (among other things) on the enactment of critique in view of (an always differently (again in a double sense) mattering) "today". He enacts this also already in 'The Ends of Man'. Both Wynter's and Derrida's text are situated decisively, with, it seems, this double sense of "now" in mind – whereby "now" does not designate a homogenous or self-evident contemporary, but rather a specific political-historical-philosophical-epistemological constellation, whose features the texts contour, excavate, highlight. "Now" is being delineated in the act; a critical move lies already in this articulating of a "now".

Historically, both texts are deliberately marked as responses to/in 1968 and 2015, assessing the (different, yet not so different) sites into/from/for which they are written. Derrida opens (after addressing the setting, an international philosophical colloquium) by noting that he dates his text "quite precisely" as written in "the month of April 1968: it will be recalled that these were the weeks of the opening of the Vietnam peace talks and of the assassination of Martin Luther King. A bit later, when I was typing this text, the universities of Paris were invaded by the forces of order" ("The Ends of Man", 114). At the same time, he also speaks to/from within a particular reception of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger in France; one that hinges – as he argues – on an anthropologic reading of phenomenology and its unquestioned "unity of human reality" (EoM 115), "as if the sign 'man' had no origin, no historical, cultural, or linguistic limit" (EoM 116); a "colonizing" gesture of (epistemic) violence that has everything to do with the historical scenes of war,

racism and contested pedagogies/institutions that he mentions as his specific political situation.

Wynter's "The Ceremony Found" takes as a key instance (only mentioned late in the text) the repeated failure of the IPCC's 2014 Report to truly confront the underlying patterns of climate change - even if she thereby also aims to respond to the centuries-old Western discursive formations of Man1/Man2.<sup>1</sup> It is the pressures of this/our moment 2014-to-today - with a growing existential experience of climate change and the threat of extinction - that, Wynter seems to hope, might make an overturn of Man2 collectively (planetically) feasible and make room for a new answer to the age-old question of "who-we-are-as-humans". According to her analysis, the cracking or overturning of autopoietically instituted systems (and their continuous re-inscription and closure) has been possible for those - like du Bois, Césaire, or Fanon - who subjectively experienced themselves as "'liminally deviant' (Legesse, 1973) embodiment of the normative self's ostensible negation of being *optimally/normally* human" (CF 200). Within the Man2-order of knowledge, du Bois' analysis of the Color Line as symbolic life/death code and Fanon's introduction of sociogeny were made possible for/by those who "subjectively experienced themselves as being the *anomaly to being human*" (CF 197) within Man2. Forcefully, Wynter seems to suggest, "critical" (or what she calls 'heretic') thinking happens situated and embodied - from liminal or "deviant" positions that an order of knowledge ascribes to certain groups and bodies. It is the same principles of situatedness and existential experience that Wynter's own text performs (intervening with a "solution" into 2015, after having failed to provide one, as she writes, in 1984) and upon which she seems to base her hope for an overturn of Man2 (or "the economic and social order") and for the emergence of a *New Studia* - enabled by "the *hitherto unprecedented* form of a millennial existential human imperative, *now* defined by the almost unthinkable yet looming possibility of our eventual extinction as a species" (CF 242, emphases added).

This investment in a "now" does three things at once: it is part and parcel of critical work, as distilling-excavating relevance (such as the anthropologic reading of phenomenology and its unquestioned assumption of a "unity of human reality" (EoM 115)); it is an (ethical) gesture of accountability (who speaks? where from? with/for/to whom? at what juncture?); but most crucially perhaps, it is intimately tied to the propositions Derrida and Wynter make about the "style" and/or critical reach of their interventions. The fact that they acknowledge their perspectival situatedness within a point of view of Western philosophy (Derrida) or Western/ized bourgeois academic/intellectual debate (Wynter) complicates any practice of critique.

*line two : being inside (autopoiesis/deconstruction)*

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the report's failure to acknowledge that "man-made" climate change does not mean "human-made" and - by obfuscating the former as the latter - rendering unrecognizable the cause of the accelerated "poverty-hunger-habitat-energy-trade-population-atmosphere-waste-resource 'global problematique'" ("The Ceremony Found", 237): in Lütticken's words "the economic and social order", in Wynter's words "(neo)Liberal-humanist, Man(2)-as-homo-oeconomicus" (CF 235) as the globally hegemonic answer to "who we are", bio-cosmogonically chartered along the Color Line.

On the one hand, starting from situated enunciations affirms “being inside” – i.e. one neither pretends to a universal position (something that Derrida precisely challenges the French Hegel-etc-reception for), nor that one could detach oneself from the mesh (Western philosophy/Westernized bourgeois academia) within which one speaks/thinks. From such “being inside” – closely tied to a “now” – Derrida and Wynter derive part of their critical and ethical force. On the other hand, “being inside” also precludes that critical force.

In Wynter’s terms: If “we” autopoietically institute ourselves as humans – only become human in the act of performatively enacting ourselves as “an autopoetic, ‘linguaging living system’” (CF 202) – our/her academic discourse also follows that “law” and functions (in the case of Western academia, i.e. the hegemonic notion of “science” and “human sciences”) within the order of Man<sup>2</sup>. Crucially, then, the question she keeps raising is: how can we come to know social reality outside the terms and codings of the system “we” necessarily participate in? If we assume the autopoietic self-inscription of the hybrid form of life that Wynter claims humans are, knowledge production would lawfully stabilize and work in accordance with the terms and necessities of the coherence and maintenance of that autopoietically self-refining system (systems she postulates as closed because necessarily striving to institute/maintain collective survival via normalcy), and “the humanities” or “critique” cannot be exempt.<sup>2</sup> Autopoiesis then quite strictly, for Wynter, “normally” disables criticality. Only “heretics” (a heresy tied to existential experience) can discern (feel) the codes, since as far as “we” are normally radically inside (inside different insides perhaps), we’re incapable of perceiving social reality outside of our collective’s terms and codings. There is no meta-perspective; any order of knowledge a smoothly running machine, which “our” “normal” “critical” practices do not disrupt, but sustain.

In Derrida’s terms: A “radical trembling can only come from the *outside*” (EoM 134), and he signals that this “trembling is played out in the violent relationship of the whole of the West to its other” (EoM 134) – yet also warns that “the ‘logic’ of every relation to the outside is very complex and surprising”, that “it is precisely the force and the efficiency of the system that regularly change transgressions into ‘false exits.’ Taking into account these effects of the system, one has nothing, from the inside where ‘we are’, but the choice between two strategies [...]” (EoM 134-135). These two different strategic bets that “we” can make, these two styles of “not getting outside” that Derrida indicates are: to “attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain” (EoM 135)<sup>3</sup> or to “decide to

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<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Derrida (realistically) notes, that in view of his gesture of disagreement with the US policies in Vietnam 1968 “it would be naïve or purposely blind to let oneself be reassured by the image or appearance of such a freedom [to articulate his disagreement]. It would be illusory to believe that political innocence has been restored, and evil complicities undone, when opposition to them can be expressed in the country itself [...]. That a declaration of opposition to some official policy is authorized, and authorized by the authorities, also means precisely to that extent, that the declaration does not upset the given order, is not bothersome.” (EoM114)

<sup>3</sup> “repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic” – “using [...] stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language” – “one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, relifting (relever) [...] that which one deconstructs” (EoM 135)

change terrain [...] by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference" (EoM 135)<sup>4</sup>.

Principally - if we start from humans as living in "autopoietic, 'linguaging living system[s]'" (CF 202) - critique then seems caught in this dilemma; it has perhaps the strategic necessity to change terrain<sup>5</sup> - the political, ethical, onto-epistemological urgency of such a change - but also its impossibility, not least the impossibility of a choice of procedure between deconstruction and break, a choice that Derrida says can be neither "simple" nor "unique" (EoM 135). Concretely, from the inside ("where 'we are'") the question of "who-we-are-as -humans" is grooved into a "thinking of the end of man [that] therefore, is *always already prescribed* in metaphysics, in the thinking of the truth of man" (EoM 121, emphasis added).

And yet, concerned with finding routes to the question of "who-we-are-as-humans" - or finding a way of posing that question - Derrida and Wynter seem to gesture to three different "exits" at the horizon.

*line three : exits in tongues (poiesis)*

Poiesis - for Wynter the "science of the word", but also the insight into our human agency in the *making* of ourselves - seems to permit a breaching (or re-mutation) of autopoiesis (Wynter). It is, she writes, the "recognition [...] that *that which we have made we can unmake and consciously now remake*. (CF 242). The wager is to re-inscript "we in the horizon of humanity" in modi not always already prescribed by metaphysics and/or Man2. If (in Wynter's terms) the word is made science (as her postulation of us humans as autopoietically self-instituting, hybrid bios-mythoi but "linguaging living system[s]" (CF 202) makes possible), then it becomes - at least theoretically - also possible "to now remake, consciously and collectively, the new society" (CF 245)<sup>6</sup>.

But there is no responsibility that is not the experience and experiment of the impossible. [...] the aporia [...] requires more than ever thinking differently, or thinking at last, what is announced here in the enigmatic form of the "possible" (of the possibility - itself impossible - of the impossible, etc.). (Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 44-45)

The remake Wynter has in mind would autopoietically be im/possible; and it cannot be *one*, even if she speaks of "the" new society. Rather, it would have to be *plural* (with "the Ceremony Found's own ecumenically human *classes of classes*" (CF 241)), in line with Derrida's suggestion that "what we need, perhaps, as Nietzsche said, is a change of 'style'; and if there is style, Nietzsche reminded us, it must be plural" (EoM 135). Plural praxes of being human in different tongues, yet *in the horizon* of humanity, that is: acknowledging

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<sup>4</sup> danger of "inhabiting more naively and more strictly than ever the inside one declares one has deserted" - "the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest grounds" - "a blindness" (EoM 135)

<sup>5</sup> "it goes without saying that these effects [of the system to reinstate old grounds] do not suffice to annul the necessity for a 'change of terrain'" (EoM 135)

<sup>6</sup> With reservations as to the use of "consciously" or "fully consciously" - which, it would seem, cannot be a return to Cartesian self-presence, as Wynter operates on the hybrid bios-mythoi, cognitive science assumptions she lays out.

our shared hybrid praxis of narratively self-producing ourselves collectively and subjectively as word-becoming-flesh.

This calls up registers of the un/translatability of differences, resonant with their im/possible im/possibility or their “new writing”: “A new writing must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction, [w]hich amounts to saying that one must speak several languages and produce several texts at once.” (EoM 135) Poesis or “a new writing” might push for a change of style rather than of terrain – a change of practice rather than substance. It might produce an opening in the inside/from the outside (which are not spatial, but relational matters; Derrida notes that a trembling is “played out in the *violent relationship* of the whole of the West to its other” (EoM 135, emphasis added); a relational matter in Glissant’s sense of relation as both connection and narration. *Homo narrans*. To make visible the deep grooves of the “nows” for which poietic overturns (in the Rastafari sense as “words [...] semantically turned upside down” (CF 207)) will have to be produced – collectively and subjectively experientiable – is, it seems, the task. And to keep those new propositions (then, in Wynter’s terms, autopoietically instituted as new horizon of “we”) open...

### **Works cited**

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