Inte Gloerich

TOWARDS DAOS OF DIFFERENCE: READING BLOCKCHAIN THROUGH THE DECOLONIAL THOUGHT OF SYLVIA WYNTER

Abstract

With this article, I explore the connections between blockchain technology, coloniality, and decolonial practices. Drawing on Sylvia Wynter's thought on the interdependent systems of colonialism, capitalism, and knowledge, as well as more recent work on the coloniality of digital technologies, I argue that blockchain-based systems reproduce certain dynamics at work in historical colonialism. Additionally, Wynter's decolonial propositions provide a generative framework to understand countercultural practices with. Inspired by Wynter, Patricia de Vries explores the notion of "plot work as artistic praxis" to ask how artistic work, implicated as it is in capitalist logics, can create space for relating differently in the context of the exploitations of those dominant logics. I apply this notion to examine how Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) in the countercultural blockchain space might contribute to this praxis.

Introduction

> "Human beings are magical." (Wynter "The Pope must have been drunk" 35)

Throughout the ebbs and flows of its hype cycles, blockchain technology continues to spark hope for a better future in mainstream as well as countercultural communities. This is possible because, in all its complexity, blockchain works as a floating signifier that represents very different opportunities to different people (Semenzin, 2021). To understand how and when blockchain technology and culture does or does not represent a radical break away from the status quo, I place it next to Sylvia Wynter's theories on the way the history of colonialism and the continuing coloniality of power are intertwined with capitalism and its order of knowledge. I focus in particular on two dimensions in Wynter's examination of colonialism: the relational and the epistemological. In the first, Wynter portrays the entangled history of colonial appropriation and exploitation of nature and human life and the emergence of global capitalist relations of extraction. In the second, Wynter shows how the extractions of capitalism are supported by a colonial order of knowledge that creates exploitable less-than-human Others. After relaying essential elements of Wynter's theory, I relate both dimensions to contemporary blockchain practices and expand existing theories on their coloniality. I then return to Wynter's thoughts on decolonial practices in the interstices of the plantation called plots. These plots, are places in which non-extractive social relations may be practiced, but they are also narratives that provide different ways to understand life and what it means to live together. I draw on the work of artists and writers, such as Sarah Friend, Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty, who use blockchain technology in ways that echo Wynter's decolonial propositions. Inspired by Wynter, researcher of socially engaged artistic practices Patricia de Vries explores the notion of "plot work as artistic praxis" to ask how artistic work, implicated as it is in capitalist logics, can create space for relating differently in the context of the exploitations of those dominant logics (de Vries n.p.). I apply the notion of plot work here to examine how Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) in the countercultural blockchain space might contribute to this praxis.[1] In what follows, I start each section with a quote by Sylvia Wynter, which I subsequently elaborate on and relate to the current blockchain space.

Historical colonialism and blockchain colonialism

> The Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were 'planted' with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations whose aim was to produce single crops for the market. That is to say, the plantation-societies of the Caribbean came into being as adjuncts to the market system; their peoples came into being as an adjunct to the product [...] which they produced. As Eric Williams has shown, our societies were both cause and effect of the emergence of the market economy (Wynter "Novel and history" 95)

Wynter writes that the West's colonisation of the Caribbean lays at the foundations of the emergence of capitalism. Western colonisers reduced the people they enslaved to labour and the nature they encountered to arable land. The places they reached were seen as nothing more than a blank slate easily capturable by a system of private ownership unfamiliar to the indigenous communities living off the land. At the same time, enslaved people were reduced to a dehumanised asset functioning as a cog in the machinery of early global capitalism. Both human and nature were integral in the process of extraction of value back to the West, but both were treated without regard for their survival except in their one-dimensional purpose as an individually replaceable resource for profit on the market in the form of labour and land. As nature and indigenous people made way for plantations, the value of harvested crops turned from something that could be eaten by the people that cultivated it – use value – to something that could be exchanged for money on the market – exchange value. To Wynter, colonial exploitation and capitalist extraction come together on the plantation: domination through marketisation, marketisation through domination (Ibid. 96-99).

Mirroring the role of historical colonialism in the establishment of early capitalism, data colonialism is the process through which data readies that which it represents for capitalist appropriation and extraction.[2] By facilitating and naturalising the production and capture of ever-newer forms of data, data colonialism is able to find corners of of life that have not yet been capitalised upon (Ibid. "Data colonialism" 339-343). Couldry and Mejias call this the "double process of renewing colonialism and expanding capitalism" ("The cost of connection" 188). They warn against the role of data colonialism in the emergence of a new form of capitalism, one characterised by "the capitalization of life without limit" (Ibid. 3). The appropriation of nature and people that Wynter described in historical colonialism are renewed in the appropriation of "human life through extracting value from data" (Ibid. 188). By focussing on the quantification of social life and the role of this datafication in the renewal of colonialism and the expansion of capitalism, Couldry and Mejias show the devastating effects for the possibility of just social relations and self-determination (Ibid. 188-91).

Blockchain-based systems have been shown to proliferate the logics of data colonialism. They ready uncaptured territories of life for continuously expanding value extraction – a form of "digital frontierism" (Thatcher, O'Sullivan, & Mahmoudi 992) that in the early days of the technology spawned goldrush metaphors and analogies, such as the 'mining' of Bitcoin in the unregulated 'Wild West' (Maurer, Nelms, & Swartz 262; Maurer & Swartz 222). The various forms of tokenisation that take place on blockchains can turn the things they represent or contain in their metadata – votes, stakes, access rights, personal data, etc – into trade-able items that can be controlled in new ways through distributed governance structures. While this is seen by many as an opportunity to democratise, it does not necessarily have this effect. For example, blockchain technology has been forced onto vulnerable communities such as refugees who have no real choice but to give away their personal data to be stored in immutable systems in exchange for basic necessities – data which may be capitalised upon in unforeseeable ways in the future (Howson "Climate crises" 4-5; Howson "Crypto-giving" 814-815). Through its proposed and real use in (social) governance systems – in places often deemed underdeveloped from a Western perspective (Crandall 286-88), but also more generally, for example in blockchain-based ID systems, supply chain transparency systems, or dating apps – blockchain technology represents an "emerging cartography of control" that is always looking for a new frontier to map (Jutel 3). This often happens under the guise of lofty societal goals, such as the development of solutions against climate change that have led to projects like Nemus ("Treasure the Forest") and Moss ("Moss Amazon NFT") that tokenise pieces of the Amazon rainforest to be sold as NFTs. They continue the rarity economy that NFT collectibles propagated – in which special characteristics such as caves or waterfalls might increase the value of the NFT of a piece of land – and are governed from afar by stakeholders in a DAO. Just like land and labour in historical colonialism, these tokenized representations of the world are abstracted assets that promise a future stream of income that care little about the survival of the thing they represent (Juárez). Despite claims about solving climate change, the rainforests themselves only become meaningful in those DAOs if they produce monetary value for their stakeholders. These projects exemplify the way in which blockchain colonialism expands on data colonialism by introducing novel governance systems that are embedded even more intrinsically in the logics of economic exchange, making possible further alienation from the nature and life at hand.

The invention of Man and the reinvention of truth

> [T]he struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and

> behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves (Wynter
> "Unsettling the coloniality of being" 260)

Here, Wynter shows that the struggle for autonomy and well-being of the human in all its capacities is deeply intertwined with the power relations that have determined what is considered knowledge and truth about humanity over the past centuries. The quote above points at several important elements in Wynter's theory: the overrepresentation of Western Man in the history of humanism, how this overrepresentation places Others outside of the human category, and how it provides a foundation for systems of domination. Wynter exposes the role of humanistic knowledge systems in the construction of an exploitable less-than-human Other. This order of knowledge takes the character of Western Man and universalises it to stand in for all of humanity, for Man, and Wynter shows that this logic still dominates societies today. To understand how this selective knowledge system emerged, Wynter looks to Renaissance humanism and its invention of Man as a secularised rational Man that is subject to the state primarily, rather than solely to the divine that dominated the Middle Ages. This newly intellectual and civilized Man was contrasted by the constructed irrational, uncivilized, savageness of the colonial Other, who as a result were not included in the category of 'human'. However the secularisation that took place as part of the invention of Man was only partial at this point, and the process continued through the centuries. The scientific developments of the Enlightenment evolved and updated the category of Man to understand it in fundamentally biological and economic terms. Here, Man emerges out of the order of nature and the market. Newly discovered universal laws of nature offered biologically essentialised proofs for the distinctions between Man and Other and lay the groundwork for the linear and teleological understanding of evolution and eugenicist theories of race established in the 18th and 19th century. Entangled with this history is the unfolding capitalist mode of production, which brought with it eventually the figure of Homo Economicus, i.e. the rational Man in the free market. This biologically and economically essentialised version of Man persists until today. Western knowledge systems still overrepresent Western Man and universalise it, invisiblising and making unworthy of humane treatment those that do not fit this narrow mould (Ibid. "Unsettling the coloniality of being" 260, 264, 282, 296, 317). This process of colonial power relations reproducing themselves after historical colonialism into contemporary forms of domination and exploitation in the name of capitalism is what Aníbal Quijano calls the "coloniality" of power (Quijano 171).

The interplay between coloniality and the expansion of capitalism into new domains through contemporary datafication practices is a central feature in Couldry and Mejias' thinking on data colonialism's "distortions of knowledge through power" (Nick Couldry & Ulises Ali Mejias "The decolonial turn" 795). Much work has been done in recent years to uncover the many ways in which algorithmic systems produce a Western system of knowledge that actively exclude those deemed Other. Notably, Safiya Noble and Ruha Benjamin show how algorithmic systems and automation reinforce racial categories and social divisions, all while proclaiming neutrality and scientific objectivity (Noble; Benjamin), a move that mirrors directly

with Wynter's theory of the overrepresentation of Western Man through scientific means. Many more examples of the current technologised functioning of colonialist knowledge systems exist, for example, tracing the legacy of Carl Lennaeus' categorisation of nature and humanity in the algorithms we use today (Dzodan 34–43), how these logics get "made flesh" through machine learning algorithms (Dixon-Román & Parisi 117-18), and the pseudoscientific anthropometric methods of 19th century anthropology that persist in today's biometrics (Wevers 98).

Offering an update to Couldry and Mejias' definitions, Catriona Gray argues that data colonialism is about "the interaction of orders of knowledge with orders of value" (Gray 10). She emphasises the way that the data about everyday life produced by contemporary platforms "do not appear simply in a pre- or non-commodified form" like nature or human life did for historical colonialism, but are produced always already in relation to economic value (Ibid. 14). Those that are recognised can participate in the system, in the market, in the processes of everyday life. Those that are not recognised, and are effectively placed outside of the human category, cannot participate. Gray's observations are particularly important in the context of financial technology such as blockchain. The climate projects mentioned above, map onto the Amazon rainforest an order of knowledge – what is represented as rainforest, in what way is it hierarchised, and what is not represented and effectively does not exist in the system – that is at the same time an order of value – how are things mapped onto economic value and made tradable? In addition, an order of agency emerges as well: who has the capacity to act and to control that which is represented and mapped onto that order of value?

Furthermore, I argue that there is another way in which blockchain technology reproduces the logics of the order of knowledge Wynter described. Moving from medieval religious understandings of reality through to versions of reality that are increasingly based on ideological Western humanism that operate under the guise of neutrality and objectivity, the invention of Man presents itself as truth while being selective in its representations (Erasmus 50). The medieval divinely ordered world in which humans, which were thought to be sinful by nature, could redeem themselves through pious behaviour, was a truth upheld by religious authorities. The subsequent version of truth ordered the world into the rationality of civilised Man or the irrational savageness of Others. The truth that is dominant until today orders the world through biological essentialism and economic logics. The inventions of Man were in effect the inventions of truth upheld through colonial power relations (Wynter "Unsettling the coloniality of being" 291).

Blockchains are often also thought of in relation to truth because their distributed consensus algorithms produce an immutable and publicly accessible history of events. When Ethereum made possible the distributed execution of smart contracts, applications of the technology exploded into countless new domains promising a blockchain revolution through transparency, trustlessness, and immutability (See e.g. Tapscott & Tapscott). Blockchain's capacity to establish truth in the context of the post-truth era has led to much excitement to explore it's applicability in diverse

fields. In the process, blockchain technology came to be seen by some as a "truth machine" – which is also the title of an influential book published around this time in which blockchain is described as "a record-keeping method that brings us to a commonly accepted version of the truth that's more reliable than any truth we've ever seen" (Vigna & Casey 20). Blockchains do not communicate a universal truth, they render a truth universal, just like Enlightenment humanism rendered Western Man universal. They makes rational action in the face of a complex reality possible by presenting a singular authoritative version of it. Nonetheless, in this overrepresentation, "[w]hat's been agreed upon as the truth is the truth. There is no room for debate" (Ibid. 65, emphasis in original). Blockchains provide a computationally established working-truth-cum-universal-Truth in the face of declining trust after the financial crisis and the post-truth era, capable of facilitating exchange between individuals that don't know each other. Blockchain technology thus reinvents truth in a post-truth context. The knowledge logics of blockchain technology performs a similar move to Wynter's critique of humanism in overrepresenting Western Man, this time overrepresenting a market-based view on what it means to be valuable and act in accordance, invisiblizing and making unworthy of attention those things that are not deemed of value. At the same time, the works cited above on the data colonialism of blockchain systems serve as a reminder that this reinvention of the truth is subject to power relations embedded in coloniality and reproduce existing power and economic imbalances.

Data colonialism and the coloniality of data-based knowledge are affordances of blockchain technology, but it is important at this point to refrain from determinism. Use of the technology does not automatically follow colonial patterns. There are for example those that explore how blockchain's affordances can be subverted to make space for different ways of relating in non-financial and more-than-human ways. Below, I will explore how these examples relate to Wynter's thought towards different ways of being and being together.

Sylvia Wynter's 'plot': a place to practice different social relations

> [T]he planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to maximize profits. We suggest that this plot system was […] the focus of resistance to the market system and market values. […] For African peasants transplanted to the plot all the structures of value that had been created by traditional societies of Africa, the land remained the Earth. […] Around the growing of yam, of food for survival, he created on the plot a folk culture – the basis of a social order – in three hundred years. (Wynter "Novel and history" 99)

Wynter describes plots as small, imperfect corners of relative self-determination within the larger context of colonial plantations. Plantation owners provided

enslaved people with these little plots of land in order to drive costs down, to force slaves to produce their own food on hardly fertile ground that was useless to the plantation. But the plot also offered a space away from the attention of the plantation owner. A space for ways of being together that were not possible on the plantation, reinvigorating the values and traditions of African cultures in which earth and people are cared for in a spiritual and communal sense. Moving beyond historical descriptions into analogies that continue to resonate throughout the centuries, Wynter explains that if the structure of the plantation represents the institutions that order and control society, even after the abolishment of slavery, the plot is where people express and reshape their own culture. In this predicament, everyone is undeniably involved in the structures that dominate society, but participating in the plot means that there is ambiguity in that involvement and other horizons may start to appear. With the plot, Wynter shows that it is possible to create space for different social relations within larger contexts of exploitation and extraction, and possibly move beyond the incapacitating ubiquity of the dominating structures (Ibid. "Novel and history" 96-100).

Here, I want to take De Vries' cue to explore what "plot work as an artistic praxis" (de Vries n.p.) might mean. Just like the historical plot, artistic work is implicated in dominant institutional and capitalist logics. De Vries asks how it can learn from Wynter's thought on the phenomenon of the plot and create space for relating outside of those logics through its own kind of plot work. Responding to De Vries' question, my own exploration thus focusses on how blockchain – knowing that it often reproduce colonial logics – can also be engaged with in a way that constitutes a plot. Where are the bits of the blockchain space that represent culture rather than control?

While historically, plots were made available for reasons of efficiency by plantation owners, DAOs can be built by any community themselves. The idea of DAOs as countercultural DYI placemaking practices is a recurring theme in Radical Friends: Decentralised Autonomous Organisations and the Arts, a book edited by Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty, two prominent thinkers, artists, and organisers in the countercultural DAO field (Catlow & Rafferty). While DAO technology may be used for such DIY practices, Catlow stresses the necessity of awareness of the relationship between the technology and historical and ongoing exploitations similar to some of those Wynter lays out:

> Crucial to this project is an acknowledgement of the multiple layers of devastating losses that are the result of colonial extractivist petrocapitalism upon which this webbed mechanosphere[3] is built: the mass dispossession, destruction and loss of human lives, the loss of species biodiversity and habitats and the impoverishment of futurity that is the aftermath. (Catlow "Translocal Belonging" 177-178)

Catlow and Rafferty write that to get out of the havoc wreaked by centuries of colonial capitalism, the technology must be used to "terraform a myriad tiny worlds;

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and smuggle out lively and strange cultural forms into more consensual realities in the world at large" (Catlow & Rafferty "Introduction" 40). By playful engagement with DAOs, Catlow explains that people "can sensitise themselves to the behaviours that might accompany new social relations that emerge in peer-to-peer, translocal networks" (Catlow "To Larp a DAO" 307). Catlow and Rafferty's thoughts on the potential of DAO's are framed in relation to those historical and ongoing exploitative power relations and propose that we need to build new worlds, or indeed plots, in order to make different futures possible.

They refer to this capacity of DAOs to bring about new worlds as prefiguration (Catlow & Rafferty "Introduction" 46; Catlow "To larp a DAO" 307), a term defined as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (Boggs 7). The DAO-plot they describe offers a space for this prefigurative embodiment and relating, a space to practice the cosmogonies that future generations can embody. An example of such a prefigurative, decolonial DAO might the one the Black Socialists of America are building. Deeply informed by the work of radical Black scholars and activists, they aim to support cooperative communities, mutual aid networks, and labour organisers through the non-hierarchical governance structures and collective ownership that DAOs afford. The organisation speaks of "building a new world in the shell of the old", prefiguring a socialist plot within rampant colonial capitalism ("Our Strategy").

Another example relates to the way that the abstractions of tokenisation invisibilise the care that is needed to sustain that which is represented on a blockchain. The logics of care and capitalism generally oppose each other (Lynch 203), and therefore, perhaps care could be a chisel for blockchain-based plot work to carve a space that offers an alternative to its surroundings. Artist Sarah Friend undermines the speculative financial alienation of many NFT projects by programming her Lifeforms NFTs in such a way that they 'die' if they are not cared for. In her operationalisation of care, this means that the NFT has to be given away for free to someone else, who then takes over the caring responsibilities (Friend). Lifeforms offers up a different way of relating, not only to the NFT, but also to those around you, calling on them to care for instead of capitalise on something.

A third example is the Corn Council, a DAO imagined as part of a speculative design research project (Heitlinger et al.). Central in it is the wish to undo the alienation that plantation capitalism produces. This DAO rewards "spending time with plants, [...] caring for them, kindling new care-taking relationships" (Ibid. 11). Although they are tokenised, these rewards are not exchangeable and can only be used in the community in ways that support the commons. The Corn Council creates a multi-species community in which crops are stakeholders rather than commodities (Ibid. 12). These are some budding examples of how blockchain's plot might be thought of as places in which different social relations can take root and grow, while also always being embedded in larger systems of extraction.

Sylvia Wynter's 'plot': a different cosmogony to understand life through

> [W]hat I want to uncover, to reveal, here is that which lies behind the ostensible truths of our everyday reality, but which we normally cannot see. It is that of the dynamic of what I now call the autopoiesis of being hybridly human. (Wynter in Wynter & McKittrick 27, emphasis in original)

To Wynter, 'the plot' is not only an analogy for a place to practice difference, but it also represents a different cosmogony to understand life through. De Vries explains: the plot is "a conceptual tool *and* historic reality. It is figurative language *and* a challenge to current spatial arrangements. It is a verb *and* a narrative device" (de Vries 12, emphasis in original). It is a place *and* a story. Exactly this irreducibility makes the term so valuable. Wynter's history of the invention of Man shows how social ordering of life, and the real experiences that are a consequence of this ordering, are wrapped up with the ontological question of what (human) life is, and the coloniality of the powers at play in answering this question. In this process, Man constitutes the human first and foremost in biological terms, and pushes those that do not fit these terms into spaces of Otherness. However, Wynter adds, humans are always a hybrid, natural and cultural, biological beings and storytellers (Wynter "Unsettling the coloniality of being" 295, 313-314). Reflecting on these ideas, Katherine McKittrick concisely summarises humans, in the universalised form of Man, as "*storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological*" (McKittrick in Wynter & McKittrick 11, emphasis in original). Exactly this realisation is what offers potential for a different future. Wynter writes that as hybrid beings, we have a

> uniquely auto-instituting mode of living being, we humans cannot pre-exist our cosmogonies or origin myths/stories/narratives anymore than a bee, at the purely biological level of life, can pre-exist its beehive. (Wynter "The ceremony found" 213, emphasis in original)

In other words, living and imagining a different life need to be done at the same time. On the plot, new myths about life and sociality can be told and the related social relations practiced simultaneously; different understandings of what it means to be human and to live with (more-than-human) others can be explored, iterated on, and tested. Wynter explains that the stories humans tell have the capacity to institute new communities around new conceptions of life, to create new plots for future generations to inhabit. This is the magic that Wynter refers to in the epigraph of this article, the capacity of people to think & practice new realities into being.

Penny Rafferty thinks of DAOs as a tool for auto-institution. To her, DAOs are like magical sigils, that express intentions by making explicit what kind of world is worked towards, and get realised through repeated rituals (Rafferty 112-13). She

takes this idea from Chaos Magick, a cultist subculture from the 70s that – heavily influenced by the work of postmodern theorists – argues that truth is subject to belief, and thus by changing ones beliefs through the use of sigils, reality can be changed (Otto 765). For Rafferty, DAOs are sigils that make explicit what kind of new world a community wants to establish, and through the rituals of proposals and votes actualise these new realities. Rafferty's DAOs are a way to establish the new mythologies of the plot. For her, the new origin story starts from a reappreciation of chaos. In neoliberal capitalism, chaos appears as a dangerous element that evades control, but Rafferty instead wants to look to it as a source of irreducible life. Chaos, she writes, is an "early genesis hole, this empty yet full state [that] was once akin to a babbling spring, oozing life and creativity" (Rafferty 103).

Rafferty is not alone in her mythologising DAO practices. Some DAOs, like MolochDAO ("The Original Grant Giving DAO") and RaidGuild ("A Decentralized Collective"), present themselves as part of fantastical stories or as if they exist in a parallel universe. These DAO mythologies reference the epic battles and mythical tales that imagine their members as self-organising collectives fighting giant villains or monsters. Although it might seem escapist, Kei Kreutler, thinker and maker in the DAO space, recognises cooperative values in DAOs like these. While their mythologies are not overtly politicised and seem to exist in a parallel fantasy universe, they reimagine social relations among their members in a very concrete way. The practicalities of organising a DAO – e.g. decisions on how to manage shared resources – offer a space to model and practice the social relations that could exist outside of capitalism even if those are not the terms used (Kreutler). The villains these DAOs fight appear to be capitalists, their extractive models, and centralised ownership.

Rafferty proposes DAOs as "an experimental practice for moving towards a different way of living together" that "could allow us to collectively set up [...] void states together, and through the act of proposal making and voting, harness intention to regulate new reality making devices" (2022 107). The mythologising DAOs allow for a new cosmogony, a new beginning out of a void state and creates an alternative to the exploitations of colonial capitalism. This void is made together with others, it is the result of bottom-up processes that resist the urge to universalise or become unalterable. Although these processes are collective, those collectives don't have to stay cohesive: they can mutate, fork, and become plural as a result of changing priorities, beliefs, or urgencies. In this way, DAO-plots offer a new starting point from which to rethink what constitutes life in all its untokenisable dimensions. Plotting on a DAO is a process that will never be perfect, it always has to relate to an extractive outside, but can always be iterated upon to become stronger:

> The creation of any DAO is a psychospiritual quest for an open-ended micro reality machine. You create this small reality machine with a number of others and let it run, fail, rebuild and evolve. (Ibid. 112)

Conclusion

I have traced the parallels between historical colonialism and blockchain colonialism according to the work of Sylvia Wynter. The concept of data colonialism offers useful starting points for the theorisation of these parallel functions in the renewal of colonial relations and the expanding of the capitalisation of life. However, I showed that the affordances of blockchain technology also call for expansions and nuances to Couldry and Mejias' concept, particularly on the way colonial orders of knowledge and value are intertwined in the technology. I contribute a reading of colonial blockchain practices through the theory of Sylvia Wynter toward this end. However, my contribution is intended as the start of more future work toward the establishment of a comprehensive definition of blockchain colonialism in the context of a broader array of decolonial theory.

Wynter's thought is useful in understanding the coloniality in contemporary systems, but it is also generative towards different futures. In response to De Vries, I have argued to understand the countercultural prefigurative capacities of DAOs as a form of the artistic plot work. In Wynter's unpublished but influential manuscript titled Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World, she writes that "decentralized groups" working in relation to a "framework of belief" have the capacity to "create a counter world" in which participants are involved "creatively in their destiny" (Wynter "Black metamorphosis" 183-184). The organisational practices of these decentralised groups are what gives Wynter hope. The way in which they allow members to shape their own futures through collaboration and spiritual practices that "attain a more authentic order of being" than coloniality provides (Ibid. 184). The reality machines of DAO-based plots are a way for this decentralised work toward new mythologies and new social relations to take shape.

These plots offer room for alternative social systems, but Wynter is clear: the plantation and its exploitative market logics are strong and will endure, at least for the time being. The plot can provide a place to find "a focus of criticism against the impossible reality in which we are enmeshed" (Wynter 100). Everyone is undeniably involved in that which is critiqued, but participating in the plot means that there is ambiguity in that involvement. This is where resistance, however marginal, finds its breeding ground (Ibid. 100-01).

Notes

1. ↑ In applying the decolonial lens that Wynter offers, I want to acknowledge my own positionality. My experience as a white European person influenced the examples that I chose. In this sense, these examples enjoy their own privilege as well. Although I have experienced oppressive forces – e.g. in the form of sexism in the male-dominated field of technology – I do not know the oppressive effects of coloniality from my own experience. In educating myself through, among others, the work of Wynter, I hope to do justice to its complexities and contribute to revealing its continued influence in contemporary socio-technical systems.

2. ↑ They write that "[i]n deploying the concept of data colonialism, our goal is not to make loose analogies to the content or form, let alone the physical violence, of historical colonialism" (Nick Couldry & Ulises A Mejias 339). I second this nuance in my exploration of blockchain's relation to the concept of data colonialism.

3. ↑ The phrase 'webbed mechanosphere' is used in reference to the networked infrastructures of the web.

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