Plot(ting): Practices of Ambiguity — Patricia de Vries

> There is another world, but it is inside this one.
> —Paul Éluard[1]

> Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities. . . . And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms.
> —Sylvia Wynter[2]

How do artists intervene in capitalist structures, such as cities, urban developments, institutes and infrastructures, and reinterpret and reclaim spaces and spatial relationships? How do artists and artistic researchers define their ground and forge spaces while evading being co-opted by the systems they aim to overcome?

Plot(ting) builds on Jamaican novelist and theorist Sylvia Wynter's rich notion of "the plot." Allocated by plantation owners to minimise costs and boost profits, plots were the provision grounds that enslaved Africans were permitted to cultivate. Situated away from plantation villages, these plots allowed the cultivation of food on land that was often rugged and of poor quality. Here, the enslaved found a way to collaborate, maintaining a degree of independence from the brutality of plantation life. These plots were not utopian refuges, isolated from the plantation's violence. Rather, they were constantly in danger of violence and destruction by planters and overseers.

Wynter describes the plot and the plantation as distinct yet intertwined entities. The plot offered a space for alternative knowledge systems, resistance to commodification, and the perpetuation of African and indigenous cultures and traditions. Yet plots were also products of the plantation; the relation between the provision ground and the plantation is ambivalent, a source of alienation and potential resistance. Wynter's scholarly discussion of the plot is also ambivalent. It is a historical reality *and* a metaphor. "Plot" is a noun referring to a physical space *and* a verb for decolonial practice. It also refers to counter-narratives and what she calls "under life" culture.[3]

While Wynter's notion of the plot has gained recognition across various disciplines, there's potential for further exploration into its applications in and ramifications for the arts.

Engaging with Wynter's insights, *Plot(ting)* investigates the plot as a model for artistic practice in the broadest sense, examining how artists, writers, and scholars can challenge institutional and capitalist norms to foster different forms of understanding, being, and social relation. Collecting and bringing together scholarly and artistic initiatives that resonate with Wynter's concept of the plot, *Plot(ting)* aims to propagate endeavours that establish forms of relationality beyond capitalist confines, acting as a testament to the power of decolonial and counter-hegemonic practices, narratives, and forms of resistance. By viewing the plot as a vehicle for investigation, *Plot(ting)* invites contemplation on the conditions that could nurture plots, advocating for varied perspectives, knowledge forms, and relational models. These contributions illuminate

alternative possibilities and highlight the transient nature of such spaces, practices, narratives, and interactions.

Contributions to *Plot(ting)* cover various subjects and objects, from Dutch domestic colonies and the recalcitrant materiality of mud to personal letter exchanges and European work songs, pushing the boundaries of disciplines and surpassing conventional narratives.

Consider, for example, designer and artist Mariana Martínez Balvanera's contribution. It reflects upon the transdisciplinary practice of Cocina Colaboratorio, a collective of cooks, artists, farmers, and scholars that question notions of individual property and ownership within food and knowledge production. Balvanera adopts an ethical approach to her work derived from the "teachings" of *comunidad*, an indigenous approach to social organisation and production still practiced in some communities in Mexico. The teachings of *communidad* include practices of commoning, shared responsibility towards land, and protecting (agro)biodiversity. One such practice is *tequio*, a way of organising collective and reciprocal work or mutual aid wherein groups of people come together to perform various tasks for the benefit of the community. *Tequio* embodies the values of solidarity, cooperation, and shared responsibility, fostering a sense of unity and opposing individualism. Balvanera shows how it is practised in the interstices of three Mexican cities—Oaxaca, San Cristobal de las Casas, and Mexico City—which are increasingly regulated, privatised, financialised, and touristified.

Or take choreographer and artist Flavia Pinheiro's performance.

Pinheiro's work navigates "in vitro" experiences—instances sequestered and removed from their vibrant, living origins—and "in vivo" explorations that are immersed in the lively tapestry of community and shared stories. "In vitro" translates from Latin to "within the glass." In Pinheiro's context, this concept symbolises arts spaces: the confines of a studio or indoor settings are often detached from broader societal realities. Pinheiro actively collaborates with a diverse mix of human and non-human partners to counter this isolation, fostering a multidisciplinary dialogue and inviting other entities—real or spectral—into her space. Her "in vivo" work dives into the essence of living interactions and communal narratives, true to the term's Latin roots of "within the living." Here, Pinheiro embraces the unpredictable flow of life in public spaces—beaches, markets, forests, streets, or squares—employing an adaptable approach that harmonises with each environment and beckons unforeseen involvement from diverse participants.

Balvanera and Pinheiro echo Wynter's plot concept in different ways. As spaces of self-organisation, communal relationships, and ancestral cultural continuity, rural and urban spaces become sites of resistance and reclamation, akin to the plot. Their different practices reflect the plot's transformative potential: to create, within the enclosures of contemporary life, openings for new ways of seeing, relating, and being. Through this, they challenge dominant narratives and structures by crafting living, breathing spaces of artistic and communal resurgence.

There is much more to explore in *Plot(ting)*. To better understand what artists face when they act within a dominant order—an order

that produces them but that they resist and critique—and to understand their work as both a cause and an effect of capitalist enclosures, however, one must first understand Wynter's conception of the plantation.

In what follows, I will focus on two facets of Wynter's framework of the plantation: the relational and the onto-epistemological. Considering the *relational* aspect of Wynter's work, I focus on the intertwined history of colonial domination and the exploitation of nature and human lives, drawing lines of connection between the plantation system, contemporary struggles, and art practices. In the *onto-epistemological dimension* of her work, Wynter illustrates how the plantation, both in its historical form and contemporary manifestations, is undergirded by a construction of Self that, through its production of (racialised) Others, deems some more exploitable than others and some more human than others. After outlining these two facets of Wynter's framework, I hone in on her reflections on the dialectical and ambiguous practices within the plantation's margins: the plots. I will then turn to the plot as a historical space, a form of decolonial and counter-hegemonic social relations and cultivation, an art practice, and a lens through which to engage with the contributions of this online platform.

Plantation: The First Factory

In her work, Wynter weaves together the eras of slavery, colonialism, and the plantation economy with the extractive and exploitative logic

of the relentless pursuit of accumulation in today's capitalist systems. For Wynter, understanding capitalism necessitates situating the plantation at its heart, before examining phenomena such as modes of production, class consciousness, wage labour, the dispossession of commons, commodification, railroads, steam engines, and so on. Wynter insists that the Black slave preceded the alienated wage worker of the Industrial Revolution.[4] Her teachings indicate how contemporary struggles—encompassing issues such as poverty, gentrification, segregation, exploitation, and the suppression of radical movements—are bound up with the historical enclosures of the plantation. The plantation's history, Wynter shows, reveals both the modes of social relations and the forms of domination that were then normalised throughout the world in different modalities.

The idea of race is integral to the function of the plantation and its progeny. The plantation system reduced enslaved people to property and "extracted" their labour, energy, and time. Without the idea of race, the plantation system would not have been possible. The plantation and all its offspring represent racial divisions and classifications that ultimately demarcate what and whose existence is privileged and what and whose existence is appropriated. It demarcates whose land, labour, and resources can be stolen and appropriated, and what bodies, kinships, languages, epistemes, cosmologies, and ecologies can be destroyed. Wynter argues that the histories of slavery and the justification of slavery by means of the invention of race are not only the basis of the plantation system but have been foundational to the organisation of capital and labour on a global scale.[5] The plantation needed the invention of racial difference

to function.

In her work, Wynter insists that the onto-epistemological and ecological transformations that European colonialism and slavery set in motion date back to 1452, at the beginning of the so-called New World, when African slaves were put to work on the first plantations on the Portuguese island of Madeira. It is on the plantation where the ontological distinction between Man and Nature emerged, changing one's sense of being, knowing, and relating. It is on the plantation, according to Wynter, that "the process of the reduction of Man to Labour and of Nature to Land under the impulsion of the market economy" began its course.[6]

In her essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," Wynter examines how this notion of Man continues to influence contemporary societal structures profoundly. As well as rendering non-white groups as inherently exploitable and subhuman, the humanistic epistemes Wynter examines form dominant narratives, ideologies, and worldviews of Western bourgeois humanism and its exclusionary understanding of what it means to be human.[7] The essay argues that the figure of "Man" is conflated with the onto-epistemological signification of whiteness, and that this conflation should be considered foundational for how power becomes operationalised and institutionalised. Wynter describes how the overrepresentation of Man in the history of Western humanism effectively marginalised "nonwhite groups" by relegating them to a subordinate position, thus outside of the category of the human.[8] Through this framework, the

attributes of Man—white, male, middle-class, European, heterosexual, tax-paying, able-bodied and so on—are posited as the universal norm and representative of all humankind.

Engaging with Wynter's work, activists and scholars Stefano Harney and Fred Moten explain that Wynter's reading of the plantation system rests on the notion that the self is an autonomous proprietor of earth and land as resources to be exploited. They argue that this figure that they call the "self-owning and earth-owning man" relies on the construction of a specific figure of man: one who is part of a group that separates itself through invasion and enclosure, establishing divisions that determine ownership for some, while excluding others from ownership at all—from either land or self.[9]

Indigenous genocide and Black enslavement are prerequisites of the plantation system, which codes oppressed subjects into the system of colonial ownership by dispossessing them of their agency and of agency over nature—and by excluding them from the category of the enslaved are coded in parallel with material extraction under the guise of exchange. 'Colonisation = thingification' . . . where subjectivity becomes fungible as a geographical as well as psychic and property entity.[10]

At the foundation of the plantation system lies a reductionist ideology that treats certain bodies and land as exploitable property, as extractable matter. African people were robbed of their lands, displaced, and enslaved to produce commodities on lands that were themselves stolen through the genocide and dispossession of the Indigenous people of the Americas.[11] The category of Man has long

afforded its proprietors ownership over people and nature. In this dominion, Man perceives himself as the “lord and possessor of Nature,” subjecting enslaved individuals to dehumanisation, dispossession, and exploitation.[12] Simultaneously, plantations, driven by profit motives, obliterated local ecologies to create monocultures for the exchange market. Global capitalist societies continue to be “entirely structured around the production and circulation of commodities”[13]; for Wynter, this means they continue to be structured around the plantation system.

Wynter emphasises, “The later large-scale dehumanisation of the European proletariat, *followed on* and *did not precede* the total negation of the black as human.”[14] This is to say, the process of enclosure in Europe *followed* the discovery of the New World. For Wynter, the year 1452, at the beginning of the supposed New World, marks the inception of Man, whiteness, and capitalism. With this primacy given to the “discovery” of the New World, Wynter departs from and intervenes in the European Marxist tradition. The enclosure and the plantations were different expressions, in time and space, of the imperial logic.

In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), scholar and feminist activist Silvia Federici describes the process of enclosure in Europe.[15] During the sixteenth century, straight lines and enclosures became a common feature of the Dutch and English agricultural landscape. Enclosures brought a specific form of agricultural production, a new power structure, and a logic of ownership and private property. Enclosure—the fencing, appropriation, and expropriation of common land—ended traditional

rights to common land, transforming it from a space of communal use into one of private ownership. Modern divisions emerged, such as those between humanity and nature, capital and labour, and men and women. Furthermore, divisions arose between a class of larger-scale landowners who “modernised’ and commercialised agricultural production and a group of people who had lost their communal lands and livelihoods to this new emerging capitalist class.

The impact of enclosure was far-reaching, influenced various aspects of life, and gave rise to capitalist structures becoming interwoven with a spatial principle. This novel approach to agricultural production, in which mechanisation stood as the principal means of accumulation, necessitated a distinct type of subject and subjectification aimed at propping up productivity. Within communities stripped of their land and resources, poverty became the impetus for waged labour. Communities of dispossessed peasants were made productive for and reliant upon waged labour. Scarcity forged the worker, serving as the host upon which the new capitalist class acted parasitically.

The enclosure and the plantation were different expressions of the same imperial logic. Wynter considers the plantation the metaphorical “first factory,” in that it shaped the early phases of capitalist production modes and became the nucleus of industrialisation. Moreover, the plantation was not merely a historical locus or event but is an ongoing “doing”; it extends into the present. Plantation systems, Wynter argues

> were both cause and effect of the emergence of the market economy; an emergence which marked a change of such world-historical magnitude, that we are all, without exception still ‘enchanted,’ imprisoned, deformed and schizophrenic in its bewitched reality.[16]

Indeed, the essence of the plantation system lingers on, persisting in the form of global capitalist production systems that extract from and exploit nature, labour, bodies, time, lives, ecologies, and animals for profit. These systems sustain divisions and hierarchies that allocate privilege and appropriation over life—in which race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality continue to be violently imposed. The plantation model continues operating through mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, dominance, and ownership.

Consider the role of nation-states, detention centres, sweatshops, vacation resorts, gated communities, and prison complexes in this context. Additionally, the plantation system reinforces imposed poverty, policing, privatisation of the commons, wage disparities, and the quelling of movements for radical social change and justice. According to Wynter, cities are the “commercial expression” of the plantation.[17] This expression includes the demolition of social housing; neglect of and cuts to public services and infrastructure; the curbing of informal economies; gentrification; home evictions; segregation; the housing market; criminalised inner-city men; the profiling of welfare mothers; the homeless; the sick, the old, and the tired; and also “migrants stranded outside the gates of the rich countries, as the postcolonial variant of [Frantz] Fanon’s category of

les damnés."[18]

The plantation is a historical event, a production system, and a model for current economic, social, and geographical arrangements.[19] The notion of the self-owning and earth-owning man persists at the heart of European self-understanding. It is a function of the reproduction of capitalism, and it systematically excises the marginalised. It continues to reproduce divisions and classifications that demarcate whose existence is appropriated, exploited, and discarded.

"The parallel here is that you cannot have a middle class as the norm of being human without the degradation of what is not the middle class," writes Wynter, "which is the working class and the jobless."[20] Today's capitalist enclosures, she writes,

> with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth's resources . . . are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs Human struggle.[21]

Wynter argues that understanding today's enclosures requires acknowledging their deep-rooted connection to Man/whiteness that initially formed the plantation, and "any attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power will call for the unsettling of this overrepresentation."[22]

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The figure of Man and its onto-epistemological link to whiteness in Wynter's scholarship encapsulates how the complex relationships between slavery, race, extraction, exploitation, dehumanisation, and nature converge. Wynter's interdisciplinary approach incorporates literature, philosophy, and sociocultural theory to dismantle the constructs of the self-owning and earth-owning man, as established by the history of Western humanism. It shows that these constructs are historically and culturally contingent. Nothing is inevitable about this historical process; it could have been—and should be—otherwise.

A central concern in Wynter's work is to read against the totalising hegemony of Europe's "implantation" and to suggest instead that there was and has always been something else besides this dominant cultural logic. The plot is one instance of this something else.

The Plot: Growing Yam in Unlikely Spaces

What is one up against if they want to disrupt the ongoing plantation logic? What are the necessary conditions for change?

In "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," Wynter draws a dialectical and ambiguous relation between two distinct but related geographical demarcations: the planter's plantation and the slave's provision grounds. In her words:

> The planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow

> food to feed themselves in order to maximise 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 structure of values that had been created by traditional societies of Africa, the land remained the Earth—and the Earth was a goddess . . . 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.[23]

Plots were a vital space for sustenance, community, and cultural exchange. On these grounds, often at some distance from the plantation towns, the enslaved could grow their own food, socialise, and find a common language, providing a semblance of autonomy within the oppressive violence of the plantation system. The plots became essential for the survival of the enslaved, fostering a culture and knowledge system that operated within and apart from the plantation's brutality.

For Wynter, the subsistence farming of the plot system stands for the "secretive histories" of folk culture, regenerative agriculture, indigenous African knowledge, and resistance that existed alongside, under, and through the violent and extractive logic of the plantation.[24] Wynter writes that in these plots, a social order with its structure of values existed that did not make nature an object that man could appropriate and exploit. Here, "the land remained the Earth."[25] Central to this plot system was the non-capitalist sensibility and non-property-centric logic of Africans, who viewed the land as

synonymous with the Earth.[26] As temporary and fragile as these plots were, they allowed for ways of knowing, being together, and relating in a communal sense that was impossible on the plantation.

Wynter elucidates how these plots, while instrumental in the survival of the enslaved, did not exist in isolation from the violence of the plantation system. She is careful not to romanticise these plots; they were not free zones diametrical to the logic and violent ordering of the plantation. The plantation produced massive amounts of food but did not feed the enslaved. Slaves had to cultivate subsistence food on often mountainous and hardly fertile soil that held no value to the plantation's operations. Although often located out of sight of the plantation, plots were always under threat; as for the planters and overseers, these places were also suspect—for who knew what the enslaved were "plotting" there.

Plots were thus subject to the plantation and a product of a violent colonial and capitalist order, but, at the same time, offering a potential refuge from it. It is not plot *versus* plantation, but plot-*and*-plantation: they implicate each other. Plot and plantation are at odds with each other but inhabit the same locus. This is to say, there is no outside; there is a within and against.

In *Black Metamorphosis,* Wynter describes this dialectical relation as follows:

> [T]he earth was not regarded as property or land, but as the base of the community, the foundation of the common good,

> rather than a grab bag for private interest. . . . Such an ideology was directly opposed to the official plantation ideology, which saw both land and labor as forms of property. While the ideology of the masters stressed the rights of property, the worldview of the African slaves remained based on a man's relation to the earth and, concomitantly, to the community. This duality of worldviews, was at once complementary and antagonistic: two world views—based on two different material bases—yet two poles originating in the course of a single historical process."[27]

Wynter's understanding of dialectics is essentially Leninist, based upon a splitting of the whole and a cognition of its contradictory parts. The intertwinement of these divergent ecological epistemes—one rooted in community and equilibrium with nature, and the other rooted in private interests and extraction for profit—reflects a complex interplay of complementary and antagonistic forces that are rooted in a single process.

This dialectical interplay of forces also affected the enslaved. The enslaved individual epitomised extreme alienation. Wynter metaphorically compares the slave to a silkworm, labouring for survival yet trapped in a cycle of exploitation. Wynter writes:

> As labour power on the plantation, [the slave] would represent the extreme case of alienation, producing an export mono-crop (sugar, cotton, vast areas of forest),

> dominating nature to create a product which was alien to his own needs, and which alienated him from them. As he created this product, it produced more capital, whose power over him was thus enforced. In his relation to the plantation, he was the silkworm who spun in order to continue his life as a caterpillar. On the plot, his position was a dual and dynamic relationship in which he adapted himself to Nature and also transformed Nature.[28]

The slave's toil was detrimental to their needs and well-being but also entrenched them in the plantation's dominance.

Conversely, the semi-autonomous spaces of the plot allowed for a more dynamic engagement with the environment, where adaptation, transformation and a semblance of agency were, to an extent, possible. Out of the necessity for survival—with and through extreme violence and deprivation—comes counter-colonial environmental praxis. Wynter writes:

> The plot was the slave's area of escape from the plantation. It was an area of experience which reinvented and therefore perpetuated an alternative worldview, an alternative consciousness to that of the plantation. This world view was marginalised by the plantation but never destroyed. ln the relation to the plot, the slave lived in a society partly created as an adjunct to the market, partly as an end in itself.[29]

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The plot is both the cause and the effect of the plantation system. It exists in and is a product of a world dominated by market relations, and it is a locus of resistance to and critique of the market system and market values. This is the foundational ambivalence: both a necessity and a possibility, "at once the root cause of our alienation; and the possibility of our salvation."[30]

The plot punctures the order of exchange value, inserting into the interstices of the plantation a logic that is antagonistic to it; yet, it develops within the context of racist, capitalist systems.

Wynter's account of the plot shows how the social ordering of life is braided around the question of what it means to be human: the answer, she argues, is contained both within the colonial figure of "Man" and in the absolute refusal to accept this as the sole answer. Wynter calls for forging alternative social relations, other subjectivities, and different inhabitations that potentially unsettle the enclosures epitomised by Man.

In Wynter's work, the plot becomes a metaphor for enacting a worldview rooted in a communal relationship with the earth, highlighting themes of coexistence, cooperation, and communal kinship, opposed to yet enmeshed in the individualistic, property-centric logic of the plantation. Through the lens of the plot, Wynter not only critiques the historical and ongoing processes of marginalisation and exploitation but also foregrounds the enduring power of collective agency in seeking, crafting, and excavating spaces of difference, liberation, and self-determination. The plot excavates time and space for what is considered impossible under

those systems: the narratives and cultural practices that foster alternative values to those offered by the prevailing order.

The cultivation of yam subtly but poignantly illustrates this dialectical ambiguity of the plot. Wynter refers to the plot as "the roots of culture" and mentions one food product of this alternative space: yam.[31] Africans could maintain agricultural traditions with crops they often secretly imported across the Middle Passage, such as yams, ackee, gourds, and other staples. The yam, a tuberous root vegetable, was a preferred food of Africans and their descendants. In fact, it was so important to the provision grounds they were sometimes called yam grounds.[32] In Wynter's work, the yam also symbolises "secretive histories," the "values of the under life," and the subterranean subversiveness of the plot.[33] As author Elizabeth DeLoughrey explains:

> [The] yam's location in the provision grounds outside of the plantation complex (often out of view), as well as its subsistence underground (where it collects nutrients for the community), underlines its significance as an invisible resource, one that must be physically and imaginatively sought, cultivated, and excavated in terms of both time and space.[34]

Cultivating yams in hardly fertile grounds emphasises the resilience and regeneration of culture, language, and values through, as writer Nalo Hopkinson says, "growing things. Chop them up, and, like

yams, they just sprout whole new plants. To re-member is to reassemble the limbs of a story, to make it whole again."[35]

The plot unsettles the story of the self-owning and earth-owning man; inside the ostensibly totalising orders of the plantation, plot-living is going on. "The slave plot, on which the slave grew food for his/her subsistence, carried over a millennially other conception of the human to that of Man's," writes Wynter. "So that plot exists as a threat. It speaks to other possibilities."[36] For Wynter, the plot is both a space of difference and an alternative cosmogony through which other ways of being human are exercised.

Plot(ting): From Yam to Jazz to Stories to Art Practices

While inextricably entwined with capitalist logic, how can art practices carve out different ways of knowing and relating as it's being exploited by such a prevailing logic?

In *Black Metamorphosis*, Wynter shows how the supposedly unproductive and hardly fertile grounds of the plots transformed into a Black cultural "under life." Yams fed into jazz: "Work songs, spirituals, blues, and jazz," writes Wyner, "were the counter-poetics native and indigenous to the American continent, subterraneanly subversive of its surface reality."[37]

Similarly, in "History and Novel, Plot and Plantation," Wynter describes how the people transplanted to the plantations and the novel form were both the creators *and* products of an emerging

exchange market. She writes that the form of the novel and plantation societies are “twin children of the same parents.”[38] The novel form, like the slave’s plot, is both a critique and product of the market economy. The novel was a product of an emerging market structure yet offered room for alternative ideas, different values, and stories that were distinct from those of the market system in which it circulated as a commodity. The plot and the novel provide “a focus of criticism against the impossible reality in which [they were] enmeshed.”[39] In the novel and the plot, resistance found a breeding ground. The novel here represents the inherent ambiguity of the entanglement with the plantation, suggesting other minor and temporary possibilities. The enclosures one inhabits are not fully enclosed.

Post-abolition, the values and expressions of Black cultural under-life of the Middle Passage, as Wynter calls it, would further “find [their] counterparts in many non-normative movements, in the Women’s, students, Youth, and Hippies.” Wynter suggests that “[i]f Utopia is to be realised, it must first be represented and imaginatively constituted.”[40]

Here, Wynter gives the example of communities who, through participation and interaction, read against the rigid patterns of domination by making music, dancing, rebelling together, and finding a common language. These are communities that found ways to experiment with and express their shared desire to read the world differently and cultivate different modes of relation and co-habitation. Connecting the plot-and-plantation to music, radical social movements, and literature, amongst other things, underscores

the depth of the plot-and-plantation concept and its continuing relevance to artistic practice.

Amidst historical constraints and current hurdles, one might wonder where to start and how to engage in plotting without it being merely symbolic or, worse, being instrumentalised to serve undesired political ends. Wynter underscores the importance of new narratives, pointing out that the grand narratives of liberal humanism have led people to their current predicament. It is within someone’s power to shape the narratives that define their existence: “The human is not only a languaging being but also a storytelling species. In my own terms, the human is *homo narrans*,” Wynter argues.[41] “Stories make place,” asserts academic and author Katherine McKittrick, highlighting how narratives envision and shape “new geographies of liberation.”[42] Like the arts, McKittrick suggests, stories spark curiosity, collaboration, speculation, and fabulation, and foster relationality and conversation.[43] Stories—and, I would add, art practices—that create places “tell the world differently, with creative precision,” inviting people to think, feel, and respond.[44] According to McKittrick, the stories that create spaces encompass a range of expressions, including theory, dance, poetry, sound, music, geography, emotion, photography, painting, and sculpture.

Plot(ting) probes the potential for plot work as an artistic praxis.[45] The platform is attuned to practices that carve out realms of interaction that transcend dominant capitalist logics, embodying a form of plot work in their own right. The contributions to *Plot(ting)* reflect the capacity of artistic practice and research to emulate the plot’s transformative potential, fostering new modalities of

connection that challenge the overrepresentation of the ethnoclass of the self-owing and earth-owning man. *Plot(ting)* embraces diverse methods of establishing connections and relationships, ways of living and being, and creating places and practices characterised by ambivalence, difference, contradiction, and complexity.

And yet, as I've written elsewhere,[46] plotting as an artistic practice should not become another of those "optimistic fantasies."[47] Plot work "is not a practice whereby shiny, happy artists sing 'Kumbaya!' and make art in blissful co-existence under the radar of the slow collapse of social and ecological structures." [48]Plotting emerges from the unravelling of "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality."[49] It aligns with scholar and artist Ashton T. Crawley's notion of "the nevertheless and in spite of condition": the idea that despite feeling restricted and confined, there exists "an excessive force that sustains."[50] The terms "nevertheless" and "in spite of" highlight "the always available and plural otherwise possibility."[51] However, engaging in plot work carries no promises. It is inherently fragile, vulnerable, and frequently without desired outcomes—endeavours falter and situations change. Artists who plot always risk remaining, to use Wynter's term, a silkworm. A plot remains perpetually "in the works," simultaneously coming together and coming undone.

The dynamics of plot-and-plantation are indeed inseparable, and the *Plot(ting)* platform is intricately woven into the fabric of a market-driven system. The concept of plot-and-plantation urges us to maintain a connection between *Plot(ting)* and its production processes, including the circumstances under which it is produced.

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The context in which *Plot(ting)* is produced, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, is characterised by a predominantly white faculty and student body and has been impacted by market forces and prolonged reductions in funding. *Plot(ting)* emerges partly from an institutionalised and state-supported environment alongside conditions marked by involuntary flexibility, job insecurity, limited resources, and temporary contracts. Contributors to this publication often balance multiple roles within the gig economy to sustain themselves. This publication, too, is a product and critique of the field in which it is enmeshed.

By serving as a research project and platform in this context, *Plot(ting)* showcases works that aim to transcend the conventional settings of galleries, public spaces, fairs, or art exhibitions. It is dedicated to presenting practices that recognise and value what has always already existed. *Plot(ting)* embraces not just the tangible objects, pieces, or performances, but also practices and processes that work in unconventional spaces and settings. *Plot(ting)* gathers practices in which other values are acted upon, constituted, and grounded in space—practices that interlace the material and the metaphoric show how art is ensnared in market logic and are a reminder of the existence of other possibilities. Significantly, *Plot(ting)* eschews a singular focus. The contributions refrain from delivering clear-cut narratives or solutions but catalyse curiosity and hint at diverse ways of living otherwise. They call for communality, remembering, recuperation, collaboration, resistance, rebellion, and co-existence, and the form of theory, dance, murmur, work songs, cooking, mud, literature, and personal archives, among others. Together, these bundled forces reclaim the things that have long

been repressed or deemed irrational or savage, such as spirituality, community knowledge, land knowledge, the body, sexuality, and ghosts.

Plot(ting) hopes to be a reminder that, however fringe, ephemeral, and marginal, there is a right life in the wrong one. After all, as Wynter reminds us, “human beings are magical” . . . at least sometimes.[52]

1. Paul Éluard, *Oeuvres completes. Vol. 1* (Paris: Galliamard, 1968), 986. ↩
2. Sylvia Wynter, “The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, the King of the Castile a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity,” in *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*, Alvina Ruprecht and Cecilia Taiana, eds. (Carleton: Carleton University Press, 1995), 35. ↩
3. See Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World*, 133, unpublished manuscript, no date, housed in The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, https://monoskop.org/images/6/69/Wynter_Sylvia_Black_Metamorphosis_New_Natives_in_a_New_World_1970s.pdf. ↩
4. Ibid. ↩
5. Ibid. ↩
6. Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (June 1971), 99. ↩
7. The capitalised “Western” here refers to a specific form of post-Enlightenment humanism that Wynter addresses and critiques in her work. Importantly, it does not refer to a region, but rather to

a nexus of knowledge and power, a specific idea of what knowledge is and the power with which this limited idea is imposed in many different contexts. ↩

8. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3, (Fall 2003), 288. ↩
9. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2021), 27. ↩
10. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 2019), 32. ↩
11. Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action* (New York, Bold Type Books, 2020): 16. ↩
12. Descartes cited in Wynter, “Novel and History,” 99. ↩
13. Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting*, 15. ↩
14. Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*, 45–46. Italics mine. ↩
15. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004). ↩
16. Wynter, “Novel and History,” 89. ↩
17. Ibid., 102. ↩
18. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 261. ↩
19. Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe* 17, no. 3, (November 2013), 12. ↩
20. Wynter quoted in David Scott, “The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000), 136. ↩
21. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of

Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 260. ↩

22. Ibid. ↩
23. Wynter, "Novel and History," 99. ↩
24. Ibid., 101. ↩
25. Ibid., 99. ↩
26. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds," *Small Axe* 34 (March 2011), 60. ↩
27. Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*, 48. ↩
28. Ibid., 52. ↩
29. Ibid. ↩
30. Wynter, "Novel and History," 99. ↩
31. Ibid. ↩
32. DeLoughrey, "Yam, Roots, and Rot," 60. ↩
33. Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*, 515. ↩
34. DeLoughrey, "Yam, Roots, and Rot," 60. ↩
35. Nalo Hopkinson quoted in DeLoughrey, "Yam, Roots, and Rot," 62. ↩
36. Wynter quoted in Scott, "The Re-enchantment of Humanism." ↩
37. Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*, 218. ↩
38. Wynter, "Novel and History," 97. ↩
39. Ibid., 98. ↩
40. Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*, 918. ↩
41. Sylvia Wynter, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis,* ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 25. ↩
42. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 9. ↩
43. McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 51. ↩

44. Ibid., 9. ↩
45. Patricia de Vries, “Plot Work as an Artistic Praxis in Today’s Cityscapes,” *Institute of Network Cultures*, https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Plot-Work_INC2023_Miscellanea.pdf. ↩
46. Ibid. ↩
47. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). ↩
48. De Vries, “Plot Work as an Artistic Praxis in Today’s Cityscapes,” 15. ↩
49. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3. ↩
50. Ashton T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: the Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 8. ↩
51. Ibid., 82. ↩
52. Wynter, *On Being Human as Praxis*, 1. ↩

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