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Geontographies: On Elizabeth Povinelli's *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*

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Abstract
This forum brings together perspectives from geography, philosophy, and political science to reflect on Elizabeth Povinelli's, 2016 book, *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*. Contributions come from both junior and senior scholars across a range of interests and backgrounds. Elizabeth Povinelli's *Geontologies* is the fourth in her series on Dwelling in Late Liberalism that began in 1994 with *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action*. In this latest text, she offers a retheorization of power and governance that challenges Foucauldian biopolitics. In its place, Povinelli maps a mode of power that she calls geontopower: a power that operates over the distinction between Life and Nonlife. Together with accounts of ethnographic encounters in Indigenous Australia, Povinelli's text weaves together political theory, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies. With consequences for human geographers as well as thinkers

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concerned with the Anthropocene, climate change, and new materialism, Povinelli's work connects the experience of late liberalism and settler colonialism across space, place, and matter.

Keywords
Geopower, colonialism, extraction, biopolitics, Anthropocene

Openings

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Elizabeth Povinelli's *Geontologies* is the fourth in her series on Dwelling in Late Liberalism that began with *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action* (1994, Chicago) and followed with *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006, Duke) and *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011, Duke). Like many anthropologists, Povinelli's work is tied to ethnographic experience, wedded to a specific place. Much of her writing has taken shape around the Aboriginal Belyuen community of northern Australia. *Geontologies* sketch a map for its readers, not of space or place; however, but of the conceptual ontologies of settler late liberalism and the Anthropocene that bear on the "cramped spaces" in which her Belyuen friends live.

In this, her most recent monograph, Povinelli offers a retheorization of power questioning the dominance of Foucauldian biopolitics as an analytic for late liberal governance. As she argues, the prolonged focus on the concept of life in critical scholarship has missed the ways that power presides over a more fundamental distinction between Life and Nonlife—not innocent terms, but categories of being (and therefore capitalized). Geontopower names a mode of late liberal governance that works on and through the dividing line between Life and Nonlife. It gets its power (quite literately) from categorizing Nonlife as such: as a something that can be said to be lifeless.

Throughout the chapters, Povinelli shows how the separation of Nonlife from Life enables the extractive economies of settler liberalism. The boundary guides decisions over what forms geologic materials ought to take: If they are to remain in the Earth or circulate as technological components and whether they can be extracted without recourse to consequences (or sacrifice). This boundary also presides over which lives matter in late liberalism, governing difference among humans and between species. Mining companies and the state wield the definition of Nonlife over Povinelli's friends who struggle to persist in the extractive and irradiated landscapes of the Northern Territories in Australia. She shows how the Belyuen's rock and river ancestors pose challenges to the logics of geontopower and the

prevailing politics of extraction. But the state also weaponizes these views as reason to treat Aboriginal communities as living fossils, hold-overs from a past to be respected only through the lens of memorialization.

Just as biopower never fully eclipsed disciplinary or sovereign power, geontopower does not name a new regime of political power. Nor does it serve as a sequel to Foucault's analysis of late modernity. Povinelli develops a political analytic that describes how the distinction between Life and Nonlife is—and has always been—a predicate of all of these forms of power. Sovereign power and late settler liberalism both require that Life be thought of in exceptional terms, as distinct from death as well as Nonlife. The ecological and social conditions of our contemporary moment make geontopower visible as never before, as climate change and the naming of the Anthropocene seem to be eroding the divide between Life and Nonlife. But, as Povinelli shows, the articulation of Life and Nonlife matters as much in the unraveling of that divide as it does in its maintenance.

With reference to Foucault's analysis, Povinelli gives us three figures of geontopower all of which provide an account of the changing boundaries between Life and Nonlife: the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus. Like Foucault's four figures of biopower (the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, the perverse adult), these figures are diagnostics of the ways that late liberalism governs difference. As she writes, they serve as a "collection of governing ghosts who exist in between two worlds in late settler liberalism—the world in which [. . .] Life (bios) and Nonlife (geos, meteoros) are sensible and dramatic and the world in which these enclosures are no longer, or have never been, relevant, sensible, or practical" (14).

All three of these figures disturb. On one hand, they seem to harbor the potential for political transformations. The Desert is the end point of climate change and the nuclear apocalypse. We find it circulating within Naomi Klein and Elizabeth Kolbert's writing on climate change where it is the limit of and catalyst for a transition away from late liberalism and disaster capitalism. Within this imaginary we find the sustenance of life as the primary motivation for social change, its operating principle indicative of a space that could continue to flourish if properly managed.

The Animist casts all things as forms of life, as participatory actants in the dramas of (primarily human) socio-political events. In Chapter 2, "Can Rocks Die?" Povinelli considered the extraction of manganese from the sacred rock formation Two Women Sitting Down to take on the figure and role of the Animists, who infuses nonlife with all of the comforts and potentials of life. In finding vitality in Nonlife, the Animist promises to re-orient hierarchies of action and being. Critiquing Jane Bennett and Eugene Thacker's readings of Deleuze and Spinoza, however, Povinelli argues that the Animist imposes the qualities of life onto nonlife. Rather than bring heightened awareness to nonlife, the Animist excises nonlife from the world by simply enfolding it within life and eclipsing the conditions of Nonlife—inaction, inertness, finitude—with an all-encompassing *élan vital*. Rather than decentering life or human-made forms of productivity, nonlife is brought into the orbit of (human) life and stripped of its capacity to remake us.

The Virus names the wide-ranging and uncontrollable elements that threaten the social order—the terrorist, kudzu, or jellyfish (see, for example, Johnson, 2016). Between Life and Nonlife as well as Life and Death, the Virus seems to exist outside of geontopower. But in serving as the primary threat, the Virus mobilizes political power toward bio- and geosecurity.

In some chapters, these figures appear central to the text. In others they seem to animate the analysis from the background. While their role in settler late liberalism is made clear in the introduction, in later chapters their status as symptom and/or diagnostic is less apparent.

Nevertheless, these figures help to mark the shifting boundary between Life and Nonlife, at times a hinge that enables the continued existence of settler late liberalism, at others an attempt to challenge those conditions.

Throughout, Povinelli avoids the danger of paying lip service to decolonization while reducing difference to culture and conflict to a series of negotiations or contestations that can be resolved through dialogue (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2018). Her work expands the language available to geography and the social sciences more broadly, particularly around calls to build toward decolonial research practices (see, for example, Asselin and Basile 2018; Jazeel, 2017; Naylor et al., 2017; Noxolo, 2017; Radcliffe, 2017).

More than in her previous volumes, Povinelli's *Geontologies* sutures together philosophy, science, the law, and multiple stories and worldings from and of her friends in the Karrabing Indigenous Corporation and Film Collective. Together with ethnographic encounters in Indigenous Australia, Povinelli's text weaves political theory, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies. Povinelli does not maintain distinction between disciplinary modes of knowing in ways that we are used to. It is therefore difficult to know how to characterize this text. Is it a work of philosophy? Anthropology? Cultural studies? The text conforms to none of these disciplines. Stories of everyday encounters speak back to Speculative Realism, Canguillhem, and Foucault, among so many others. The transitions among these registers can be dizzying, as Karrabing Collective films respond to questions posed by, for example, Malabou. One of the most pleasurable things about reading Povinelli's work is how her life—so obviously not singular, but multiple—infuses her work as part of a collections of experiences and encounters that undeniably exceed life itself.

The following reflections on *Geontologies* express the non-singularity of Povinelli's work, tugging on different threads entangled in this most recent of her books. Cutting across human-environment geography, political geography, anthropology, and political theory, these interpretations pry at different fissures represented by *Geontologies*, opening several conversations across a variety of themes to which Povinelli responds. In "Reading Povinelli in the shadow of the Alberta Tar Sands," Zoe Todd connects the book to the ongoing politics of extraction in Western Canada. Setting Povinelli's geontopower alongside *nehiyaw* (Cree) legal principle of *wahkohtowin* (kinship, relatedness), Todd shows how indigenous principles of power, governance, and being yield alternative practices within the "cramped space" of late liberalism. From this vantage point, Todd mobilizes these cosmologies as situated ways of being that seek to refuse and transcend liberal colonialities (and how those colonialities manifest in white supremacy, capital, and patriarchy) as they seek to constrain Indigeneity itself. Elizabeth Johnson, in "Unsettled Ground," illustrates the tactical ways that Povinelli's geontologies unsettle seemingly unified visions of life and materiality that became signposts of late liberalism. Tracing the intricacies of an argument that neither injects vitality into the nonliving, nor leaves the nonliving as bare and inert, Johnson expresses the nuances of Povinelli's geologic and temporal interventions. The epistemological concerns Johnson raises are addressed by Garnet Kindervater in "Life, Thought, Nonlife," which explores the relation between geontologies' explicit ontological commitments, their epistemological requirements, and the political consequences produced by onto- and epistemological frictions. Kindervater focuses on the notion of "citational power" to express a fundamental tension between being and knowledge animating Povinelli's theses, and which produce a particularly critical orientation to late liberalism itself. Kathryn Yusoff's "You are not here" situates Povinelli's writing among a burgeoning revolution in geopolitics that reimagines the earth beyond conventional bio- and international politics. Exploring the stakes of value surrounding world and life creation (ontogeny) and lithospheric deformation (orogeny), Yusoff explores the ways that political value is ascribed to categorizations—and more importantly, what such categorical

ascriptions portend for projects of political change. In "Hovering," Keith Woodward explores the distance—psychic, political, and physical—produced by the liberal monopoly over meaning in its latest phase. Woodward shows a kind of alienation produced for those whose lifeworlds are alien to the objectivity of the Life-Nonlife metaphysical distinction. In so doing, "Hovering" considers the range of ways that conventional metaphysics undergirding late liberalism create not only a cramped intellectual space for theory, but physically, materially marginalize those whose realities are articulated differently. In her response to the interventions, Povinelli meditates on reading and being read, taking up the opportunity to reflect on writings that past and readers present.

As much as these interpretations of Povinelli's *Geontologies* explore central themes of the author's work, they also expose the range of interpretations a text like *Geontologies* encourages. Povinelli's work seems itself to invite this kind of engagement where we can contemplate collectively, thinking about the power and value of geontologies, as generative and multiple. Accordingly, the forum below might also operate as an artifact of readership and interpretation. Wherein a multifaceted text, compelling as it is sometimes slippery, generates not only different perspectives, but also a range of interventions. Each reading is a symptom of its respondent's critical orientations, as well as the multivalence of the writing they hold in common. With consequences for human geographers as well as thinkers of the Anthropocene, climate change, political power, and new materialism, Povinelli's work connects the experience of late liberalism and settler colonialism across space, place, and matter.

Reading Povinelli in the shadow of the Alberta Tar Sands: Thinking wahkohtowin into disruptions of late liberalism

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I grew up in Alberta, a Canadian province that is metaphorically and literally drenched in oil. You may know the province today through one particularly virulent assemblage, the Alberta Tar Sands. The organizing force of our province's colonial politics is most firmly the mechanics, logics, and yearnings of *extraction*. In other words, geontopower is vehemently at work in my home territory.

In *Geontologies,* Povinelli shows us, through the notion of geontopower, that it is not enough to merely *recognize* non-Western or Indigenous ontologies. We must engage with the consequences and implications of their erasure and capture (or, to reference Simpson (2014), *apprehension*) by Euro-American/White supremacist/colonial actors. And, we must reckon with the foundational violence of the forced imposition of the Life/Nonlife binary upon myriad worlds, existences, assemblages, and peoples.

The "cramped space" that Povinelli (2016: 6) suggests that Indigenous interlocutors are forced to occupy in late liberalism is indeed constricted by the violences of white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, and the brutality of western universalizing paradigms which seek to viciously erase non-western ontologies in the name of global capital. Back home, Indigenous legal traditions, cosmologies, and ontologies arguably operate as modes of Indigenous refusal (Simpson, 2014, 2016). Reflecting on this, I am struck by how even the bluntest of epistemic weapons, including the Life/Nonlife binary and the geontopower at the heart of petrostate and extractive politics in Canada, has not succeeded in erasing the force and manifestations of Indigenous laws, stories, kinship, and knowledge here. This is indeed what Povinelli demonstrates in her work in Australia. Nehiyaw (Cree) philosopher Erica Violet Lee (2017) teaches us to refuse the cramped space relegated to Indigenous bodies, worlds, existences, assemblages, and ontologies in late liberalism. Lee insists on love and intimacy in the midst of the violence wrought by colonial forces, upending the colonial expectation that Indigenous longing and worlds can only ever be spectral:

> I cannot talk about death while your fingers taste like wild rice and your breath turns to sunlight in my belly. I cannot be disappearing if I insist upon a celebration in the midst of upheaval. I cannot be extinct if I refuse to let the lake settle. What do you want? I want to spend hours with your heat, talking about absolutely nothing of consequence. I want a moment to mourn the nutrients spilled, to accept this trauma as our kin, and then I want to move on. (Lee, 2017)

This, too, is what I wish. Lee's words here are arguably a manifestation of the nehiyaw legal principle of wahkohtowin (alternate spelling: wahkootowin), a principle that Métis historian Brenda MacDougall (2011) defines as:

> a worldview that privileged relatedness to land, people (living, ancestral and those to come), the spirit world, and creatures inhabiting the space. In short, this worldview, wahkootowin, is predicated upon a specific Aboriginal notion and definition of family as a broadly conceived sense of relatedness of all beings, human and non-human, living and dead, physical and spiritual.

While Indigenous bodies and worlds are forced to occupy vanishingly small space in late liberalism and are erased nearly wholly in universalist understandings of contemporary phenomena like the Anthropocene, this cramped space is nonetheless simultaneously a space occupied by myriad, plural and pulsating cosmos, ontologies, and worlds (which Povinelli ably demonstrates in the chapters of *Geontologies*). It is here that Indigenous praxis and philosophies—including principles like wahkohtowin—quite deliberately refract the forces of geontopower, bending and shifting them to yield alter-narratives and possibilities (or what Povinelli might refer to as *the otherwise*). Some astronomers and physicists argue that, after the Big Bang, the universe contained all of its materials in tightly bound worlds and cosmos expanding ever outward, unbothered by the momentary constriction of their circumstances (Library of Congress, 2017). Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the plural and simultaneous circumstances of Indigenous cosmologies, ontologies, worlds in this moment of late liberalism: constricted in the cramped space, yes, but also moving unapologetically through and beyond the violences of empire, white supremacy, capital, and patriarchy—literally expanding space itself in powerful forms of existence and manifestation.

Kim Fortun (2014) argues that even if "we have never been modern", as Latour suggests, we nonetheless have a "modernist mess" on our hands as we contend with the toxicities and

pollutants issued by late industrialism (Fortun, 2014: 312). Similarly, in reading Povinelli's work, I am struck by how, even if the Life/Nonlife dichotomy is the main ontological driver of late liberalism (which I think it is), we nonetheless also have a biopolitical mess on our hands, as Povinelli demonstrates. This requires our ability to work in many registers, and across pluralities, to tend to the violences of geontopower *and* biopower—whose offspring are the white supremacist, colonial, heteropatriarchal, capitalist nightmares wrought by European and American imperialism over the last half millennium. Povinelli's intervention here is therefore an important one, in that her work forces us to contend with the biopolitical mess *and* the geontopower that drive the universalizing forces of global capitalist liberalism.

This book, with its care and attention to Indigenous theory, must and will set the stage in Euro-American Academe to center discourses that take seriously non-western theorists and their concerns, urgencies, and entanglements. It is a step towards even more robust provincialization of European thought, as Mbembe (2015: 13) urges us to embrace (drawing on the work of Fanon). Perhaps most importantly, this book forces the reader to query the epistemic violences of universalist/imperial knowledge, law, and governance. This is particularly necessary at a time when geontopower drives the contemporary discourses of the Anthropocene, geopolitical turmoil, climate change, space exploration and many other current crises, conflicts, and consternations. As Povinelli teaches us, it is not enough to acknowledge alternate ontologies, and we must simultaneously dismantle the violent geontologies of late liberalism. Doing so will require a great deal of courage and care.

On unsettled ground

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Povinelli's *Geontologies* unsettles. Rather than providing a grounding line upon which one might develop political agendas or alliances, Povinelli interrogates how the *geo* works as Wittgenstein's "propositional hinge" (2016: 37). Each chapter in Povinelli's text offers another turn of the hinge, focusing on differences between settler and indigenous ways of distinguishing Life and Nonlife. With each turn, she shows how Life has been rendered an exceptional, dramatic character against a backdrop of a Nonlife to be manipulated only in the service of Life. The *geontopower* of late settler liberalism decides not only on how Nonlife is to be categorized, but how it is to be manipulated. Minerals of the earth are extracted, often made to re-manifest, as Povinelli notes, in the form of technological objects. This creates the conditions for late liberalism to settle the world by uniting land and many lives in a damaged political and toxicological history. The violence of settler colonialism cannot be undone–the land cannot be unsettled–but Povinelli's writing shakes the conceptual worlds upon which settler liberalism continues to ground itself.

Povinelli's ontological gambit posits the *geo*—in the form of rocks, rivers, and fossils—is decidedly unsettled: neither human nor nonhuman, living nor dead. She takes up and takes issue with the arguments of speculative realism, object-oriented ontologies, and new

materialisms all of which have attempted to offer new vocabularies of Nonlife. At the heart of Quentin Meillassoux's speculative realism (2006) and Graham Harman's object oriented ontologies (2011), for example, Povinelli finds a categorical indifference. These philosophers have thought the earth as an object unto itself, one that exists as non-relational or, more precisely non-correlational. For them, material things express a world of objects that are not contingent upon the minds and bodies that apprehend them. In Nigel Clark's words, they depict a world that is "to a large degree, indifferent to us" (2010: 50). In contrast, through Povinelli and the Karrabing Collective, we find an earth that is neither the Kantian product of human structures of thought nor the indifferent rock that operates through processes distinct from our own life-worlds. Instead, earthly elements are "intensely interested" in the movements and makings of collectivity. Here, different forms of existence respond to one another: Fossils and streams manifest themselves to human perception as the products of a "mutual orientation of existences" in place (59). This is a world of beings that *can* but at times *chooses not to be* indifferent to us. It is a ground that cannot be claimed or owned.

Povinelli treads carefully here, ever aware of the trap of Lovelockian vitalism, in which all the world vibrates with lively activity. Povinelli's figure of the Animist—found in the works of Eugene Thacker (2010) and Jane Bennett (2010), Latour's "Parliament of Things," and at times in the fields of New Materialism, and Actor Network Theory—names this tendency. The Animist excises Nonlife from the world by enfolding it within Life. Nonlife is therefore pinned to a productivist drive. This blinds us to incapacity, lassitude, and unbecomings. Rather than bring us closer to nonlife or death, the desire for "ceaseless becoming" expressed by the Animist "allow[s] us to escape what is worse than death and finitude, namely, absolute inertness" (55). By extending the attributes of Life to Nonlife, we anthropomorphize it, stripping it of its capacity to unsettle networks, politics, and things to which we have become habituated.

That Povinelli's writings on Nonlife also undermine the treadmill of progress—an ideology born in conjunction with settler colonialism—should come as no surprise. Through geontopower, the state enacts violence on those who would declare rocks and rivers as ancestors, rendering the survival of indigenous collectively a matter of preservation or a past mode of being, valued only in its memorialization. In contrast, Povinelli and the Karrabing film collective show us ways in which ancestral time is both "present and durative" (85). Against Ranciere's primary focus on language as the means by which we lay claim to a collective "we," Povinelli proposes that Charles Pierce's "semiosis" turns our attention to the constitution of collective life through "coordination of the habits of being" (138). These habits become collectives that persist only so long as they continue to hang together. From here we begin to see the ways that human and nonhuman collectives—including those that dominate in our time of settler late liberalism—are constantly reproduced.

Through her turn to Pierce's work, Povinelli suggests that the forms of Life and Nonlife that have taken hold, that have come to be seen as permanent lasting truths, have only ever been tendencies that we settle into. These are built neither on truth or knowledge, but on habit and repetition. Unsettling the patterns of late liberalism therefore also requires questioning the epistemic cultures that guide it and its potential futures. These include those modes of knowledge production that drive climate change research and the conditions of the Anthropocene. These typically view nonhuman life as *subject to* histories of human settlement. But what might an epistemology look like that takes seriously Life and Nonlife as responsive to (or, even, responsible for) our modes of engagement? Povinelli is clearly not angling for a view of the earth as Gaia; indeed, the earth and its processes as such are not issue in this text. Instead, Povinelli calls on us to account for the conditions of "an object's endurance, extension, and domination of interest" whether that object is a stretch of land or

a planetary body (91). This requires attending to how the techniques of late liberal governance produce a "differential distribution" of our collective entanglements with the world. As those techniques are brought to light, the forms of Life and Nonlife forged in late settler liberalism begin to seem more fragile, far less durative, and far from "progressive".

In being unsettled, Povinelli's writing creates an opening for thought, making transparent a kind of vulnerable honesty. Her stories from the Northern Territories—some of encounters that took place now over 30 years ago—speak for the possibility of forging lasting attachments to place and people while simultaneously undermining the settled spaces and sedimented onto-epistemologies to which we have become habituated.

Life, thought, nonlife: Ontology and political knowledge in Povinelli's critique of liberalism

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In *Geontologies* (2016), Elizabeth Povinelli argues that biopolitics lost its (perhaps singular) dominance as the late liberal age corrupted distinctions within "ordering divisions of Life and Nonlife" (5). Biopolitics, Povinelli contends, depends upon an underlying form of power—one that for me is more an epistemology than ontology, but no less political. This proposed concept of power commanded a logically prior distinction between, not what lives and dies, but "the lively and the inert". Or, clearer, another form of power struck between the living/dead and that which never had the chance. This subtending force is geontopower, a concept first traced by the book's opening pages, and which expresses several critical, if perhaps fragmented, facets:

1. In distinguishing it from biopolitics: "... ***a set of discourse, affects, and tactics*** used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife" (4, my emphasis).
2. In choosing geontopower over other plausible signatures: "... I want to intensify the ***contrasting components of nonlife*** (geos) ***and being*** (ontology) currently in play in the late liberal governance of difference and markets" (5, my emphasis).
3. Then, in a note to the first of these: "... the concepts of geontology (Nonlife being) and geontopower (***the power of and over Nonlife beings***) are meant to indicate the current phase of thought and practice that define late liberalism ..." (179n13, my emphasis).

Hence, three features: A convergence of practical knowledge production; an intensified wedge between nonlife and being; a power of and over Nonlife beings—each an expression of "late liberalism".

It is easy to find oneself enamored by the implications of geontopower and its cognate concepts, not least because it enables a conceptual distance between Earth and political force in an age when quasi-apocalyptic debates hinge on the platitude that "the human" (*anthrōpos*) is destroying "the Earth" (*geos*). *Geontologies* does not do away with such distinctions but *exposes* such distinctions—a necessary addition to critique in the Anthropocene.

Yet the allure of geontopower may well also do disservice to what geontopower ultimately articulates, which is neither the classical liberalism associated with secular-capitalist-democratic modernity, nor about the ontological status of living/nonliving/dead things. Geontopower, like biopolitics, revolves around political efforts to define inclusion in political matters. Foucault in his earliest discussions of biopower, for example, questioned how a regime *promoting* life could be capable of killing. His answer: "Racism … [whose] first function … [is] to create caesuras within the biological continuum" (Foucault, 2003: 255).[1] Such caesuras serve not merely to legitimize political behavior, or to add quasi-scientific nuance to hatred. They also to superimpose upon ontologically exant things a kind of knowledge supposedly justifying the supremacy of some over others, and underwriting the attendant institutions delivering violence upon *whom it defined* as colonizeable, enslavable, those beyond salvation, the wretched, and the killable. Geontopower may use the same techniques to superimpose alterity upon those things outside of the scope of vitality or, at least, those that have been lifeless for impossible stretches of time.

This is important and interesting in the context of Povinelli's monograph for a few key reasons. The concept of geontopower might lack some concreteness in the text because of its (too?) many valences. But when taken as multiple expressions of a particular regime of late liberalism, geontopower's varied senses illustrate the complexity not of an abstract modality of power, but of a regime of power in a particular periodization. Geontopower, after all, only becomes thinkable in an age where the foundation between Life and Nonlife ceases to satisfy and becomes apparent as their common ground begins to shake.

I note the epistemological force of difference-making because even in "early" liberalism non-Christians, denizens of the antipodes, in other words, the "savage," the unenlightened, the human fodder of the European colonial project—despite having life—did not have life of redeemable value to the metropole. This was a conceptual distinction animating a political project of centuries-long immiseration. Liberalism as difference-maker relied on a revolution, not in what had inherent ontological value, but by what (and whom) a modern quasi-science *perceived* of value across its own intellectual scale of difference.

Such accountings and their errors were matters of philosophical description and scientific testing (Wynter, 2003). It was not a power distilled from ontological difference, but a power exercised through politics of vision and description. It was a power that in turn emboldened critique, which in turn said: We will reappropriate a word of hate; or, "[the colonizer] transform[s] *himself* into an animal" (Césaire, 2000: 41); or, in Jeanette Winterson's *Weight*, a retelling of the myth of Atlas: "My father was Poseidon. My mother was the Earth … My mother and father teemed with life. They *were* life" (Winterson, 2005: 11). By the transformation of value, how presumably never-living things become revalued, or how some living things become devalued, each movement of Povinelli's monograph expresses the nontrivial force of naming, of political semiology. As Povinelli puts it in her concluding chapter, "Late liberalism is a *citational power* that is able to figure a series of geographically and temporally diverse and dispersed occurrences into a *part of this thing we call liberalism*" (2016: 169, original emphasis).

Cannot the "citational power" of Povinelli's late liberalism, one that seizes on governance of markets and difference, find an affinity in Edward Said's orientalism and its imaginary

geography? After all, late liberalism, Povinelli argues, is "not anywhere or any thing" (Povinelli, 2016). Its citational power is not mere naming, but the deeper power to organize thought, to render same and different—but not at the ontological level, at the level of knowledge; at the level, not of what matter exists, but what we *think* about what matters. Already in a long line of thinkers connecting epistemology to power and difference, Said (1994) called this a "radical realism," where a vexing breadth of seemingly unrelated phenomena are unified by a word—in his case, the Orient— "which then is considered to either to have acquired, or more simply *to be*, reality" (72, my emphasis).

This radical realism is a ruse. It is a trick that creates knowledge as a means to organize a political vision of reality, then pivoting and calling it empirical reality—claiming its fabricated coherence as ontological truth. It is a sleight of hand in which Povinelli rightly detects the latent force carried within it to transform epistemological coherence into a claim to ontological reality. Or, to recall Said once more, "... we will appreciate how possible it is for many objects or places or times to be assigned roles and given meanings that acquire objective validity only *after* the assignments are made" (1994: 54, original emphasis).

All this seems interesting at the level of semiology, or of epistemological and ontological conceptualism, but where if at all are the political stakes? Writing about Thomas Hobbes, a figure rarely evoked in recent discussions of life and its value, the politics of affect, and the animist exercise of power apart from human life itself, Sheldon Wolin observed:

> ... Hobbes stated the basic task of political philosophy: to identify and define what was truly political. ... [T]he function of theory was to help identify a specific type of authority and its province of activity. To identify and to define is to abstract certain characteristic roles and activities in order to subsume them under a classifying scheme. (2004: 259)

This means that the first activity of a political philosophy is to outline in/exclusion. The first act of theory with political merit is to locate authority in the purview set forth by in/exclusion. Just as there is no lack of politics in the division cast by biopolitics between life and death, there is no such apoliticality in the division between geontopower's founding violence of Life-Nonlife. To manage their proprieties, their normative distinctions, their potencies and prowesses requires, not ontological framing, but epistemological naming. And outlining their various authorities and exercises of power grounds any reorientation; it sets not just their parameters, but also their politics.

Povinelli knows this all too well. By the end of the book, late liberalism becomes an adjective for geontopower, which imbues geontopower with an air of an overarching principle capable of organizing a period in human and planetary history. She writes:

> And like late liberalism more generally, late liberal geontopower is a social project whose purpose is to keep an arrangement of accumulation in place through the specific governance of difference and markets that stretches across human and nonhuman forms of existence. Late liberal geontopower is an activity of fixing and co-substantiating phenomena, aggregating and assembling disparate elements into a common form and purpose. It is a set of dominant patterns, constantly tinkered with and revised according to local materials and conditions, according to which Life is fabricated and Nonlife is used. (Povinelli, 2016: 173–174)

Call it object formation, or citational power, regardless, the extent to which late liberalism's work of substantiating, aggregating, and uniting undertakes first and foremost to ally itself with a modern form of accumulation that *always*, and in the name of scientific exactitude, marginalized people as things, landscapes as enclosures, *geos* as mere use-value.

Or, as Andreas Malm recently put it, "Only in a society that strives to turn every bit of nature into profit can the idea that nature has no independent existence take root" (2018: 217).

In the end, Povinelli's geonto(citational)power renames liberalism as a market-infused system of differentiation. Geonto(citational)power reaffirms that liberalism strikes between peoples and their others. But also, now, and more clearly in focus, liberalism differentiates Life itself from Nonlife.

Is this not the supreme act of knowledge? To locate, conceptualize, name, and in so doing to reorient reason to what it can never comprehend? I am too Spinozan in my commitments to believe a concluding remark, that "... Nonlife created what it is radically not [i.e., Life]". In reconceiving *geos* as such, this sort of political philosophy intervenes in and acts upon not only "life," but also the very systems that subjugate what modern thought has excised from political value—whether human, merely living, or not.

Povinelli's concept of geontopower makes these namings, their values and their impacts more knowable, and therefore more possible as political subjects and objects. As the conceptual distance between human and planet supposedly widens, and at the exact same moment when their supposedly different forces collide to threaten the existence of not only all that lives, but that has ever been captured by thought, knowledge of geontopower perhaps bridges lengths formerly prohibited by liberalism in ways capable of restaging what we value, whether living or not.

"You are not here": Sessing[2] the line between ontogeny and orogeny

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Between the biophysical idea of *ontogeny* (origination and genealogy, biological "family" of species life and its development) and the geophysical concept of *orogeny* (the geologic deformation of the Earth's lithosphere) questions emerge about genealogical description, as a biological mode and analytic, which stories earth. What and who are kin? Why do biological existents get kin recognition (albeit only some) and lithic existents get to be already classified as property? And how is kinship a sphere in which matter categories and modes of attention about what can exist and what can be extinguished get established? How does a biocentric focus get coupled with the ideal of the white settler family within settler colonialist governance to produce the Life/Nonlife division of matter as a regime of governance; a governance that enacts possession and dispossession? This is the timely question Elizabeth Povinelli asks. If the carbon imaginary is the basis of biocentric life (and by extension, an ethics of governance in its myriad of moral, administrative and juridical forms), what possibility is there for indigenous communities of having a rock in the family? How to withstand the genealogical exclusions of settler colonial geo-logics that don't recognize the earth as kin?

Povinelli's *Geontologies* sits at a crossroads of critical engagement with indigenous politics of earth and matter and the various Anthropocene pluralisms that are busily rewriting worlds. The Anthropocene offers an engagement, albeit contradictory, with the notion of inhuman forces as a subjective mode of life (and death), thereby reshaping the narrative of the Life/Nonlife dynamic in specific ways. Nonlife is suddenly recognized in the Anthropocene as a life force and *life itself* is threatened by the acquisition of this inhuman force (i.e., "geologic life" can be a toxic asset). The appearance of the Anthropocene as a concept at this moment of political ecological excess denotes a quiver of late liberal apprehension about the continuance of *its* life and its *givenness* as birthright and genealogical asset. This anxiety around liberalism's reproductive capacities (or white settler futurism) is generating a set of questions around the ontological basis of western life in its current formation. Elsewhere the conditions of racial capitialism have been securing shitty conditions for marginalized communities for much longer and with much less attention than the current Anthropocenic meme. It is perhaps no wonder that we see a certain ontological promiscuity within these new earth discourses, drawing on Indigenous, Black and "other" discourses (feminist, queer, nonhuman) that disrupt the narrative of Modernity and its end to offer a way out of a blocked future, which is looking decidedly precarious in its ability to reproduce the juridical canon of humanism, whiteness and reason (and its "revised" forms of poshumanism and the environmental humanities). I think of this desire as the desire for ontological deliverance: If we just rejig the ontology then it doesn't have to be the end of the world, well the end of this late liberal version of it, anyhow. Yet, ontological deliverance will not save you.

No matter how the child of the future is refashioned into the avatar of a mixed-race girl that will lead civilization out from the ruins to a different future (normally into the promised land of Canada) in any number of cli-fi films and novels, the futurism is the same. It is important that she is mixed race because she is a reproductive figure of incorporation and assimilation, a post racial figure for the end of the world that side-steps the deep colonial histories of ending worlds since 1492. That post racial Anthropocenic futurism takes up whiteness as genealogical category of power and redeems it rather than annihilating it (as long the colonial violence of forced removal of mixed-race children is forgotten), "we" can see new forms of genealogy being brokered. It is here that there should perhaps be caution in the alliances that are made in the ascending time of *Geos*. While the geohumanities engages with rock aesthetics that are often impervious to the grammars of extraction that mobilized the inhuman as a commodity and subjective form, Povinelli's accounts of existents in hard-scrabble places are enduring to give regard to the possibilities of the otherwise of such relations that forge their languages of existence under ongoing settler colonialism violence. Anthropocene discourses certainly bare all the traits that Povinelli describes as the "speculative games of those who do not feel or are unaffected by the intensely interested nature of geontopower in late liberalism" (85).

Into this trauma of Nonlife comes Povinelli's timely analytic of geontopower (the power of and over Nonlife beings), grappling its way across the scarred skeins that are inscribed by this form of governance and the quagmire of its biopolitical allegiances (to biocentric white European norms). It is important that this work is situated in a deep commitment to working with Karrabing analytics; analytics that occupy the narrow margins and violent eruptions of late liberal settler governance, as it "foregrounds the distributed nature of enfleshment" (174). *Geonotologies* sears into this "prisonhouse of biontology" to disrupt the inside/outside renderings of Life/Nonlife through the sored tissue of redress, attention and desire. That is, Povinelli pays attention to the affects that are marshaled at the Life/Nonlife border and which become its form of implementation. These are affects that often

occupy the less dramatic forms of living and dying that the vitalist paradigm provides in its life/death caesura. Following her previous work on quasi-events, she convincingly demonstrates how the fixation with the event gathers a set of priorities that make life seem as the inevitable organizer of possibility/existence, when it is the "event" that does that work to establish life as a tautological horizon of its own accomplishment. In this sense, all vitalism is transcendental. It is the tense of the event, rendered as a set of strategies, affects and divisions of materiality, which creates a deformation in the possibility of other demands. Povinelli's concentration on the "activity of endurance" (28) through a detailed traversal of Karrabing analytics offers a different praxis, whereby theory emerges through its own activation in the telling, in the redress, in the regard, and in the apprehension of reciprocity that is demanded from so-called nonlife. In Karrabing analytics, embodied obligation is not a work of finitude or completion in the event, "but rather ongoing efforts of attention to often-nuanced interactions between human actions and other modes of actions" (79) where "truth was not a set of abstract propositions but a manner of attentiveness and proper behavior to the manifestations of a field of intervolved materials" (79). In this zone of attention, nonlife emerges as a political order in the body of a creek and an intimacy and investment in its endurance. Rocks as kin.

While the ever-shakier foundations of the "good life" reveal themselves to be undermined and overburdened from within and without, settler colonialism's golden spike of "Life" has long impaled "others" through a more discrete but no less deadly eugenics aimed at severing the interrelation between people and earth and consolidating its norms of property and possession at that site. The foil of the Life/Nonlife, inside/outside, lively/stone-dead game of governance is but a lure in the constitution of the settler state that attends to, what the Caribbean theorist Sylvia Wynter called the "selection" and "dysselection" of different people from geography (Wynter, 2003; see also McKittrick, 2014). The indigenous analytics that Povinelli's work is organized from makes apparent how the regime of geontopower (and its operative geo-logics) has a much longer duration than that to which the recent spasm of liberal anxiety around the Anthropocene attests. While the Life/Nonlife binary is the last of the big binaries to get due attention (albeit in the form of a geological epoch), it is certainly one of the most persistent, supposedly self-evident naturalized rubrics, Povinelli argues. It has maintained its hold on the imaginary, from critical theory to mineral extraction, to disimagining that rocks listen (see Povinelli, 1995). While the sciences might be giving us mineral evolution and deep life, it seems the attachment to the wonder of life (and its narcissistic forms in the white settler family) continually negate these mineralogical fields of emergence and attachments beyond tightly governed genealogies.

Here, it might be asked whether what is imagined as sovereign is perhaps not the division of Life/Nonlife as the fundamental ground of governance, but rather its detour through the grammars of geology that cast those that are "dysselected" from geography in an intimacy with nonlife through what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls a logic of *exclusion* that works through constitutive *inclusion* (2011: 146). That is, the Indigene is a figure of exclusion from a certain politics of life that becomes included through a figuration of inclusion on the side of nonlife (as "Stone Age race", "breathing fossils in the way of progress", practitioners of divergent subject/object relations in the judiciary, arche-fossil of land claims, deadly viruses in sex panics, non-biologically legible, reciprocate with stones, etc. in Povinelli's text). Thinking with the logics of this settler liberalism that Povinelli names geontopower, she gives us three figures of the operative thought; the Desert, Animist and Virus that move through the text, like ghosts reassembling themselves in different guises at the feast. These figures express the deformation of the Life/Nonlife dynamic. What is on the table for the carnivorous colonial consumption is the extinguishment of an "interested" world in

which the "on-going efforts of attention" to existents in all their manifold configurations and "secretions" are rendered inarticulate. Such attention and on-going obligation to local existents in the present of settler colonialism requires an analytic of "mutual belonging" and "entangled substances" (77) as a grammar secured against its erasure.

Here, the hinge of the Life/Nonlife governance becomes exposed in its subtle erasure as a material and temporal placing that is enacted through the dynamic of Australian settler law that continues to refuse the presence of such obligations, thereby curtailing their political present. Povinelli argues that the work is not to arbiter between these claims to truth but to attend to "whose arguments about truth and persuasion ... gain the power to set the norm" (91). All existents matter, but some divisions in matter get to enact the geopolitical cuts that extinguish other existents. In this wound of *Geos* that skins human and nonhuman life, genealogy is the hidden ghost in the machine of Life/Nonlife governance, of acceptable and illegitimate kin. *Geonotologies* provides a critical project of re-description in the presence of lithic kin, in which the "citational" power of Karrabing analytics is both an aesthetics of existent figures within a different set of geopolitical allegiances and a "linguistic category" (157) that keeps other arrangements in place. *Sessing* the line between ontogeny and orogeny, Povinelli's Geontopower names a lived, "cruddy" margin, an operative mode of governance and an analytical praxis for making it otherwise, for living with rocks in the family.

Hovering

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> "... demandez au vent, à la vague, à l'étoile, à l'oiseau, à l'horloge, à tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout ce qui parle ..."
> —Baudelaire

The closing lines of *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*'s penultimate chapter find Elizabeth Povinelli and several "colleagues"—members of Karrabing, an Aboriginal media collective—hovering in a helicopter "over a vast mangrove and reef complex" (2016: 144, 166–167) located somewhere along the coast southwest of the Daly River in Australia's Northern Territory. They have travelled here from Belyuen Community to the north to participate in "a land survey for potential mining exploration in [the] area" (145), but theirs is more of a sojourn than a journey, more a suspension than a passage. We do not witness their voyage, but rather discover them already in the air, floating above the coastline, frozen in mid-flight. Nor will the volume's "Conclusion" bring closure to this scene. It will offer no end to their hovering, no escape from the enveloping copter cabin, no eventual descent to familiar ground. Instead, the claustrophobic helicopter scene recalls to the reader the many "cramped space[s] in which [Povinelli's] Indigenous colleagues are forced to maneuver as they attempt to keep relevant their critical analytics and practices of existence" (6). Captured within a pervasive Western settler colonialism, the group remains subject to a physical

enclosure beyond which awaits perilous void; they are held at a remove from an area that they recognize as traditionally indigenous space; their ways of accessing such spaces are often mediated by settler colonial interests in property, extraction, and production; their peculiar view-from-nowhere is enabled only by the entanglement of capital and late liberal governance of space; their own position allows them not to determine *if* the space will be mined, but only advise *where* the mining might take place; and even this is possible only if they perform a position-ality that settler colonial law imagines for them.

The scene traces the narrow psychic, political, and physical space that prefigures existence in settler colonial late liberalism. What constitutes and encircles this claustrophobic zone, Povinelli argues, is Western ideology's management of the division between Life and Nonlife—a metaphysical distinction so pervasive that it governs difference in everything from the physical sciences (the "Carbon Imaginary" structuring physics-chemistry-biology) to philosophical modes of existence (including the supposed irrationalism of "Animism"). Further, the very same divide currently structures discourses surrounding the "new drama" of total extinction through planetary climate disaster (8). This focus signals a change in Povinelli's critical approach, which has long targeted more epistemologically oriented forms of biopower. Beneath these concerns hides an ontological grounding that she calls "geontopower":

> a set of discourse, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife … Thus, geontology is intended to highlight, on the one hand, the biontological enclosure of existence (to characterize all existents as endowed with the quality of Life). And, on the other hand, it is intended to highlight the difficulty of finding a critical language to account for the moment in which a form of power long self-evident in certain regimes of settler late liberalism is becoming visible globally. (4,5)

Although her theoretical canvas has broadened, Povinelli continues to work from within the critical epistemological tradition. *Geontologies* offers no "new ontology" to add to critical theory's ever-growing pile. Nor does it suggest corrections to extant theoretical schemas of Life and Nonlife. If she fixes her gaze upon metaphysics, she does so to clear a space for speaking critically about the politics of ontology and, in particular, the oppression that accompanies thinking existences that are illegible to Western logics. Settler colonialism includes, in other words, the colonization of metaphysics.

Povinelli's cast of colleagues includes several modes of existence that are recognized by Indigenous communities and collectives, such as Karrabing, that do not map cleanly onto those settler colonial imaginaries—rock formations, streams, winds, "Dreaming[s] or totemic formations" (26), each singular and possessing its own name:

> Two Women Sitting Down, Old Man Rock, *durlgmö*, Tjipel, *tjelbak*, and *thimbilirr:* a multitude of geological and meterological modes of existence [that] have prompted people to demand an ethical and political reconsideration of who and what should have a voice in local, national, and planetary governance. (123)

If such beings demand that we turn toward and learn to attend to their existences, then Povinelli's abiding point is that, subject to late liberal logics, they get reduced to categories of "Animism". Consequently, members of Indigenous communities subject to settler colonial governance are forced to "pass" with respect to Western metaphysics: "Indeed, the law demanded that Indigenous claimants bracket the entanglements of existence that transformed colonial dislocation into Indigenous belonging. They were told to tell the law

only about the arrangements of existence that existed before colonial dislocation" (Povinelli, 2016: 80). Thus, the coordinates of geontopower's "cramped space" of existence closely resemble the doubling effect found in Gillian Rose's (1993) "paradoxical space" of experience. But it is also in the midst of being legally, discursively, materially, socially and spatially squeezed by multiple settler colonial infra/structures, subject to a world that Western colonial governance imagines for them and that serves as an *onto-ideological* condition, that the members of Karrabing construct an improvizational, experimental politics.

If thought and experimentation in a cramped space are a key concern of Povinelli's project, nowhere is this clearer than in her reflections on Dreamings. Here, the book recalls her earliest inquiries into object intentionality (Povinelli, 1995): Late liberalism simply cannot believe, as do Povinelli's colleagues, that the Belyuen Dreamings mobilize some form of agency. Responding to this myopia, *Geontologies* introduces such existences—Tjipel, *tjelbak*, *thimbilirr*. . .—to initiate a series of thought experiments as its own mode of improvizational politics, asking: If we had eyes to see or ears to hear (2016: 96), how might we think nonhuman existence beyond the proprietary object relations of settler colonialism? Occasionally, this even means reversing the inquiry: How might such existences react to the work of theorists like Quentin Meillassoux or Georges Canguilhem (96)? I am fascinated by such questions, not least because Povinelli's answer, involving what she calls "materializing attention" (60), resonates with what I have elsewhere called "matter-processing" (as opposed to "subject-thinking": Woodward et al., 2012). However, I am struck by one key difference in our critical terms: Povinelli's decision to retain the language of attention and sensation when speculating about the experience, understanding, and agency (in the broadest senses of the terms) of nonhuman objects, it seems to me, risks reproducing the coordinates of a dogmatic and humanistic image of thought. A prior decision seems to have been made that lays out thought and sensation, idea and the world, as axes composing a grid of Truth. That is, a constant test underlying *Geontologies's* thought experiments concerns a differential between what may hold true for the settler colonialist vs., say, the object. Some resolution to this appears where Povinelli speaks through the voice of Charles Peirce: "Thought does something; it *assembles* and *correlates;* it does not *represent* something" (137, my italics). Certainly, assembly and correlation are key elements of the mutual attention that matter mobilizes. And yet, where she attempts to animate this process in her thought experiments, Povinelli seems to repeatedly fall back upon the language of representation by imagining the possibility for differential correlations across various existences. This is not to suggest that they would not be differential, but only that Povinelli's argument (as well as Meillassoux's!) would seem to demand that our imaginings reach an escape velocity from the cramped space of Western late liberalism's image of thought as a truth-oriented system of correlation.

This is perhaps the other notion that the helicopter scene suggests to the reader: That acts of surveying and reading the world unfold within their own cramped spaces of looking. All the more important, then, that memory enters the scene to shift our passengers to past visits to the coastal rock weirs below. Of course, this does little to prevent settler colonial governance and capital from spiraling the world, if not toward death, then at least toward a planetary "fecoventilatory collision" (Pynchon, 1990: 280). As Povinelli puts it, "The earth is not dying. But the earth may be turning away from certain forms of existence" (28). Neither, in the meantime, does the recollection suspend the helicopter's whirling rotors, nor still the vertiginous anxiety that fills the cramped, paradoxical space of its cabin, hovering while the earth turns below. But perhaps in the narrative's memorial rupture, its momentary break with the manifestation of the present, Povinelli glimpses a pure time—or a speculative geography—that flies above the late liberal limits of attention.

Hovering hovering hovering. . .

Response

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Easier advice to give than take. I always say that if people read you in a way that seems alien to your intentions, you should first think about how you are contributing to this misreading. So rather than spend the next few pages detailing what these wonderful responses got right or wrong about *Geontologies*, I thought I would first say what the book intended to do—or, what some three odd years after writing it, I now think it intended to do—and then speak to the issues raised by the incredibly generous and smart engagements with this piece of my work. And I mean what I write here. Each of these authors engage *Geontologies* through their own obsessions and commitments. And this is a good thing insofar as we can hear a rich range of responses from these exact people, whose work has been so essential, no matter whether they agree with this or that point I make, to our attempt to undo the uneven and differential terrains of late liberalism.

It is hard to recount the intentions behind an older text when one's thoughts are already deeply within a subsequent set of concerns following from or adjacent to it. The trouble of retrospective interpretation that we all share is compounded by those of us who understand each of their books as a building on, or turning back into, the previous ones. So, for instance, I find it hard not to reinterpret my discussion of "Can Rocks Listen" in my first book, *Labor's Lot* or my discussion of the "Poetics of Ghosts" in my second book, *The Cunning of Recognition*, from my discussion of the governance of geontology; or geontopower. And now it is hard re-presenting my intentions behind the writing of *Geontologies* as I am deep within a reflection on what I have been calling the four axioms of existence in progressive critical theory. With these caveats in hand let me provide what I think are the three general purposes of *Geontologies*.

First, I wanted to detail a mode of governance that has been operating in the open in Indigenous worlds since settler colonialism arrived in Australia. This mode of governance is the ontological and epistemological division between Life and Nonlife. As I say in the book, the division between Life and Nonlife that interests geontopower is not between Life and Death, but between things that are seen as having the potential to be born and die and those that do not. Note I use the copular "is", i.e., "geontopower is the ontological and epistemological division ..." That is, geontopower is not merely how it deploys this division but is the division itself. How this division has been deployed in Australian settler colonialism has depended on how settler governance has had to maneuver to maintain its legitimacy. Before the advent of late liberalism, governing others by differentiating their level of civilization and society via their understanding of a hierarchy of agencies and intending being. In late liberalism, this hierarchy is hidden behind late liberal recognition—late liberal states claim to embrace the different *spiritual beliefs* (aka cultures) of those who see rocks as capable of sensing without this acceptance of cultural difference disrupting the ontological or epistemological centers of western philosophy and science. Thus, I would slightly amend Kindervater's account of geontopower—geontopower becomes self-evident outside

Indigenous worlds as late liberalism, itself a particular periodization, enters a crisis period around climate change and other forms of toxicity.

Three subpoints follow. (a) Because I do not intend *Geontologies* (geontopower) to propose a new ontology and counter-ontology, Elizabeth Johnson's formulation "Povinell's ontological gambit" sounds funny to me even as I nod my head to her characterization of geontopower as a kind wedge to unhinge a certain apparatus of knowledge-power. But I have to cop to why my continued refusal ("I am not proposing a new ontology") does and doesn't register as sensible. I think it is because, although I say that from where I stand alongside my Karrabing colleagues, geontologies is not an ontology but a mode of governance, this statement would seem to imply an alternative or counter ontology. That's not their ontology, elicits what *is* their ontology? So why don't I just say what is? Or admit that they have one? I thought my reasoning was more or less persuasively presented in the manuscript. But it might help to condense this reasoning: I am arguing that because ontology *as such* founds the very governance I am trying to elaborate, to pluralize and disperse ontology insinuates the elemental forms of this governance into other social spaces.

Another way of putting this is to ask, Why must everyone have an ontology to show their equality within the order of humanity? I use the phrase "Karrabing analytics" as a way of marking the refusal to either have a version of what the west has or to be barred from humanity meaning and relevance. I also use the phrase "Karrabing analytics" to mark a possible alliance with other analytics, such as those Todd outlines among First Nations, without participating in the flattening of Indigenous and First People's worlds. If pressed, I would admit that my first assumption about existence is that it is entangled in such a way that different regions of this entanglement have more or less powers to affect their own condition of entanglement. But I would also say this "first assumption" is not in fact my first or last concern. My first and last concern is the operation of governance that, as Kindervater notes, is the extraction of value from Indigenous worlds so that they can be accumulated by others. I like to think that this is about the choice of what one is obligated to rather than an argument one wishes to avoid. I can understand if some disagree with my explanation for why I am not engaged with the problem of ontology.

(b) As I noted, my way of understanding geontopower is not as something that emerged with late liberalism or emerged in the wake of biopower. My argument is that geontopower is shifting from background to foreground in the west as it is forced to acknowledge that what they were once able to place in their deep presuppositional background, they can no longer.

And finally (c) I am not trying to hover above any world or any order of governance, hover hover hover, but rather stand alongside others in a particular place to knock down the drones apprehending them. Rather than above or under, alongside. I wish to steer the eyes of the critical north toward our own enmeshment in this governance, and to participate in a conversation about how geontopower is as citational as liberalism. Because settler colonialism has certain strategies in common even as it has elaborated itself according to different strategies in Indigenous dispossession, I assumed that will have more or less help in analyzing power (Todd, yes).

Second, I want to show the limit of western derived critical theory in accounting for whatever is existing and might arise in the wake of geontopower as I attempt to show the deep governance of western ontologies and metaphysics in liberal settler colonialism. I hope readers have intuited that this dual purpose characterizes all my books, although perhaps more explicitly as I have gone along. As I elaborate in more detail in *Geontologies*, I became an anthropologist on the request of a generation of older Indigenous men and women that I met at Belyuen during a yearlong visit to Australia in 1984—by law they had to be

represented by an anthropologist if they were to initiate a land claim. I was straight out of an undergraduate degree from St. John's College, Santa Fe. On graduation, students receive a degree in Philosophy, but what one is truly receiving is an indoctrination into western ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology. St John's College writes the global history as if it were the history of the west's civilization unfolding globally. It is not possible to understood the analytics of existence of this generation of Indigenous men and women as anything but a forceful alternative to what I was taught even as the spirit of the west showed its perversions as it expressed itself in anthropology, law, and hegemonic publics. My understanding of their request that I become an anthropologist for me was not that I translate them for the law, but that I participate with them in understanding and resisting the formation of power claiming to want to listen to them—to apprehend them—as that power defined what was legitimate for them to say and show. In this regime of late liberal recognition, the translation-function, or diplomatic function, keeps the *problem* of national belonging and inclusion on one side of the conversation. Those excluded must show themselves in such a way that they are different, but not so different as to shatter the skeletal structure of settler law.

The point of my writings, whether I have been successful or not, was to shift the focus of the gaze, of the problematic, of who must answer to whom. It has been to return the problem of difference to late liberalism, to make it encounter its own limits. Garnet Kindervater writes powerfully, because he knows from his own research that the point is to focus on how governance superimposes "a kind of knowledge supposedly justifying the supremacy of some over others, and underwriting the attendant institutions delivering violence upon *whom it defined* as colonizeable, enslavable, those beyond salvation, the wretched, and the killable." And it is stating again that

> call it object formation, or citational power, regardless, the extent to which late liberalism's work of substantiating, aggregating, and uniting undertakes first and foremost to ally itself with a modern form of accumulation that *always*, and in the name of scientific exactitude, marginalized people as things, landscapes as enclosures, *geos* as mere use-value.

In my early work, it was to turn the focus to late liberal modes of recognition and multiculturalism. In the latter books, I have turned the focus more explicitly on the critical philosophies subtending late liberalism.

Zoe Todd argues powerfully that as in Australia so in the settler state of Canada, "it is not enough to merely *recognize* non-Western or Indigenous ontologies. We must engage with the consequences and implications of their erasure and capture." Have I been successful in these efforts? Hopefully partially. Certainly not completely. And for some not at all! I myself have found it difficult to present enough grist of the "here where you are apprehending others" sees your limit, but not too much such that (i) something is given away that is not mine or the readers right to have and (ii) any reader who is expecting to hear about Indigenous difference is left off the hook of confronting themselves. Again, I wouldn't say I have ever been completely successful in this goal but these were the goals. But Kathryn Yusoff, whose work has been so essential to our understandings of the racial and settler colonial logics of climate change, notes, the governance of geontopower maintains its hold through the "wonder of life (which is a force of narcissism par excellence)". And she is right, I think, that geontopower does not work merely from excluding certain forms from Life but also from how they are included in their exclusions—the idea that there are Stone Age races who operate as social fossils in the way of progress is not an old discourse long ago tucked

away in a curiosity cabinet, but always available for a new enemy of liberal extractions. Witness the Islamaphobic language in the US wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

As corollaries to this point: (a) I can understand why Keith Woodward might think I am hovering above the Dreamings. I can only repeat what I said above about on whom I hope to keep the analytic gaze. (b) Johnson is right that I am particularly critical of the speculative realists, but the organization of the chapters was meant to leave aside the wars of position within critical theory—I choose Foucault, I choose Derrida, et cetera. Instead I try to demonstrate the limits of theorists I have been most influenced by: Foucault, Deleuze, Charles S Peirce and William James. This doesn't mean I have stopped thinking about possible alliances among Western derived critical theory and Indigenous critical theory, knowledge, and practice. I very much remain so intrigued—and thus why I will consider Woodward's worries about what he calls "matter-processing" even as I wonder how I wrote such that I could be read as having presupposed a "grid of Truth" composed of "thought and sensation, idea and the world". But I also work on myself and the habits of my thought, stretching far back to Santa Fe and beyond, by remembering Aimé Césaire's caution, that while there is nothing wrong with conversation among peoples, colonizers were never actually engaged in a conversation with the colonized.

Third, I want to contribute my energy to keeping open or enlarging cramped space—that, following Todd, I'd acknowledge Erica Violet Lee, Karl Mika, Aileen Moreton-Robertson, Glen Coulthard, Audra Simpson and so many others working toward the same and whose works are so essential to us all. Here I see myself standing alongside rather than in front of not merely my Karrabing colleagues and their ancestors but my colleagues in critical Indigenous studies and decolonizing studies. I begin repeating myself at this point, but I take the risk of repetition rather than not—better or worse given where I come from no matter how much of my life has been spent with and within my Indigenous family, the north and west and the canon, I think my contribution might be to help stand against a relentless swallowing (yes, Simpson's understanding of the apprehension of Indigenous world). But also increasingly I work alongside Karrabing in film and art practices in which a double move—on the one hand, the authorship moves definitively to some 30 Indigenous men and women young and old; and on the other the goal of this too is what they wish is the redirection of resources—my own and the critical curatorial arts and film—from accumulation in the North to accumulation for their world.

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Notes

1. Rosi Braidotti (2007) shows a hinge between Foucault and Mbembe (2003). Alexander Weheliye approaches the question from a different angle in *Habeas Viscous* (2014).
2. Sessing is a reference to NK Jemisin's exploration of race and geology (and much more) in *The Broken Earth* trilogy. The central characters in these novels are Orogenes who can understand the world by both seeing and sessing it. That is, Orogene's know the pull of the earth and its cosmic kin, and through this geologic subjectivity they can buffer and extend the forces of the earth. Despite and because of their immense geophysical gifts, Orogenes are officially classified as non-human and suffer under the enclosure and constraint of a fearful and subjugating order. "To *sess*" is to travel in the mineralogical flows of the earth and the underground of racial hierarchies.

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