THE CUNNING OF RECOGNITION IN THE FOUR AXIOMS OF EXISTENCE

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Abstract

This essay examines the politics of late liberal settler recognition from the perspective four axioms of existence and from within a case study of the disinheritance of two sets of clans. After reviewing the author's intellectual position with the literature on recognition, the essay argues that scholarship on recognition needs to be reframed within four axioms of existence emerging in critical theory in the wake of geontopower and then moves to a short overview of how this reframing might provide new methods to the study of contemporary cultural politics. The four axioms of existence are the entanglement of existence; the unequal distribution of power to affect the local and transversal terrains of this entanglement; the multiplicity and collapse of the event as the *sine qua non* of political thought; and the provincial racial and colonial history that informed liberal western ontologies and epistemologies and the concept of the west as such. The clans are the author's own Simonaz clan of Povinellis that emerged at least by the turn of the 17th century in the Alpine village of Carisolo and the clans of the Karrabing in the Top End of the Northern Territory of Australia.

Keywords: Late liberalism, Geontopower, Heritability, Recognition.

Some prehistory

When I published *The Cunning of Recognition* in 2002, political philosophy and critical theorists had been engaged in intense arguments about the purpose and potential of state-based social and cultural recognition and about the ways state recognition did or did not mirror the publics to which it was addressed for at least a decade. A raft of essays and books had flooded out from journals and presses arguing that recognition was a necessary component of human flourishing; a state and capital strategy of defanging radical critique; and as inexorably linked to the dialectics of public and counter-public formation. All of the major works during these turbulent years presupposed that the politics of recog-

nition – whether irreducibly liberal, potentially revolutionary, or simply the dialogical nature of human well-being – were about human modes of sociality and expressivity. The human difference centered the argument no matter whether the author was foregrounding race, sexuality, ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender or class and whether they focused on political publics, state function, or cultural expressivity.

I approach the problem of recognition from an analysis of late liberalism, namely, the means by which late liberal-based capitalist orders have attempted to redirect the energies and commonsense of anticolonial and new social movements. The great uprising against the paternalistic and civilizational rhetoric justifying white, primarily male, supremacist imperialism across the Global South in the 1950s threatened the ongoing accumulation of wealth by dispossession in the Global North. While this was not the first revolt against western hegemony, by the 1960s and early 70s, the Global South had gained an economic power that fueled the movement, evidenced, for example, in the emergence of OPEC and its ability to destabilize the US economy. Thus, late liberalism is method of periodization so that one can gather together shifts in the liberal governance of difference and markets and see it as a reaction-formation to the agency of a multiplicity of anticolonial and radical social movements. Its mode of governance difference is to demand those historically excluded demonstrate how their way of life differs from but does not violate the skeletal principles of liberalism as such. Take, for instance, the foundational decision in *Mabo v State of Queensland*, *1993*, to finally recognize what it called native title. This decision encapsulates key tactics of liberal recognition when it applies to Indigenous and Native peoples – *a mea culpa* ("on past prejudice"), absorption of difference into logics of western law ("native title corresponds to within settler state jurisprudence"), the sequestration of difference into a precolonial past ("change but not too much"), and a strict limit on powers of the incorporated ("as long as it does not shatter the skeletal principles of law").

The phrase late liberalism might be misleading. I don't mean it as late-stage liberalism. Late is meant in the sense of being late to ones own party; it is at its core a belated mode of being in relation to itself. Here I lean in on liberal claims that liberalism truth is horizonal, coming, promissory, and dynamic. In so far as it is, liberalism is itself always illusive. The early scholarship on recognition made this, if nothing else, very clear. The need felt by liberal states and publics to debate whether this or that social

group or culture should be recognized, as Charles Taylor put it, not merely for "the equal value of all humans potentially" but "the equal value of what they have made of this potential in fact," conserves liberal forms of reason (Taylor 1994, pp. 42-43). The great world historical difference of communicative reason, the foundation of liberal democratic orders, according to Jurgen Habermas, is that the ground and horizon, the facts and the norms, are in constant motion. What were assumed to be facts are shown to have been for some unintended misunderstandings and for others strategic misrecognitions of their own desires to take from others by characterizing them as lesser than themselves (Habermas 1996). Anytime you catch liberalism being wrong, it shifts, often through one or another form of *mea culpa*. Some theorists see this as the great world historical good of liberalism; it will always correct its course. For many others it demonstrates that no amount of death and suffering will ever dent its hubris. At every moment, great swaths of the earth know that they will have been an unintended mistake for which many apologies will be made.

Not only is liberalism, and thus late liberalism, structurally belated to its own good, as a consequence of this, liberalism is only ever citational and diasporic; diffused and tactical; heterogeneous and pocked; multidimensionally incommensurate (see also, Lea 2020). Multiple strategic responses to the effective uprisings against liberal civilizational paternalism, such as late liberal forms of recognition did not unify the west nor produce a uniform liberal solution – the fiction of a unified or uniform liberalism is a strategy of making coherence from incoherence. As numerous comparative sociological and ethnographic monographs have shown, the specific enactment of what we place under the general rubric of "liberal recognition" reveals liberalism to be a diasporic form, a unity and singularity only through discursive citation.

By the time I was addressing the logic of late liberal recognition, primarily focused in and on the settler colonial liberalism, the heat of the progressive scholarly work had shifted as wave after cooptative wave washed over activist struggles. What to do when a feminist and queer critique of marriage morphed into a movement for gay marriage? When a critique of race and capitalism led to movement to diversify the workforce? When Indigenous refusal to be dispossessed from their lands and the relations of obligation they have with the more than human world in them was transformed by what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls "the white possessive" (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Rather than exclude oth-

ers, late liberalism wraps its tendrils around them. Brown commons, Indigenous refusal, sexual self-outlawing, and radical trans-plasticity: all seek to maneuver around or confront the corrosive juices of absorptive late liberalism. By *Economies of Abandonment*, I thought it best to unpack recognition into three aspects – recognition, espionage, and camouflage – and to begin to recon with a new mutation of liberalisms around whitness, a mutation that sometimes appears as militant whiteness, but insofar as it feeds off a wounded whiteness is something much different (for wounded attachment, see Brown 1993). It is the abstract subject of liberalism always looked like.

As scholars attempted to get ahead or out from under late liberal recognition, some worked to change the presumption that the deracinated human was the ultimate source and object of reflection. Sylvia Wynter, Paul Gilroy, Denise Ferreira da Silva and others working out from the Black Atlantic insist that a different genealogy of human and humanism must be written before any discussion of what a post-racist recognition might entail (Wynter 2003; Gilroy 2014; da Silva 2007). Mel Chen, using Michael Silverstein technical work in linguistic metapragmatics, has unpacked structures of race and gender normativity animating the animism hierarchy (Chen 2012). In the North American context, Kim Tallbear, Zoe Todd, Glen Coulthard, Jodi Byrd and other First Nation and Native American scholars began probing the powers of other forms of relationality not via the frozen idea of traditions that late liberalism demanded, but through the struggles of the ancestral present – human and non-human struggles – whose aim is to put to rest the ghoulish settler skeletons rampaging across the earth (Tallbear 2017; Todd 2017; Coulthard 2014; Byrd 2020).

The rise of white militancy in the wake of decolonial critique is more evidence that the long arm of geontopower, long operating in the open in Atlantic and Pacific settler colonies and distinct from the drama and grip of biopower, has lost its grip differentiate geontopower from biopower. Geontopower is not situated within the power of life but in the power to distinguish nonlife (geos) and being (ontology). Geontopower subtends the late liberal governance of difference and markets. Geontopower is not a power that is only just now emerging to replace biopolitics; biopower (the governance through life and death) has long depended on a subtending geontopower (the difference between the lively and the inert). And, similarly to Achille Mbembe's argument that necropolitics operated openly in colonial Africa only later to unravel its form within fascist

Europe, my argument is that geontopower has long operated openly in settler late liberalism, insinuating itself in the ordinary operations of its governance of difference and markets. The attribution of an inability of various colonized peoples to differentiate the kinds of things that a geontological imaginary invested with that agency, subjectivity, and intentionality has been the grounds of casting them into a premodern mentality and a post-recognition difference. Geontopower works within the history of colonialism and recognition by superimposing the division of Life and Nonlife onto a hierarchy of being – caught in all its casually formative power in the characteristic of Indigenous Australians as Stone Age people. The purpose, then, of the con cept of geontopower is not to found a new ontology of objects, nor to establish a new metaphysics of power, nor to adjudicate the possibility or impossibility of the human ability to know the truth of the world of things. Rather, it is a concept meant to help make visible the figural tactics of late liberalism as a long-standing biontological orientation and distribution of power crumbles, losing its efficacy as a self-evident backdrop to reason.

As the politics of difference and recognition are placed with the cracking grid of geontopower, propelled by the relentless critique outlined above, four axioms of existence that have emerged in recent years across a significant section of critical theory (for geontopower, see Povinelli 2016). They are: the entanglement of existence; the unequal distribution of power to affect the local and transversal terrains of this entanglement; the multiplicity and collapse of the event as the *sine qua non* of political thought; and the provincial racial and colonial history that informed liberal western ontologies and epistemologies and the concept of the west as such. Although I treat these axioms as distinct theoretical statements, they are in fact part of a much broader discursive surface of political thought and action arising in the wake of geontopower. The current rise of illiberal xenophobic liberalism, zero-interest capitalism, and ecofascism concurrent with the collapse of a unipolar American US power may be signaling a new reorganization of liberalism. Thus, we must pay attention not merely to emergent forms of critique but to the syntax of their arrangement if we are to avoid their them being co-opted into late liberal and illiberal capitalism. Whatever we think about these axioms we must think of them as a set of actions supporting or disrupting the conservation of late liberal power.

Four axioms of existence

Over the last few decades, critical theory, or a large segment of it, has migrated from interpretive and hermeneutic approaches to social life and from discourses and practices of life, to approaches centered on the ontology of existence in which life and nonlife sit. In other words, the problematics of biopower – whether approach as a positive or negative form; as irreducibly related to the necropolitical; or a shorthand for the play of immunity and community and the dialectics of plasticity – has given way to what is often called the ontological turn. In anthropology, this turn is best known through Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's concept of multiperspectivism or through the long shadow of Marilyn Strathern who argued that nonwestern cultural understandings of existence were equivalent to western philosophical claims (de Castro 2009; Strathern 1995; see also, Descola 2013; Kohn 2013). Scholars inside and outside of anthropology have also been influenced by feminist and queer theorists and science and technological studies – Donna Haraway's symbiogenetic and Barad's physics based approach to entangeled existence as well as the work of Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour (Haraway 2008; Barad 2007; Stengers 2018; Latour 1993). Across this divergent and sometime acrimonious discursive field is a shared procedural approach to questions of difference. All begin with the nature of (all) existence whether this nature is revealed through interventions in the natural sciences or the analytics of a group of people. Even scholars seeking to make Indigenous understandings of existence of equal value to western philosophical understandings treat Indigenous knowledges as if in the same mode as western forms; they abstract the knowledge from a specific history in order to create a general account of existence. As I just suggested this abstraction and universalization seems to be motivated by desire to make Indigenous analytics equivalent to Western philosophical approaches.

It is from within these debates that a new axiom of existence has emerged within critical theory, namely, that existence is entangled. As I, and many others, have noted the claim that existence is entangled is also a claim about the nature of objects, forces, and habits. It is not that things are entangled in existence, but that existence is entangled in itself. Existence is like a huge ball of string – forces – that has been bent and folded into and around itself in such a way that what we take as an object is a moment of habituated densities within these folds or *pli* (Deleuze 1988). Thus, objects are only ever thingish, hereish, nowish et cetera. Objects are merely moment of objectivation in the manner in which Foucault understood sub-

jectivation, namely, the tactics and procedures of power that provide the conditions for thought of the self as a specific form of subjectivity. Objectivation is not reserved to human modes of knowing in or abstracted from human modalities of power. The folds that are misrecognized as objects are created by existence's relation to itself including within it human and more-than-human worlds – existence is first human procedures of discernment, recognition and interpretation second. Another way of visualizing the nature of entangled existence would be to appropriate Lacan's concept of the psychic extimate and apply it to the nature of materiality. The intimate inside of every *thing* is external to it – what something is is not within itself but at distance from itself. Take human breathing. The material extimacy of human animals is not merely in its the symbiotic relation to plants, but to the ongoing toxic externalizations of extractive and consumptive (pun intended) capitalism including its foundational distinctions between Life and Nonlife long grounding disciplinary differentiations of biology and geology get in way as much as they might ever clarify.

The example of breathing takes leads us to the second axiom – the observation that in such as entangled existence the ability to exert agency over the entanglement depends on where, how and what other folds of force objectivate you. In the US, the political cry, Eric Garner's ultimately unsuccessful plea to police officer Daniel Pantaleo to kneeling on his neck, "I can't breathe" is a powerful, tragic example of the differentials of material and social entanglements. The social distributions of breath in the US are hardly new nor restricted to the policing apparatus. Henry Dumas's 1968 short story, "Goodbye Sweetwater," is situated in a fictive southern town being slowly buried in the toxic white toxic dust of a bauxite mine and concrete factory. The dust from the trucks, cars, and factories that "had spread over the land like a creeping fever" is not mere metaphor for the toxic nature of white supremacy, but the actual sedimentations of its poisons across ecological landscapes choking trees, waters and Black families first and foremost, but also seeping into the psychic strategies of resistance and refusal (Dumas, 1974).

Dumas was himself shot to death by a New York City subway transit police officer in 1968 at the age of thirty-three. The official reason for the shooting was authored and controlled by the police department. His writing and life show the knotted sedimentations of human and more-thanhuman matter and discourse. The grids of racial and gendered intelligibility are simultaneously linguistic and material – the who or what one is and thus

how one can and should be treated is constantly, although not necessarily simultaneously, in the air, so to speak, in the ways that, sediments of force are managed and manage to escape this management. Dumas produced a counter-discourse to the very forces that had an ultimately deadly agency. In doing so he left a discursive sedimentation for future Black writers, activists, and their allies to remobilize. Dumas appears to see this in the refusal of nature itself to be swallowed by the avarice of white supremacy. Speaking of a sweet water spring hidden in old plantation grounds, Dumas has his protagonist Layton reflect,

> He noticed that the spirt was thinner than it was yesterday. He wondered if anyone else besides the Negroes who lived near the spring had discovered it. It wouldn't be long before the government found out that it had sweet water on its plantation. By then the spring would disappear and come up again somewhere else (Dumas, pp. 245-246).

In this way we grasp the relevance of the approach that pragmatist William James took to mental life. What James sought to show how the powers of belief and doubt are determined by the complex energetics of social fields and relations. Indeed, for James, power as such can be measured by the ability of one region to seize hold of habituated practices across regions, forestalling other possibilities that are in existence from taking hold and extending themselves. In *The Principles of Psychology* James critiques those for whom "the higher faculties of the mind are pure products of 'experience;' and experience is supposed to be of something simply given." Instead, "experience is what I agree" to or am forced "to attend to" (James 1950, p. 402) Because concept formation, like other mental practices, demands an effort, those who are constantly exhausted by the extractive machinery of capital are given a double task. On the one hand, they must carve effort from their world even as others are sucking as much energy from it as they can in order to enrich themselves. On the other hand, they must focus their effort on social analysis.

These forms of extimate social entanglement have altered how the political event is conceptualized. The political event is no longer conceived as only that which structurally transforms a given arrangement of existence with potentially universal reach whether by a subjective act of fidelity, a structural alteration of social relations, or the emergence of a new arrangement of the sensible. Political events are now seen as registering in small, micro, and quasi forms in one region or another of the entanglement; and the political often expresses itself as intensities without events or even-

tualities, what Paul Gilroy called "politics at a lower frequency" (Gilroy 1993, p. 37). Because of the uneven nature and variability of social forces within a given morphology of entanglement (assemblage) what registers as transformation in one region doesen't another, what is experienced as large here is as of yet small to nonexistent there. The bauxite mine tailings covering the land and polluting the landscape in "Goodbye Sweetwater" manifest as clear skies elsewhere. In other words, the change in our understanding of the political is not a new understanding of what counts as a structural change with universal reach but an undermining of the ontology of existence that supported this possibility. From the perspective of axioms one and two there is no one moment, decision, or event because there is no *at any given time*. Strains in one region of existence register with massive or subtle seismic effects depending one where one is located, how this area is supported or not, and how the historical treatment of the region has already created microfractures throughout. The different habituated zonings of entangled existence affect each other as if by ghostly action at a distance. But what may be experienced as ghostly causes and effects are, however, simply the result of how one region is composed by forces far afield and yet intimately internal to its ability to hold itself in place – or like the sweet water, hide and relocate itself away from the catastrophe of white capitalism.

At this point the relevance of the syntactic arrangement of these first three axioms should be clear, and the nested assumptions about the hierarchy of ontology, sociology, and politics revealed by this syntax. The first axiom sets an ontological ground in which social conditions, the second axiom, are organized, and thus political maneuver, the third axiom, are or are not possible. Of course, no one makes these syntactic relations more explicit and theoretically clear than Judith Butler's distinction between precariousness and precarity. Butler argues that all humans share an ontologically grounded vulnerability. These shared conditions are, however, socially differentiated not merely in who and what can be killed and murdered but what murders and killings can be grieved. The politics of grievability, or black killability, from Dumas the person to Black Lives Matter as a political movement, are, in other words, immanent to an ontologically transcendental condition. The general claim holds true for everyone everywhere; it is universally true. How it is actualized in the social world is specifically true. These specificities provide the materiality of politics – the how, what, and why of a movement of reforming and redistributing the common.

This hierarchy of forms and modes of existence – ontology leads to sociology leads to politics – is often shorthanded. We say, existence is entangled as if the other two axioms simply unfold from this statement. But the fourth axiom inserts a wobble into the smooth rotation of this nested hierarchy. The fourth axiom can be stated in this way. The provincial racial and colonial history that informed liberal western ontologies and epistemologies and the concept of the west as such must not merely be provincialized but seen as, on the one hand, a back formation for the justification of colonial dispossession and enslavement, and on the other hand, implicated in the means by which existence has been ravaged. In other words, it is not any ontology per se or scientific approach to biology and geology per se that is at stake. It is that the procedures by which we produce these separations and hierarchical relations are within the discourses and practices of geontopower. Thus, the solution is not to find a better ontology or to treat ontology as if it were everything and before everything. The solution may be instead to alter the syntactic arrangement of these axioms in such a way that they collapse the ontological and epistemological habit of late liberalism. Glissant's *Poetics of Relations*, in distinction to Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy*, suggests what is at stake (Glissant 1997; Deleuze and Guattari 1994). The three abysses that opened in the hull of the slave ship and the lands of Indigenous dispossession created specific, unfolding, and decisive relations between Europeans in their diaspora, West Africans, Indigenous and Pacific people and eventually everywhere. In other words, axiom four insists we start in the relations of liberalism and capitalism that began to unfold from the belly of those ships. Three aspects of liberalism are altered when we start with axiom four. First when we start with the historical sedimentary relationality rather than deracinated and abstracted questions of the nature of being, we remain in the ancestral present. We no longer are involved in a politics of recognition that pivots on time and the other, but the endurant creative manner in which history manifests as sedimentations rather than temporality. Second, the question of control of common goods, and what such commons goods are – whether they are things or relatives – are placed at the front and center. We stay within the routes and worlds created by the motion of the extraction machinery of capitalism and the way they terraform existence as they encrust ears and eyes so no one can hear or see the human and more than human terror they produce. Third, we don't unintentionally reproduce the very orders of being and knowing that we state are the grounds of the problem.

I do not pretend that the inversion and reordering of the four axioms that I am suggesting are inconsequential or uncontroversial from a philosophical point of view. Indeed, they might appear as incoherent claims from

such a perspective. I could be read as asserting, for instance, that before these histories of colonization existence was not entangled. Or I could be called out for opposing ontological claims even as all of my work seeks to lend energy to various Indigenous and subaltern claims about non-Western ontologies. For now, let me simply note, in relation to both worries, that both criticisms are correct even as they miss the point. If I were interested in existence as such or ontology as such then a massive incoherence would subtend this exercise. But I am not interested in either of these as such, that is, as if they could be abstracted out and said to exist outside of existence. Where is existence other than in existence? Where is being other than in being? More crucially who can believe without the slightest irritation of doubt that the figuring of existence as some sort of abstract something somehow neutralizes the specific historical contours of Black and Indigenous lives? Who can act as if this should be the first and final concern?

Heritability and recognition

I have been working on a project that I sometimes call the Inheritance Project, the Disinheritance Project and the Heritability Project. Each of these titles frame a different aspect of what is simple in its form and purpose. The Project tracks the fate of a set of clans in the wake of western forms of freedom, white supremacy, and settler colonialism – my own Simonaz clan of Povinellis from Carisolo, Trentino and the clans of the Karrabing Film Collective from the coasts of the Top End of the NT, Australia. The project uses a series of rhyming historical events, images, and ecological alterations to demonstrate how perhaps initially similar subnational, family and clan-based modes of belonging to land its more-than-human worlds are diverted as they are differentially folded into the unrelenting infrastructures of colonialism and racism. The purpose is to get ahead of and around right white nativisms sprouting up everywhere though differently depending if your situated in the US, EU, New Zealand, or Australia, all places that clans from my village left for starting in the 1870s just years after Darwin was established as the first British colony in the far Australian north.

The Heritability Project suggests some methodological and conceptual interventions to how we might reapproach the late liberal politics of recognition when this politics is situated within the inverted logic of the four axioms of existence. We can start with a methodological intervention. If we abide by the normative syntax of the four axioms, we might be tempted

to begin by asking how ontological conditions were socially manifested in Simonaz Povinelli and Karrabing clans – how did they understand the nature of existence as an entangled relation between the human and more-than-human world. In the Simonaz case, we could ask precristological ontological frameworks were left as traces in archive, memory, and genetics such as, in the case of genetics, we can demonstrate how cows were bred to thrive at high altitudes. We would focus on this biological inheritance as one node in an entangled existence (Senczuk et al. 2020; Raffaetà 2021). A similar process could be undertaken with Karrabing clan, with the obvious substitution of ecology of flora and fauna. These two abstracted ontological and multiperspectival histories would then be placed alongside each other, a politics of recognition based on shared histories of precolonial modes of sustainable relationality between humans and the more-than-human world.

But a methodology that begins with axiom four would instead track the warp and weft of these clans as they came to be spatially and corporeally expressed through colonial history. Instead of beginning the analysis at the moment when the archive suggests Povinelli transformed from a nickname to lineage surname between 1494 and 1572, we would begin with the dates of 1788/1801.

It was on January 26, 1788 that the first fleet of nine transport ships arrived at Sydney Cove from British penal harbors to dump their human cargo onto the lands of the Gadigal, Wangal, Wallumedegal, Boromedegal, Gamaragal, Borogegal, Birrabirragal and Gayamaygal. This began the long and ongoing material and discursive Indigenous struggle against settler invasion, first justified on the basis of terra nullius, then paternal civilizationalism, and more recently cultural recognition. 1801 marks Napoleon's trek across the Alps. And, from the perspective of the Simonaz clan, the year the tradition of *carte di regola* for Trentino villages was abolished. The *carte di regola* was an institution of patrifamilial (*capifamiglia*) based rights of self-governance of *vicini* over who could and how they could us community lands and resources. Napoleon said he was also carting modern civilization military his military lumbered over the Alps. Hegel claimed he was bringing more than that – that Bonaparte was the historical personification of *Geist* unfolding universal mutual human recognition as he bombed his way across Europe. The Geist Napoleon and Hegel supported had a limit – liberty, fraternity, and equality presupposed a hierarchy of Life, its absolute difference from Nonlife, and its pinnacle as occupied by European Man. The liberation of Man had a universal reach only if the Haitians struggling

for freedom under the wing of Toussaint L'Ouverture were expelled from the human (James 1938/1980; Buck-Morss 2009). The Haitian Revolution like the numerous fights of First Nations against colonial dispossession made clear, if clarity was still needed, that the grid of intelligibility was organized not on ontology but dispossession.

Another series of other parallel dates would demonstrate, on the one hand, how heritability is a problem and process by which some are able to forge and maintain a relation to locality based on their ability to maintain the pragmatic analytics subtending it; and what forms and relations of dispossession commence when they are no longer able to do so. On the other hand, we might demonstrate how these differentials of power work as a history of material and mental sedimentation. Take, for example, the two dates of 1869 and 1870. The first is the date that the settlement of Darwin was established on the shores of Larrakia lands. Darwin was the first settler foothold in the British coastal invasion of the far north of the Australian continent. The settler population was quite small some 135 British men and women. The founding corresponding to the arrival of the Australian Overland Telegraph Line from Port Augusta in 1870. No matter its size the ramifications of the settlement were felt along the coast as settlers shot and poison Indigenous people as they appropriated their lands. A totem in Karrabing lands sent a plague of flesh-eating flies in response, memorialized in *Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland* (2018). In 1870, faced with increased mortality rates as private property ate through common lands, the Simonaz clan began dragging their knife-grinding wheels across the Atlantic into Seneca lands (Buffalo, New York). By the end of the First World War, having been dispossessed of their own lands, the Simonaz clan had departed to the dispossessed worlds of others, to the US, some to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

As these two sets of clans move into 1964 and 1967 the sedimentary consequences of these forms and modes of dispossession grew even larger. In 1964 a fragment of the Simonaz clan, my natal family, moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, located within Caddo Parish. The actual Caddo were forcibly removed to Oklahoma in 1859, ten years before Darwin was settled, and about forty years before my family began moving out of Carisolo and onto the lands of the Seneca (Buffalo, New York). Shreveport was the last capital of the Southern Confederacy; Caddo Parish one of the most notorious lynching regions in the US South. The fragment of Simonaz took up residence there the same year that the US passed the Civil and Voting Rights Acts meant to overturn the entrenched racial discrimi-

nation in schooling, public access, and voting. The conditions that Henry Dumas narrative in "Goodbye Sweetwater" and other short stories were not in short supply in Shreveport. Industrial agricultural toxins covered the cotton fields and spread across the landscape on the winds and into the soil with the rains. As the Simonaz children carried forward their ancestral foraging traditions, substituting crawfish, snapping turtles, and blackberries for their grandparents' mushrooms, blueberries, and rabbits, the police were violently attacking Black protestors in the racially segregated city.

In 1967 the Australian voting public, overwhelming white and British, voted on two specific changes to the Australian constitution. Voters were asked to approve, on the one hand, granting the Australian federal government the right to make special laws for all races rather than excluding "the aboriginal race in any State." This change allowed the federal government to pass the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, 1976, the first peg in what would become a late liberal response to Indigenous demands for the return of their lands. On the other hand, voters were asked to approve the removal of a section of the constitution that excluded "aboriginal natives" from the census, an administrative mode of manufacturing *terra nullius*. All of this was occurring while Karrabing ancestors continued to tell their children the ancestral history of their lands interned as wards of the state in a small settlement named Delissaville.

In conclusion

This essay has examined the politics of late liberal settler recognition from the perspective four axioms of existence and from an overview of an ongoing project about the fate of two sets of clans in the wake of colonialism. At this point it should be clear that the way I framed the literature on recognition was meant to lead us to what I consider a more pressing issue, namely, how should we reckon with four axioms of existence that have emerged in the wake of geontopower. My reasoning is that what were the discursive conditions that gave rise to altered in significant way as anthropocenic climate has forced western to experience the toxic effect of the processes of dispossession at the root of their accumulation. The Heritability Project attempts to understand how cultural recognition increasingly turned inward and nativist within the European diaspora exemplifies both the problem with the current syntax of these axioms and an alternative conceptual and methodological approach that emerges when we invert this syntax.

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