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The Black Horizon: Alterity and Ontology in the Anthropocene

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes the case for an approach to International Relations in the Anthropocene, which draws upon resources from critical Black studies. This distinctive perspective is set out in comparison to two, more familiar, sets of critical Anthropocene thought, that have been influential in contemporary discussions of global politics. We heuristically frame these as the "Planetary" - a focus on ontology and vibrant and unruly materiality – and the "Pluriversal" - which places race and coloniality at the centre of our understanding of power and knowledge. We suggest that Planetary approaches underestimate the centrality of race and coloniality to questions of ontology and that Pluriversal approaches are often undermined by a failure to take ontology more seriously. These literatures are opposed to a third perspective, which we call the "Black Horizon", which troubles our approach to alterity and works with a non- or para-ontological understanding of being.

Introduction

In the contested world of modernist politics, the world of Left and Right, of class struggle, colonial contestations and resistances and of identity politics, a shared ontology was reproduced; that of a "One World World", populated by universal, rational and autonomous subjects (Law 2015). This world was one that was full of politics, but it was a world where the construction of the world and its subject (the human) was excluded from consideration. Phrased otherwise, the world was accepted as there before us as subjects, available for us to know and to use for our purposes. Thus, politics was contestation over the division and rights over this whole, the categories of division and their justification. The famous trope of modernist politics summarises this well: "Politics is who gets what, when and how" (Harold Lasswell's definition of politics in the 1930s). Politics operated at what we might call today the level of "epistemology"—the level of perspectives and understandings—of the causes and reasons for forms and modes of division and how to maintain, improve or remove them. This world, the world of modernist politics

and governance, was not itself put into question. This world was a world composed of entities and the questions were about how they could be understood and categorised, which often depended on one's normative political position. We are all familiar with classical political questions of categorisation, such as "terrorist or freedom-fighter?"

The Anthropocene, understood as the limit of modernist understandings of scientific and economic progress, brings to an end the assumption of universal policy solutions and of the constancy of background environmental factors and forces us to think beyond the limits of a modernist ontology. The crisis of modernity is one the central preoccupations for contemporary social and political theory. Whilst modernist ways of thinking have been eroding for decades, the current prominence of environmental destruction and climate change, combined with the manifest failure of the promises of linear progress, prosperity and emancipation, have led many to conclude that modernity is either in terminal decline, or already over. Numerous responses and alternatives have been put forward, from new materialism and speculative realism to object-oriented ontology and posthumanism, all congregating around new ontological and epistemological commitments that better fit social thought in the age of the Anthropocene. This challenge has been joined by dissident theorists from other traditions, including decolonial, postcolonial, indigenous, black studies and Africanist thinking, creating a vibrant debate, both about the nature of being, humanity, and indeed governance in the Anthropocene.

Our purpose here is to highlight what is at stake in the rethinking of alterity and ontology in the Anthropocene and to make the case for what we call an emerging Black Horizon of social and political thought, a tendency that destabilises and deconstructs both the ontological commitments of modernity, and the rising forms of ontological politics promoted by theorists of the Anthropocene. Our argument centres on the proposition that modernity has always contained two understandings of limits of alterity, which we pose as (1) the limits of difference, that tend to be grasped in discourses of division/race (the limits of coloniality in time and space) and (2) the limits of otherness/ontology (the limits of being and non-being). These forms of alterity are important to grasp in their difference, especially as they are so frequently conflated in contemporary thought. We heuristically identify three key perspectives on these problems of alterity: the Planetary; the Pluriversal; and the Black Horizon. Our intervention is specifically concerned with clarifying what is at stake in these conceptual choices for work within in the discipline of International Relations (IR), which, in recent years, has drawn significant inspiration from work within and across these paradigms. Thus, our argument draws out important distinguishing features of the theoretical work at the methodological core of these three perspectives and then moves on to address the ways these theoretical tools are taken up in conceptions of Anthropocene politics and governance within IR.

The first conceptual framing, heuristically addressed here in terms of the "Planetary" paradigm, is drawn from what can broadly be termed the New Materialist tradition of continental philosophy and sociology. This perspective critiques the static, modernist approach to ontology which sees nature as the inert background to the vibrant foreground of society, by articulating new forms of ontological entanglement and relationality. New materialists eschew the unitary, singular subjectivity and agency of modernity, instead emphasising the entanglement of the human and the nonhuman, the sympoiesis of co-relational life forms, and the assemblages of both natural and social life that

construct and maintain our worlds. These approaches were the first to be integrated into the discipline of International Relations, foregrounding the hubristic dangers of assuming that the world as it was appropriated in modernist frameworks of knowledge—with their universal and linear causal assumptions—was the same as the world in its complex and inter-related reality. Planetary approaches are concerned with the problem of ontology, emphasising that modernist constructions of the Human as subject and World as object have neglected our mutual entanglement and interdependencies. Their focus is very much upon rethinking governance and policymaking without Modernist ontological assumptions of universality and linear causality, with the goal of preventing environmental destruction. These approaches thus have a clear temporal framing, one which locates environmental catastrophe as a threat we are rapidly approaching and which argues that modernist imaginaries need to be consigned to the past in order to confront this threat. Alterity here is treated abstractly so there is little discussion of the role difference plays internally and externally in a modernist ontology: alterity as a socio-historical key to understanding modernity via coloniality and race often plays a minor role in the contemporary articulation of these approaches.

The second conceptual framing, which we analyse under the rubric of the "Pluriversal", is more explicit in its articulation of race and coloniality at the centre of the contemporary crisis of the Anthropocene. Scholars of this tendency, who generally work with decolonial and critical Indigenous theory, highlight the mutual constitution of coloniality and modernity, and the basis of contemporary life in racialised capitalism and the exploitation and subjugation of those outside the West, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples. The attendance to the struggles of Indigenous peoples leads Pluriversal politics towards a plural conception of a "world of many worlds". This perspective allows for the agency of the nonhuman and the merging of the natural and the social worlds to exist alongside modernist framings and understandings. Both Western or modernist and non-Western and non-modern approaches can co-exist in separate spaces, each of which is seen as distinct and valid, providing for a pluralising set of possibilities that embraces radical difference and alterity as the antidote to the authoritarian homogenising force of modernity. This perspective has been deployed within International Relations debates on the Anthropocene as a critique of the Planetary approach and its lack of attention to the imbrication of race in the constitution of the world. However, in what follows we suggest that Pluriversal approaches provide a powerful alternative to predominantly Western Planetary approaches but, in doing so, tend to privilege race and coloniality over the ontological grounds enabling these distinctions.[1]

Finally, we identify the Black Horizon, a broad theoretical tendency that draws largely upon critical Black studies.[2] This tendency is rooted in a recognition of the antiblackness of modern thought and the world, both as a condition for the production of modernity, and as a continuing foundation for its maintenance. Thinkers of the Black Horizon understand that modern ontology is produced in relation to Blackness as a non or

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[1]We would like to emphasise that these are heuristic categories enabling us to analytically bring to the surface conceptual distinctions that are often at the heart of different approaches to alterity within the discipline of International Relations. In the "real world" of the published work of individual authors, and particularly in collectively written work, conceptual categories are mixed, joined and conflated (often to good effect) which means that often work does not neatly fall into one heuristic grouping (see, for example, Burke et al. 2016; Trownsell et al. 2019).

[2]We take the concept of the Black Horizon from the work of Nahum Dimitri Chandler (2013).

Table 1. Three approaches to race and being in the Anthropocene.

Planetary	Pluriversal	Black Horizon
Anthropocentrism/Kantian "correlationism"	Coloniality of power/knowledge/being	Antiblackness
Flat ontology	Plural ontologies	Anti-/para- ontology
Relational	Correlational	Nonrelational
Transcendence	Positive immanence	Negative immanence
Posthuman	More-than-human	Less-than-human
additive	additive	subtractive
Speculative/open to	Adaptive to	Unknowing/opacity
Beyond modernity	Others of modernity	Deconstructive of modernity
Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Timothy Morton, Bruno Latour, William Connolly	Deborah Bird Rose, Deborah Danowski & Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Arturo Escobar, Walter Mignolo	Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Fred Moten, Edouard Glissant

para-ontology, a form of being that is excluded from humanity and lacks an existence in a modernist ontology in which the world is one of entities with fixed essences. This form of exclusion, born out of the abyss of the Middle Passage, the slave trade and the plantation, is enabling in creating a fundamentally different form of contemporary subjectivity. The rootlessness of Blackness forces it into a state of continual emergence and creative becoming, constantly re-territorialising and destabilising attempts to govern and control the world. The Black Horizon recognises and springs from the traumas of colonialism and antiblackness but does not seek salvation in a multiplication of ontologies, but in a world of becoming that destabilises and erodes ontology, refusing the settled status of an emancipatory future. Thus, the Black Horizon is attentive to both the importance of ontology and race in the constitution of modernity, and debates on the nature of being in the Anthropocene. We argue that the Black Horizon provides an important, distinctive perspective for debates on International Relations after the crisis of modernity. This can be seen in Table 1 below, which summarises the main distinctions between our three heuristic perspectives.

Planetary approaches: beyond modernity and the human

We understand the Planetary as a heuristic that can be derived from the conceptual work of approaches that focus on ontology in a challenge to modernity, these include new materialism, posthumanism, complexity theory, speculative realism and other forms of materialist thought (Connolly 2017). The Planetary approach highlights the move from a static modern world, characterised by the nature/culture, inside/outside, time/space binaries, towards flatter ontologies, which emphasise relationality, assemblage thinking, and dispersed agency. These forms of thought reject the idea of the unitary liberal subject and linear causation, arguing for new forms of posthuman ethics and practice, where it is possible to think beyond the Kantian prison of "correlationism", where thought always presupposes the human subject (Land 2019, 71; Meillassoux 2008). These approaches seek to go beyond a modernist ontology where the world is an object always there "for" the subject, encouraging human-centred and instrumental discourses of control and appropriation.

The rise of the Anthropocene as a new temporal framing has opened up a wide range of possibilities for rethinking the formerly settled premises of modernist ontologies. At the most basic level, the Anthropocene denotes a new geological era where humanity

has become a crucial actor in shaping the surface of the planet and the long-term material basis for the life of humans and nonhumans (Harrington 2016; Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). From this perspective, the actions of humanity, which impact on the planet through the search for economic growth, extractive industrial production and destructive burning of fossil fuels, have awakened planetary forces that now threaten the survival of the species and its many nonhuman adjuncts. However, this apocalyptic reading has further broadened into what Randazzo and Richter (Randazzo and Richter 2021) call the "continuous-ontological" strand of Anthropocene thinking, which sees the breakdown of barriers between the natural and the social not as a catastrophic rupture, but an affirmation of the already existing ontological state of the world. Moreover, rather than being fearful of the emergence of powerful nonhuman actors, theorists of this strand celebrate the vibrancy and creativity of nonhuman forces and the potential for co-creation, coevolution and sympoiesis (becoming with) across species in the Anthropocene.

There are multiple ontological implications to be drawn from the opening of this new world of nonhuman/human collaboration, and the breaking down of binaries that separated and calcified the elements in the world, obscuring their complexity and interrelations. Crucially, this is a relational world, one where separate, individual subjectivity, agency and identity are replaced by entangled subjects that are created and evolve through relations (Haraway 2016). Humans exist in assemblages or networks with nonhumans, both conscripting objects into projects of destruction or collaborating to create new worlds. Crucially, humans are viewed as part of a species, which acts collectively, if often unwittingly, creating an Anthropocene that destroys as it creates (Morton 2016). This is what leads to the mass extinction of species, to the destruction of unique habitats, to the destruction of ecosystems. And yet for many Anthropocene theorists, this relational existence is one that opens up possibilities, that allows us to approach life affirmatively, in relations of care rather than destruction. As Anna Tsing argues in her study of the journeys and corelations of mushrooms, "humans shape multispecies worlds", not merely acting on a passive environment, but interacting with the other inhabitants of the spaces they create and transform (Tsing 2015). Writing on the relationships between humans and birds, Thom Van Dooren contends that: "It is inside these multispecies entanglements that learning and development take place, that social practices and cultures are formed. In short, these relationships produce the possibility of both life and any given way of life" (Van Dooren 2014, 4).

The complexity and interrelatedness of our natural and social worlds is also shown to undermine modernist conceptions of linear causation. Relational worlds are moved by feedback loops, which can be activated to escalate or decelerate systemic conditions, insights which have been taken up in recent studies of peacebuilding and conflict prevention in IR (Millar 2019; Bargués-Pedreny 2019). With multiple linkages between systems, individuals, humans, nonhumans, predictability becomes difficult, patterns harder to discern. For Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), this can be traced to the radical withdrawnness of objects in the world and our inability to access them directly (Meillassoux 2008). If we take OOO seriously, it upends our understanding of the relationship between science and the world. Rather than demystifying, codifying and mastering the world, we instead seek to re-enchant it, as the only way to indirectly access objects is through a speculative aesthetic (Morton 2016). This approach to ontology is not merely complex

and entangled, but also weird and spectral, existing in temporal and spatial flux, haunted by multiple pasts and futures. This is a world of contingency. As Timothy Morton writes, "the politics of coexistence are always contingent, brittle and flawed, so that in thinking of interdependence at least one being must be missing" (Morton 2016, 6).

The ontology of Anthropocene theorists is freighted with ethical obligations, necessitating actions, co-relations and alternative ways of being. It is not merely an ontology, but an ontopolitics, naming a predicament and requiring us to attend to the "arts of living on a damaged planet" (Tsing et al. 2017). We are called to attend to the hidden or forgotten ways of living, plants, animals, collaborations that allow for living otherwise. We should listen and watch for the ghosts, both human and nonhuman, that haunt our landscapes, carrying the traces of ecologies and histories that point away from the destruction of modernity. This is an ethic that requires us to think spectrally, to embrace hauntings, to engage with the weirdness of the world in the Anthropocene. The flux of complex life means that "thinking becomes a weird openness rather than cataloguing and classifying, because it cannot presuppose a preformatted being as its content" (Morton 2016, 25).

The rise of the Anthropocene and its attendant problematisation of ontology and modernist thought opened up a number of recent debates in International Relations, as the discipline has begun to grapple with the political implications of the many challenges to modernity. The introduction of the planetary scale has inspired new forms of "planet politics", with theorists advocating for forms of "entangled humanism" that take account of the breakdown of barriers between nature and culture (Burke et al. 2016; Connolly 2017). Others have drawn on complexity theory to explain the unpredictable and unruly nature of contemporary conflict, turned to posthumanism to reassess conceptions of agency, or advocated for new forms of cosmopolitical diplomacy (Cudworth and Hobden 2011; Conway 2019). The Anthropocene opens up new temporalities of global politics, new imaginaries that can shape how we understand the future of world order and planetary governance (Grove 2019; Rothe 2019). This allows us to draw out new depictions of conflict and politics, which move beyond state or human centric narratives, towards entangled, materialist understandings of the role of the human, nonhuman and more-than-human agency in war and global order. The influence of Planetary theorists in these debates has been crucial in shaping the ontological contours of debates in the discipline and the major ethical and political imperatives that have emerged (Blaney and Tickner 2017).

Despite the evocation of openness and creative possibilities among Planetary theorists, the use of a speculative or abstract framing of a "beyond" to modernity can be profoundly depoliticising. Reading OOO or speculative realism, there is often much discussion of science fiction, gothic horror, mysticism, and number or set analysis as ways to think the "unthinkable" beyond of modernist certainties and fixities (Land 2019; Thacker 2015). This often seems like a wilful denial of long existing alternative approaches which faced genocidal consequences, in part, on the basis of their denial of the human/world dualism (Povinelli 2016). We suggest that the neglect of race and coloniality in Planetary thought is linked to the focus on ontology in the critique of modernity. This depiction of the world and its search for alterity is not one that is explicitly focused on coloniality or the ways that racial thinking have shaped both modernity and the world that it created. While authors are aware of racial oppression, and the uneven distribution of modernity and its effects (see Clark and Szerszynski 2021; Bennett 2010), they are not

interested in a sustained examination of the centrality of race to the Anthropocene. Indeed, as Axelle Karera notes, in much of the Anthropocene debate, "one finds that the apocalyptic catastrophe anticipated by the Anthropocene is, strangely, both considered comforting and ethically welcomed" (Karera 2019, 39). The escape into a vital, relational, creative world of complexity, and the search for new ways to become with nature helps to obscure how we got to the world that we have.

Pluriversal politics: the Anthropocene otherwise

The heuristic we analyse as the "Pluriversal" underpins a second set of arguments which rearticulate questions of alterity and ontology to address the crisis of modernity and the challenge of the Anthropocene, whilst addressing some of the lacunae identified in the work of Planetary theorists considered in the previous section. Pluriversal and decolonial theorists posit a different approach to modernity, one that is not so much of a *beyond* but an *otherwise* to, or an outside of, modernity. Rather than being a speculative or indirect attempt to access the speculative beyond of appearances—the world as given to the human as subject—these approaches seek to draw upon alternatives that have been long practiced in non-modern modes of existence, outside or in resistance to Western modernity. Alterity and the outside of modernity no longer takes the form of the speculative or the virtual—the unknown—but can be found in the practices and cosmologies of existing and historical modes of being and resistance at the borders or margins or under conditions of exclusion and repression. In inversing the framing and potential of alterity, the level shifts from the ontological to the socio-historical processes of world-making itself.

Pluriversal critique thus provides a different vantage point, focusing on the mutual constitution of modernity with coloniality, otherwise known as the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). From this perspective, the destruction of the environment, mass extinction and the changing climate cannot be separated from the production of colonial power, from the 16th century onwards, and the dominance of Western forms of governance, economy, epistemology and society. The crisis of modernity is the crisis of the colonial world, a world characterised by rationalism, capitalism, liberalism, patriarchy and racial hierarchy (Grosfoguel 2007; 2008; Mignolo 2002). Thus, the problems created by modernity cannot be addressed with modern solutions, or through forms of thought that fail to understand that modernity cannot be disentangled from coloniality. Indeed, the Anthropocene must be seen as a product of modernity, as well as a concept that homogenises humanity in order to obscure the specific peoples, belief systems and political projects that led to (some) humans emerging as planetary agents.

This approach has significant and clear implications for the discipline of International Relations, reframing the understanding of the world, or rather worlds that form the object of analysis and concern (Blaney and Tickner 2017; Tucker 2018; Rojas 2016; Shani 2021). If the world of modernity is a universalising world, a "One World" world which demands the inclusion of all nature and culture into a single ontological world, then the alternative is a world of many worlds (Escobar 2016). This form of pluriversal politics shifts the focus to those who exist on the borderlands of modernity, including Indigenous societies, Afro-descendent peoples, insurgent maroon societies, and many others, who engage with their worlds differently, both narrating and producing worlds

as separate realities (Mignolo 2005). This goes beyond plural epistemologies, using different knowledge practices to access the same ontology, as it posits that multiple, incommensurable ontologies exist, where ontology is a form of "worlding", which both describes and produces realities, engaging in a form of ontological politics that allows for people to live otherwise, to create worlds which cannot be understood by or reduced to the ontology of modernity (Blaser 2014). This form of pluriversal politics has been promoted by scholars of International Relations as a means to disrupt the "coloniality of modern international politics" (Rojas 2016, 380).

This pluriversal approach is put to work in IR in an influential piece by David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, who explicitly critique framings that rely on a singular world with epistemological pluralism, rather than accepting a more radical form of ontological difference (2017). Their argument for a "pluriversal IR" draws on standpoint feminism to argue for a political ontology of the marginalised, but perhaps more significantly they promote a "decolonial science" that cultivates knowledge through walking with the Other, rather than attempting to know them (2017, 308). This argument draws heavily on Robbie Shilliam's work in *The Black Pacific*, where he sets out a vision of multiple political ontologies that encompass the peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the African diaspora and European settlers (Shilliam 2015). Shilliam's project, like Blaney and Tickner's is intended to be one of diplomacy between worlds, rather than inclusion into a single one, which they view as a "a diplomatic project of coexistence or a process of reparation where past violence may be healed, and relationality recovered" (Blaney and Tickner 2017, 308).

The pluriverse acts as a challenge not only to modernity, but also to Planetary conceptions of history and temporality in the Anthropocene. The singular Planetary narrative of the Anthropocene sets out a trajectory from pre-modern to modern society, culminating in the emergence of humanity as a species which impacts on the geological conditions of the planet and threatens its ecosystems and environmental sustainability (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). However, this story obscures the plurality of temporalities at work across different ontologies, groups of humans and the places that they inhabited, which refuse to be homogenised into one metanarrative of species development (Escobar 2017). Moreover, the "Anthropos" fails to account for the specific form of humanity, practices, forms of knowledge and beliefs that produced the dominant One World World that now threatens the sustainability of many forms of life across the planet. Indeed, decolonial theorists, activists and Indigenous scholars highlight the multiple temporalities and trajectories of peoples on the borderlands of modernity, that fail to conform to the singular narrative of modernity (Todd 2016; Corntassel 2012; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Thus, the Eurocentric narrative of a universal history that has led us to the brink disaster cannot be sustained in a pluriversal world where there is no single point of origin, and entangled temporalities resist simple linear trajectories.

Unlike many Planetary theorists of the Anthropocene, advocates for Pluriversal politics put colonial dynamics and racial difference at the centre of their analysis. One of the main features of this approach is the recognition of radical difference, pushing beyond conceptions of multiculturalism or cultural relativism, towards ontological difference (Blaser 2014). Pluriversal politics thus moves beyond explicit colonial logics of race and neoliberal conceptions of culture towards an even more radical conception of difference, one where reality itself is produced and sustained as separate from the world of modernity (Blaney and Tickner 2017). Relational Indigenous or Afro-descendent ontologies thus

cannot be understood through Western epistemologies that require the separation of subject and object, nature and culture, inside and outside, because they exist in a state of radical difference (Escobar 2017). Importantly, proponents of pluriversal politics do not argue that Western, modernist frameworks are wrong, but that they are parochial and cannot be applied universally. In a recent example in IR, critical Indigenous thinking was held up as a potential "critical mirror" for reconceiving and re-imagining life in the Anthropocene, clearly demonstrating the need to learn from and with, rather than to assimilate ontological others (Randazzo and Richter 2021). Thus, a thoroughgoing epistemological plurality is inherently tied to the ontological pluralism of otherwise world(s). The Anthropocene is reframed through a prism of multiple realities, produced through the worlding practices of different peoples, allowing for different entanglements of nature and culture and the dialogue between and across ontologies. The ontological unity sought by modernist thinkers is rejected in favour of a cosmopolitics, an ontological diplomacy that allows those outside modernity to engage together to find new, productive ways of developing futures beyond modernity (Conway 2019; De La Cadena 2010).

While Planetary approaches tend to obscure the role of alterity in the construction of modernity, Pluriversal approaches centre those excluded from the imaginary of "Man" (Wynter 2003). Pluriversal theorists importantly argue that modern forms of thought, industry and governance were and are intimately bound up with the hierarchical racial schemas that underpinned colonial conquest, and contemporary forms of coloniality, which continue to exclude and oppress Indigenous, Afrodescendent and other non-Western peoples. Problematising the view that there should be the inclusion of these Others of modernity into a unitary conception of humanity, Pluriversal approaches propose a plural ontological schema, allowing for multiple worlds within the world. However, there is the inevitable danger that an essentialising set of binaries are brought into play, where peoples or communities in certain times and places are seen to be the bearers of either non-modern or modernist understandings. This problematically affirms existing modes of life and the struggles, imagined to be ways forward to alternative non-modern futures.

For authors that we categorise as working within the paradigm of the Black Horizon, the problem with Pluriversal approaches is not the centring of coloniality and race but rather the neglect of the ontological preconditions for a world of "many worlds" in which there are plural modes of becoming human. A good example is Maldonado-Torres' critique of leading decolonial theorist Enrique Dussel, precisely for the confusion of the ontological level and the empirical (or ontic) in attempting the "direct application of Levinas's ethical metaphysics to concrete historical reality" (2008, 183). Dussel argued that Levinas' affirmation of the Other could be taken literally, so that "this Other encompasses the peripheral colonial world, the sacrificed Indian, the enslaved black, the oppressed woman, the subjugated child, and the alienated popular culture—all victims of modernity's irrational action in contradiction to its own rational ideal" (1995, 137). Dussel's Other, unlike Levinas's, is knowable and functions more like a justification for the Subject's normative ideals than a point of ontological alterity that can never be fully understood. Maldonado-Torres argues that: "Dussel seems to commit a double error: first he mistranslates Levinasian ethics to concrete reality and then he uses the translated terms for the analysis of a context in which ethical categories do not seem to apply in the first place" (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 185).

The reason why ethical categories do not apply for a more ontological reading is that there is nothing to affirm in life under coloniality and racial capitalism. The affirmative reading of Dussel and others conflates an outside or Other to modernity with the experience of colonisation, of being Other to the coloniser (see also work on "critical border thinking" and critique from the margins, for example, Grosfoguel 2008; Mignolo 2000). While, for Levinas, the Other is never literally present but "a continuous source of destabilisation" that "never becomes a ground" (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 181):

> … for Dussel, the Other is a concrete human subject in a position of subordination. The Other for him is precisely the subject who lives on the periphery. It is the poor and the oppressed. In this way Dussel identifies metaphysical exteriority with exclusion. The Other is not so much the Other qua Other but the Other qua poor. Dussel (con)fuses here the "beyond Being" with the non-being. (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 181–182)

Maldonado-Torres argues that Dussel shifts from the modernist understanding of the subaltern as a "non-being", lacking ontological weight, to "beyond Being", in a space outside of modernity, the antiblack world and coloniality (2008, 182; see also Fanon 1967). This understanding then can be understood as remaining within a modern ontology, not only essentializing the subaltern or Indigenous subject, held to possess non-modern beliefs and practices, but dividing the world according to the binary imaginary of coloniality—between Colonial and Non-colonial subjects (on this point, see also Shilliam 2016). Thus, rather than challenging discourses of mastery, ironically, decolonial approaches can easily end up reproducing them once there is a category error of confusing levels of analysis. Maldonado-Torres' insight is one that asks uncomfortable questions of pluriversal work in IR as well, suggesting that desire to learn from or engage in productive cosmological diplomacy with ontological others may run the risk of reifying colonial ontological framings rather than eroding them.

Increasingly, alternative approaches are developing which enable work within International Relations to move beyond decolonial or Pluriversal understandings. As we analyse in the following section, work largely within critical Black studies draws on the sociological work of W. E. B. Du Bois at the start of the last century (1903; Maldonado-Torres 2008, 226) to explore questions of ontology. For example, Nahum Chandler argues that Du Bois opens up the problematic of the modern ontology and the subject per se, suggesting that the task for critical thought is one of "desedimentation" or "destablization" rather than "primarily one of recovery and return" (Chandler 2014, 65). Where the dominant strands of Pluriversal thinking seek to pluralise and rework the concept of the human, adding more worlds to the world of many worlds, those operating within the Black Horizon seek to maintain the centrality of coloniality and race but to place greater emphasis on the ontological groundings that are the precondition for this framing. In doing so, we suggest below that the Black Horizon as an approach may enable those working within International Relations to go beyond the choice of either a One World World or a world of ontological fractures and divides.

The Black horizon

In the two sections above we developed heuristic paradigms to help clarify and draw out limitations with both the Planetary and the Pluriversal approaches. The Planetary, in its

focus upon ontology, too easily seeks to move to a speculative "beyond" of modernity without coming to terms with the racial and colonial grounding of concepts of the Human and the temporality of a catastrophe to come. Pluriversal approaches instead foreground race and coloniality but, although they tend to the ontological import of modes of life in the making of a pluriverse of many worlds, modernity is "'provincialized" or reduced to an identity, one among others. The advocacy of many worlds is then a call for co-existence for separate and distinct spaces, a celebration of other knowledges and practices rather than a thorough going critique of modernity itself. Our third heuristic framing, through which to think discussions of alterity and ontology, draws from work in critical Black studies as part of the broader Black radical tradition, theorising the nature of Blackness within the world of modernity and in the wake of slavery, colonialism and systematic subjugation.

Much of the work of Black studies scholars has focused on understanding the relationship between modernity and antiblackness, and the foundations of the modern world in a conceptualisation of the ontology of the subject or the Human via the disavowal of the racial cut of the ontological Colour Line (Spillers 1987; Warren 2018). For many, this means highlighting the foundational nature of antiblackness for key elements of modernist thought, particularly the figure of "Man", representing the autonomous, liberal subject, who is equipped with knowledge and agency to gain mastery over the world (Wynter 2003; McKittrick 2006). This version of Man becomes conflated with humanity, or the Anthropos, forgetting the exclusion of those who are deliberately situated as outside of the Human. Crucially, the exclusion of Blackness provides a boundary point for humanity, giving coherence to the self of Western modernity (Wilderson 2010). Rather than the singular, sympoietic ontology of the Anthropocene, where the assemblages of nature-cultures engage in a world of becoming, or the multiple relational ontologies of the Pluriverse, the Black Horizon sees a world of modern ontology, with its reductive and linear binaries, brought into question by a Black non/para-ontology, where existence of a distinct realm of humanity is imagined only at the cost of the production and reproduction of the policed limits marked by Blackness.

In a world where humanity is defined by Blackness as the outside, it is the violence of antiblackness that patrols the border of the human. Thus, as Jared Sexton argues, "black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space" (Sexton 2011, 28). The violence of antiblackness serves an important function, the maintenance of social life in the world, the continuing production and sustainment of civil society. Antiblackness is a tool of ontological stability, a form of political ontology that produces human being through the evisceration of Black being. In this sense, Blackness is a product of modernity, intended to sustain modernity from the outside, never fully allowed in, but required to set the boundaries of humanity. Thus, the Black Horizon is not about an affirmation of black life but the necessary disavowal of black life as figure for the disavowal of all life that is beyond the grasp of a modern ontology.

The distinction in the framing of the Black Horizon is that this cut is not correlative to thought (as it is for Planetary approaches) nor is it a secondary product of colonial hierarchies of power (as it is for Pluriversal approaches). Antiblackness is the grounding precondition for both Planetary and Pluriversal framings which start from racial differentiation amongst those already included within the category of the Human (Sexton 2016). Thus, from the perspective of the Black Horizon, Pluriversal approaches

do not pay enough attention to ontological concerns which structure the discourses of colonial and decolonial/Indigenous struggle. These are mediated by an invisible or disavowed third positionality, that of racialized chattel slavery, enabling colonies to integrate Indigenous rights on the basis of shared humanity. The point being that slavery was not just economically vital to capitalist modernity but socio-historically central to constructions of citizenship and to the understanding of humanity itself.

Diasporic Black experience was forged out of the transatlantic slave trade and the traumatic journey across the Middle Passage, before emerging on the plantation and in the fugitive communities of the maroon (Glissant 1997). This terrifying journey, through the "abyss", produced new forms of life in the Caribbean and the Americas, which pushed against the linear time, the cuts and binaries, of modernity (Drabinski 2019). Moreover, the abyssal subjectivity that emerged from this process was one untethered to a point of origin, rendered nomadic and rootless, in contrast to both modern and Indigenous forms of subjectivity. Memory and history are erased by the abyss, reduced to shards and fragments, which are tied together into creolised forms, that never fully cohere into a stable new identity, but remain in a constant process of becoming. Thus, through trauma and survival, a different form of being is produced, one that is rhizomatic, multi-rooted and constantly in motion; understood as a process of becoming rather than a static form of being (Drabinski 2019; Moten 2018).

Life, after this abyssal beginning, is a process of continual becoming and undoing, an unwinding of the subject of modernity and in excess of modern ontology (McKittrick 2021; Moten 2013; Warren 2017; Moten 2018). This groundless negation of static subjectivity is an opening for new creative possibilities of being and affirmative life in the shadows of modernity (King 2019; Keeling 2018). J. Kameron Carter argues that blackness,

> … is a movement of the between … an interstitial drama on the outskirts of the order of purity. It is an improvisatory movement of doubleness, a fugitive announcement in and against the grain of the modern worlds ontotheological investment in pure being, or pristine origins, and of the modern world's orchestrations of value, rule, and governance … in the project or the ongoing exercise of inscribing pure being. (Carter 2013, 590)

It is in this sense that the nature of Black being (or lack of being) is understood as something other than ontological. For Fred Moten, this is a mysticism where ontology is displaced by something Other (Moten 2013). Rather than the political ontology of the pluriverse, this is a paraontology where the nothingness of Black life (according to modernity), indicates an underside of modernity that allows for an escape from pure being (Harney and Moten 2013).

The paraontology of Black life is thus expressed creatively, in the undercommons of modernity or in the cultural productions that are denied by the mainstream of modern thought. For Fred Moten, this is the potency of jazz, which is the sound of "interdicted black social life operating on frequencies that are disavowed" (Moten 2018, 151). We might also consider the disruptive, vernacular forms of speculative thought that came to be known as Afrofuturism, recasting musical experimentation as "Black Secret Technology" (Eshun 2003), or the bricolage techniques of Black musicians, remixing and sampling the music of the past to create new histories and futures (Samatar 2017). At the centre of many of these modes of culture is the idea of improvisation and

syncopation, aesthetic forms that contain the possibility to destabilise foundationalist conceptions of the world, to corrode the certainties that support the unitary subject.

For the Black Horizon, race is central to the ontological question, but does not provide a stable answer. Blackness is understood as both necessary for a modern ontology and as simultaneously destabilising and paraontological. The creativity and relationality of Blackness is understood as produced through the violence of modernity, allowing for a diffusion of subjectivity and a relational existence that refuses the separation between nature and culture. However, the Black Horizon does not lead towards a plurality of ontologies, but the deconstruction, destabilisation and corrosion of the very notion of ontology. The fugitive inclinations of the Black Horizon suggest lines of flight away from concrete ontological positions towards being as a poetics. Similarly, epistemology is complicated and undermined by the opacity of the Black Horizon, which resists governmentalising. It is an aesthetic method rather than an ontologising practice, a creative becoming that cannot provide a new foundation for thought, but remains suspended in in a creative, opaque uncertainty. The Black Horizon is an immanent ethos of critique. This shares much with the structural position of Afropessimism and other approaches within critical Back studies, which emphasise antiblackness, i.e. the inability of a modern ontology to recognise "the sentience, much less the sapience, of those marked by racial blackness" (Sexton 2016). Thus, the Black Horizon seeks not to add or to include what modernity disavows but to open up the ontological assumptions grounded upon this. Afropessimism, as Jared Sexton states, can be understood as "a meditation on a poetics and politics of abjection wherein racial blackness operates as an asymptotic approximation of that which disturbs every claim or formation of identity and difference as such" (Sexton 2016).[3]

While Planetary approaches separate ontological concerns from those of race and coloniality and Pluriversal approaches inverse the hierarchy thereby privileging race and coloniality, critics working within what we are calling the "Black Horizon" take care to pay attention to the distinctiveness of both the social and historical questions of race and those of ontology (the foundational assumptions of modernity itself). As Patrice Douglass stresses "blackness enters coherence not through race but as a contrapuntal position to existence itself" (2016, 120). This separation is often expressed conceptually through the prioritisation of the concept of antiblackness as the disavowed grounds of the modernist subject and "world".[4] While both Planetary and Pluriversal approaches seek to add new forms of understanding and new approaches, the Black Horizon seeks to take critical approaches forward through the power of subtraction or of undoing and unmaking, destabilising or desedimenting governmentalizing assumptions, understanding its task as a process of unlearning or unmaking of the world, the subject and its instrumental hubris.

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[3]Sexton argues: "Afro-Pessimism, by this route, critically *supplements* the paradigm of critical ethnic studies in at least two ways: First, by moving conceptually from the empirical to the structural or, more precisely, from the experiential to the political ontological, especially insofar as the question of differential racialization—or the complexity of racial hierarchy—makes recourse to a comparative history and social science. Second, by reframing racism as a relation grounded in anti-blackness rather than white supremacy, or, more precisely, by pushing through the conceptual framework of racism altogether toward an apprehension of the world-historical transformation entailed in the emergence of racial slavery" (2016).

[4]As Frank Wilderson writes: "Rather than celebrate Blackness as a cultural identity, Afro-Pessimism theorizes it as a *position* of accumulation and fungibility; that is, as condition—or relation—of ontological death" (2010, 58).

The ethico-political approach of the Black Horizon thereby should not be seen as limited to Afropessimism or indeed to work within critical Black Studies. As leading authors in the field regularly acknowledge, the understanding of an immanent deconstructive critique owes much to the work of Jacques Derrida (2001) as well as to more contemporary theorists of non-ontological or non-philosophical work such as Francois Laruelle (2017), Claire Colebrook (2014), Karen Barad (2007), Vicky Kirby (2011) and Eugene Thacker (2010) (see Sexton 2017; Moten 2020). However, it has been in the field of critical Black studies that these ideas have seen their fullest development, driven by the understanding that a deconstructive or anti-ontological positionality is one that comes more easily to those who can identify with the non-subject positionality of those excluded from full being. As Jayna Brown states: "I argue that being categorised as inhuman, or not quite human, is a privileged position from which to undo the assumptions not only of race thinking but of the other systems of domination with which race thinking is linked" (Brown 2021, 112). This perspective, for Brown, is a non-ontological one of immersion or submergence in being rather than one of cuts and distinctions which can only be part of discourses of control and domination.

While the heuristic framings of the Planetary and Pluriversal frameworks can be seen to underpin significant work within IR over recent years, our third paradigm, heuristically designated here as the Black Horizon, has so far had much less traction in the field (see Agathangelou 2021; Odysseos 2017). Crucially, as of yet, we are not aware of any critical work which has identified and examined the ontological tensions highlighted here, between Pluriversal approaches and the Black Horizon. At most the focus has been upon folding crucial Black studies figures like Moten and Spillers into existing discursive framings of race and coloniality (Kamola 2020; Odysseos 2019). Thus, the paraontological focus on desedimenting or eroding modern forms of being and governing in the world, from the position of the inhuman remains largely unexamined by IR scholars. The problematic of the Anthropocene is still addressed in IR essentially through Planetary or Pluriversal perspectives, leaving critical Black studies on the sidelines. The Black Horizon offers an opportunity to address issues of alterity and ontology in the Anthropocene in an approach that bypasses the lacunae left by the dominant critical approaches to the crisis of modernity.

Our argument is not intended to construct the Black Horizon as a distinct approach to IR, however we can draw out some preliminary implications that arise from taking this form of thought seriously in the Anthropocene. The first is the opening up of new critical possibilities in ontological debates in IR, moving from a pluriversal position of adding alternative ontologies to one where we examine how paraontological tendencies erode the foundations of modernity. Secondly, IR can benefit from considering what it means to understand the world from the perspective of the "abyssal subject" (Drabinski 2019), one that is rooted neither in a modernist ontology nor a nonmodernist world, but exists in a rootless, nomadic orientation to a world of flux. This is an ontological position that emerges traumatically through modernity, rather than against or alongside it, one which opens new possibilities for thought and critique. Thirdly, the Black Horizon opens the possibility of abandoning ontology as a discussion of being, moving us towards more radical philosophical critiques of modernist forms of thought, suggesting that the Anthropocene may not be a space of multiple ontologies but one where being is

eroded, dissolving even the tenuous conceptions of subjectivity that remain in Planetary and Pluriversal forms of thought.

Conclusion

In this paper we heuristically distil three contemporary positions or paradigms which underpin conceptual work engaging an alterity beyond or external to a modernist ontology. Planetary and Pluralist framings are currently the most influential within the disciplinary sphere of International Relations. The former places the problem of alterity at the level of ontology, advocating a speculative "beyond" of modernity, while the latter stresses alterity at the level of race and coloniality and the already existing modes of living otherwise in a pluriverse of many worlds. By placing these in relation to a third potential approach, the Black Horizon, we analysed how the two dominant critical approaches to the crisis of modernity carried lacunas associated with the particular ways in which they thought alterity or the "outside" of modernist thought.

Planetary approaches were limited by an inability to take coloniality and racial discourses seriously as grounding modern ontological frameworks. Once this is done it is no longer possible to imagine a posthuman in universal terms nor is it possible to imagine acts of salvage or prevention which prevent the catastrophe to come, when there is an awareness that the modernist imaginary depends on the destruction of other worlds. Pluriversal approaches were also limited, in placing coloniality and race at the centre of their theorising they tended to reify and celebrate differences, suggesting that distinct identities and modes of life pre-existed or were somehow literally separate or other to modernity as a seemingly legitimate and coherent life world. From the perspective of the Black Horizon, making these cuts and distinctions would be problematic as there can be no entities and essences grounding plural ontologies or stories of origin and purity.

We raise these issues not to be pedantic or contrarian but because what is at stake in these debates exceeds the space of the academy and informs the policy realm of International Relations itself. As has been well documented, Planetary and Pluriversal approaches have been drawn into debates on policy interventions (Austin 2019; Sabaratnam 2017; Schmidt 2013). The problems of Planetary approaches, which suborn societies to preserving hegemonic forms of modernist existence, and those of Pluriversal approaches which essentialise and responsibilise those on the margins of society then become clearer. The Black Horizon provides a creative outlet outside of strictures of modern governance, allowing for an expression of sociality and being that refuses to be governed. This refusal is given a conceptual framework via the paraontological approach which seeks to use the contemporary crisis of modernist thought not to salvage and affirm the world but to push further the unravelling of assumptions about the Human and the World. This forces us to question both proposals for planetary governance and pluriversal diplomacy in IR, suggesting that there is still much deconstructive work to be done in a world that remains stubbornly wedded to the foundations of modernity.

Disclosure statement

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