

Worlding without end? Geographies of the human, the posthuman, and the inhuman: An abyssal perspective

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**David Chandler¹**  **and Jonathan Pugh²**

Abstract

Critiques of relational and posthuman geography have targeted the persistence of Man as a privileged figure of agency, seeking to unsettle the subject long taken to anchor modern critique. This paper argues that a deeper condition remains less examined: not simply the persistence of Man, but the continuing demand that violence, rupture, and repair become occasions for further worlding. Engaging Kathryn Yusoff's *Geologic Life* as a pressure point, the paper reads her inhuman geography as one of the most sustained attempts to displace Man by turning to earth, geos, rift, and inhumanity. What this clarifies, for us, is not only the status of Man, but the status of geography itself. Geography does not recede when Man is displaced. We read it as the foundational ontological operation of modernity: the historical condition through which earth is organised as world and through which worlding becomes the terrain on which critique must operate. Tracing how concepts such as capacity, repair, generativity, relation, and opacity function within this operation, we posit an alternative analytic of abyssal geography. Abyssal geography does not provide alternative worlds or deeper immanence but a diagnostic of the regime in which critique is repeatedly organised through the labour of worlding.

Keywords

Abyssal, Anthropocene, inhuman, ontology, worlding

Introduction

Recent debates in human geography have increasingly turned on the limits of relational and posthuman thought. The turn to experimental poesis, assemblage, more-than-human becoming, and distributed agency has sought to move beyond a modernist image of the Human as a detached subject standing over a passive and instrumentally available world (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Connolly, 2011; Latour, 2017). In this framing, the problem is often located in epistemology and ontology: Man is imagined as cut apart from the world, and critique seeks to unsettle this separation by redistributing agency

across relations, processes, ecologies, and non-human modes of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Quijano, 2000; Wynter, 2003). The human appears to be given a second chance to world the world, this time through more fluid, responsive, and immanent

¹University of Westminster, London, UK

²School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Corresponding author:

David Chandler, University of Westminster, 32-38 Wells Street, London W1T 3UW, UK.

Email: d.chandler@westminster.ac.uk

forms of relation (Chipato and Chandler, 2024; Colebrook, 2015). Yet this move has itself been sharply challenged. Critics argue that relational and posthuman approaches can move too quickly from the violence of modernity to new languages of generativity, repair, and becoming, while insufficiently confronting how coloniality, racialisation, and anti-Blackness structure the very world these approaches seek to recompose (Chipato and Chandler, 2025; Karera, 2019; Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023). Relational critique can also appear parasitical on non-modern, non-Western, or Indigenous modes of being, treating them as more attuned to what nature, earth, or the world itself 'wants' (Burke et al. 2016; Todd, 2015, 2016).

Related concerns about the rapid passage from violence to generativity, repair, and becoming have also been developed in work foregrounding negativity, refusal, voiding, and the limits of futural salvage (also see Bissell et al. 2021; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2021; Kingsbury and Secor, 2021). Yusoff's inhuman geography approaches this problem from a different direction. It is one of the most sustained attempts to think of race, geology, and coloniality beyond the figure of the Human subject. This paper engages Yusoff's work, particularly *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018) and *Geologic Life* (2024), in order to draw out the value and distinctiveness of her critique of the relational turn.

At the same time, we ask what becomes visible when Yusoff's account of earth, geos, and the inhuman is read not only as a critique of Man but also as an opening into the question of worlding itself. Our concern is that much contemporary critique, even where it displaces the Human, continues to organise its force through the continuation of worlding. The world is not a neutral category in this framing but the limit point for critical alternatives, which remain ontologically tethered to the work of the subject in world-making or 'worlding' its existence. This limit is not the phenomenological limit of the subject's experience; the 'world' encompasses an infinite plurality of worlds. This is precisely the point. The world, in this way, becomes an infinite field of spatial and futural possibility. The world becomes an inexhaustible resource, where finality and closure become ontological impossibilities.

What is the origin of this groundless ground of infinite possibilities? This is where the paper turns to geography. At this introductory point, geography can be understood in its familiar sense: as the field concerned with earth, space, relation, location, environment, territory, and world. Yet the argument developed below asks whether geography also names something more basic: the historical condition through which the earth becomes organised as world and through which worlding becomes the terrain on which critique must operate. This is not to treat geography simply as an academic discipline, nor to reduce it to cartography, spatial description, or territorial knowledge. It is to ask how the world itself becomes the unavoidable register through which modern claims to order, harm, relation, and repair are made.

The paper proceeds in three sections. The first section reads Yusoff's inhuman geography on its own terms, showing how her work relocates race, violence, and extraction from the register of human misrecognition to the material ordering of earth, geos, and world. The second section turns to the historical and ontological role of geography in modernity. It argues that the decisive issue is not only the status of the Human or the redistribution of agency beyond it but the continued reliance upon worlding as the labour through which violence, rupture, and repair are made consequential. The third section develops the framework of abyssal geography. By abyssal geography, we name the problematising of the condition in which worlding remains compulsory: where even rupture, opacity, repair, and critique must be made worldable in order to count.¹

The inhuman

This section reads Yusoff's inhuman geography as one of the most sustained attempts in contemporary academic research to relocate race, violence, and extraction from the register of human misrecognition to the material ordering of earth, geos, and world. The point is not to treat Yusoff as a representative of a simple posthuman or relational optimism. Her work is important precisely because it refuses that route. It moves through geology, geo-trauma, rift, depth, buried histories, and anti-Blackness in

order to show that the violence of the Human cannot be understood at the level of the Human alone. This is why Yusoff functions here as a pressure point for the argument of the paper. Her work pushes critique beyond Man with unusual force, while also making visible the continued investment in worlding that this paper seeks to examine.

Yusoff's recent work on race in the Anthropocene, the central concern of both *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018) and *Geologic Life* (2024), begins from the claim that race has been narrowly construed as a problem of the 'human (that is, the figure of humanism)' (2018, 18). Against this narrowing, she situates race within the 'material spacing and temporal ordering' of modernity (Yusoff, 2024: 61), reframing the cut of race as the 'agentic separation of matter into *bios* and *geos* [from which] specific imaginaries of the planet as a stable object and ground of knowledge emerge' (Yusoff, 2024: 60). The significance of this move is considerable. Race is not added to an already constituted world. It participates in the very material and spatial ordering through which world becomes coherent, actionable, and extractable.

This is why, for Yusoff, Enlightenment accounts of time, space, and the Human subject cannot be separated from colonialism and colonality. As she writes, while colonialism was being theorised as a natural emergence of the social surface, 'the enslaved were spatialized in the depths of the strata' – in slave ships, sea beds, dungeons, plantations, prisons, and mines (Yusoff, 2024: 241). The world was worlded as a white world through 'the transformation of nature into 'World' from earth: white World through Black earth' (Yusoff, 2024: 315). What matters here is not simply that the world is racialised but that the world itself becomes the medium through which racial differentiation is made to hold: to organise value, stabilise meaning, and enable extraction.

Yusoff develops this point through the relation between race and geology. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes*, race is described as 'a material economy that itself emerges through the libidinal economy of geology' (2018: 7). In *Geologic Life*, she argues that 'geology is always racialized and that race is a geologic formation' (Yusoff, 2024: 10). Race is therefore not primarily a biopolitical concept subsequently mapped onto space. It is

materially and conceptually grounded through the relationship to the earth. This is why Yusoff insists that 'there is no liberatory politics to be had through an account of biopolitics', since biopolitics is already grounded in a colonial earth in which bios has been divided from a racialised geos (Yusoff, 2024: 490). The focus on bios covers over the prior spatial and material extraction through which race is organised as a governance between Life and the inhuman (Yusoff, 2024: 12).

The consequence is that the inhuman is not simply the excluded remainder of the Human. It is the material condition through which Human and world are produced together. Race maintains the border between a racialised Life capable of knowing, extracting and instrumentalising, and a racialised inhuman available to be known, extracted and enslaved as 'property, energy, and flesh of geology' (Yusoff, 2024: 13). This grounding places race at the centre of the construction of the world itself, not merely at the level of subject-formation or representation. Yusoff's formulation is stark: race was made 'where nobody thought to be looking for it – in geology – because it did not have or need or depend on a human subject at the centre of its analysis or empirics' (2024: 19).

This is also why Yusoff's work provides such a powerful critique of relational and posthuman approaches that move too quickly towards generativity, repair or more-than-human becoming. Against the assumption that the future remains open to new compositions, Yusoff insists on a reckoning with what has already been done, 'and for whom and through what languages of the imagination and materialism it was done' (2024: 491). The present is not simply oriented towards future possibility; it is already inscribed by the material recombinations of past violence. The point is not merely that history has been omitted, but that the World itself has been produced through racialised spatial and temporal ordering. Dionne Brand's reminder, cited by Yusoff, that 'one is born into history, one isn't born into a void' captures the force of this intervention (2018: 27).

In this register, Yusoff's 'ghost geologies' are not simply hidden histories to be recovered. They unsettle the apparent neutrality of the world as a surface on which history unfolds. The plantation, mine,

and prison do not merely exemplify racial capitalism; they help define ‘the racialization of *all* space’ (Yusoff, 2024: 437). The world, the subject and the geologic division of bios and geos are produced together through a libidinal and material economy of extraction. Yusoff’s invocation of Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014)’s black feminist geopoethics is therefore crucial: the task is not the betterment of the World as we know it, but an ethics that ‘aims at its end’ (2018: 104).

Yusoff is careful, however, not to turn Blackness, Indigeneity, or colonised knowledge practices into an experimental outside or supplement to Western science. She explicitly rejects the mobilisation of Indigenous and colonised knowledge practices as an exterior resource for Western critical thought (Yusoff, 2018: 21). Nor does she offer a romanticised return to nature. In *Geologic Life*, she describes her project as the opposite of a ‘closer to nature’ discourse, locating it instead in the paraontological tactics that emerge from the ‘forced margin of the inhuman(e)’ (Yusoff, 2024: 12). This caution matters. Yusoff’s work cannot be reduced to a simple politics of recovery, harmony, or redemptive relation. Her account of the inhuman remains marked by violence, impossibility, and geotrauma.

At the same time, Yusoff’s work continually returns to the question of how the earth, geos, and the inhuman might become the terrain through which another relation becomes thinkable. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes*, she writes towards the ‘non-event’ of a billion Black Anthropocenes and towards an ‘insurgent geology’ ‘flooded with the world’ (Yusoff, 2018: 22). In *Geologic Life*, she asks for a politics of the inhuman that pushes further into the inhuman as a potential political and liberatory category, ‘staying in proximity to geotrauma’ in order to navigate and loosen its passage into the present (Yusoff, 2024: 134). These gestures remain cautious and internally conflicted, but they are central to the force of her intervention. The earth is broken, rifted, and violent, yet it also becomes the site through which critique seeks another relation.

This is why the argument of this paper begins from Yusoff rather than from a more straightforwardly relational or reparative thinker. Her work is not important because it simply repeats the familiar injunction to ‘world otherwise’. It is important because

it tests that injunction at its most difficult point: where worlding passes through anti-Blackness, earth, geos, rift, inhumanity, and the demand for the end of the world. Yusoff gives us one of the strongest accounts of why critique cannot remain centred on Man. Race, geology, and world precede and condition the Human subject. The violence of modernity is not only enacted by Man; it is materially organised through the earth/world relation that makes Man possible.

This becomes clearest in the passage in *Geologic Life* where Yusoff discusses Sylvia Wynter’s critique of ‘Man-as-Centre, Man-as-Universal-I’ (2024: 277). Yusoff writes that ‘the inhuman is what secures the differentiation to produce the human as such’ (2024: 278). She then clarifies that the inhuman ‘can never be incorporated into the political subject or *being* as such because of the material differentiation between figure (the political subject of juridical rights) and ground (the matter of resource to enable the *becoming* of the political subject, philosophically and materially, that may have access to rights)’ (Yusoff, 2024: 278). The split between figure and ground is therefore not a secondary consequence of the Human. It is the racialising and material differentiation through which Human and world are produced together.

Yusoff’s next sentence is decisive: ‘But Man is not geography’ (2024: 278). This sentence matters because it refuses to let geography be reduced to the figure of Man. The figure is not the ground. The universal view of the world articulated by Man is not the only possible configuration of geography. For Yusoff, Man names a particular world-ordering – colonial, stratified, and extractive – but does not exhaust the earth, geos, or geography itself. There can be other temporal–spatial modes of inhabitation, other materialisms, and other ways in which geography holds ‘a multiplicity of imaginaries’ (Yusoff, 2024: 279). It is precisely here, where Yusoff’s account most forcefully refuses to let Man exhaust geography, that the next section begins.

Geography as the ontological regime of modernity: worlding without end

Yusoff’s claim – ‘Man is not Geography’ – brings the argument to a decisive point. Once Man is

distinguished from geography, the question becomes how geography comes to function as the ground through which critique, rupture and political possibility are engendered. As intimated above, it is here that Yusoff's intervention sits in proximity to what might broadly be registered as the field of 'otherwise geographies' (Derickson et al. 2025; Oswin, 2020), while also testing that field at its limit. Like many related efforts to unsettle mastery and the sovereign subject, *Geologic Life* turns towards other modes of worlding. What distinguishes Yusoff's approach is how much it intensifies and deepens the stakes. She insists that 'Geography', as an academic discipline, has a missing terrain: 'the agency and volatility of the earth' (Yusoff, 2024: 242, 269):

For at least three centuries most social thought has taken the earth to be a relatively stable platform on which dynamic social processes play out. Western theory has engaged with surface-led theorizing and attachments, eschewing the depths and durational in order to adhere to a homogenizing place of social interaction. (Yusoff 2024: 244–5).

Yusoff seeks to reinsert the earth not as backdrop but as active condition: a material force implicated in the production of subjectivity, temporality and political possibility. This is carefully distinguished from geologic determinism. Drawing attention to the reality of the earth, Yusoff insists, does not entail reducing politics to geology or treating materiality as fate. On the contrary, it is crucial 'not to see everything as colonialism, as other earths were made in deference to and defiance of that coloniality' (Yusoff, 2024: 486). The reality of the earth, on Yusoff's account, is not exhausted by colonial geology or stratigraphic violence. It exceeds the single ordering that claimed to master it. Beneath and beyond the colonial ordering of matter lie other geographies, other modes of relation that have been suppressed but not erased.

Geography, in this sense, is capacity rather than closure, a gift for the development of new pathways in critical thought and practice. For Yusoff, it is by turning the gaze of geographers to the rift that we can unlock the power of how 'geography is not a

constant but a multiplicity of differentiated experiences in the dynamics of space' (2024: 340):

The presumptive erasure of all other possibilities of time and space materialisms, and all other modes of relation and subjective sense, was a geographic imagination before it was an ideological goal (and a material condition enforced through genocide and annihilation). This violent intent not consent was able to be refuted precisely because of the fullness of geography to hold a multiplicity of imaginaries... The temporally discontinuous, the chronogeographies of nonsettler time, blues time, Black time, and beaver time expose the plane of reason on which the presumption of the universal rests... (Yusoff, 2024: 279)

This is the strongest form of Yusoff's investment in geography. Geography is not merely the surface on which coloniality was imposed. It is also, for Yusoff, the depth and multiplicity through which suppressed materialisms, temporalities, and modes of inhabitation can unsettle the universal. Yusoff's claim does not weaken the geographical stakes; it intensifies them. Once Man is distinguished from geography, the question becomes how geography itself comes to function as the ground through which critique, rupture, and political possibility are articulated.

This is where the present argument turns from Yusoff's account of geography to the historical-ontological emergence of geography itself. Geography is not approached here primarily as the academic discipline, nor as cartography, mapping, or spatial description alone. We use geography to name the demand that earth carry order, relation, violence, responsibility, and repair without appeal to an external guarantee. Worlding names the labour of that demand: the ongoing work through which earth is made consequential from within.

Perhaps the clearest scene in *Geologic Life*, where its stakes come into focus, is Yusoff's reading of the Lisbon earthquake of 1 November 1755. For Yusoff, Kant's treatment of the catastrophe marks a pivotal moment in the gradual disappearance of God and the consolidation of the Man/Nature distinction. The shift from divine causation to natural causation stabilised a new division in which Man stood as a knowing subject over a world rendered as an object.

This account is important, but it can be pushed further. Lisbon does not only mark a shift in explanation, from providence to nature, or a shift in authority, from God to Man. It clarifies a deeper relocation of ground. Catastrophe can no longer be secured by appeal to an external order; it must be explained within the terms of the world itself. The world must account for its own shocks, divisions, and destructions. What comes into view at Lisbon is therefore not simply the rise of Man as a knowing subject, but the demand that the world cohere without transcendental guarantee.

Yet, to our mind, Lisbon also discloses something deeper than this division. It marks the consolidation of a condition – geography, not as an academic discipline, but as the foundational ontological regime of modernity – in which coherence must be produced from within the world itself. As we will draw out, by the time of the Lisbon earthquake, this was less a turning point than a moment of belated clarity: the demand was already in place.

This demand concerns the status of the earth. In the earlier theological frame, the earth could be read as the medium of divine order. Meaning was not produced from the earth alone. Mountains, seas, creatures, climates, distances, and differences did not need to cohere through their own internal consistency. They held together because they were enclosed within a symbolic and teleological unity secured beyond them. What changes in the late medieval and early modern period is that the earth is increasingly required to function as a totality in another sense: navigable, mappable, comparable, measurable, and internally consistent. The earth had long been imagined as a unity under God; it was now required to operate as a single field of order.

From the sixteenth century onward, the atlas increasingly reorganised the earth as a single comparative surface – projected, gridded, rendered commensurable across distance. Seventeenth-century systematisations consolidated this reorganisation, recoding territory and ordering the ‘world’. During this time, as historians including Sylvia Wynter (1995), David Livingstone (1992), and Robert Mayhew (2000) have drawn out, religion was central to the emergence of geography. In Sebastian

Münster’s *Cosmographia* (1544), Abraham Ortelius’ *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), Gerardus Mercator’s *Atlas* (1595), Bernhardus Varenius’ *Geographia Generalis* (1650), and Athanasius Kircher’s *Mundus Subterraneus* (1665), God was read through the earth, as though the world could be divined as God’s script – interpretation encountered as spatial legibility.

The point is not that these works simply abandon theological order. They do not. Early modern geography often bears theological pressure on its surface. As Mayhew shows, geographical writing remained entangled with theological and political questions well into the modern period. Geography could still be presented as a means of reading the works of God. Yet the practical labour of coherence was shifting. The older guarantee remained, but the earth was increasingly being organised through grids, scales, routes, tables, projections, instruments and comparative descriptions that had to hold across distance. The world was not simply given; it had to be assembled, coordinated and made commensurable.

This is why Münster, Ortelius, Mercator, Varenius and Kircher matter here. They sit inside older devotional and cosmological orientations while also normalising a new demand: that the earth be rendered as a coherent field. Ortelius gathers the earth into a comparative theatre. Mercator makes the earth navigable through projection. Varenius systematises geography as a general science of the earth. Kircher extends subterranean and cosmic imagination into the ordering of the world’s depths. In each case, geography does not merely describe a world already secured elsewhere. It helps make the earth function as world.

But as the early modern period took hold these practices did more than facilitate position, movement and accumulation. They were part of a broader recalibration of what coherence depended on. They installed the earth as the site through which differences and claims would be rendered commensurable. As modernity unfolded, they habituated the sense that order arises through internal delineation rather than external guarantee. What was being learned was not only how to map the world, but how to let the world carry what could no longer be guaranteed from outside it. By the time of

Lisbon, in our reading, this habituation had taken hold: ontology was no longer grounded in the divine but in the world. The world is forced to assume the work of coherence itself.

Here, the stakes of the emergence of geography are not merely epistemological – about new techniques for registering the earth. They are ontological: geography binds being and meaning to the ‘world’ as the compulsory register of intelligibility. What counts within modernity is increasingly what can be organised, positioned, related, and worlded. Worlding names this operation. It does not replace the earth. It makes the earth hold as the world. It orders, positions, relates, compares, and extends what is encountered so that it can be sustained as a coherent field. Geography, in this sense, is not the description of a world that already exists. It is the historical–ontological operation through which earth is made to function as world.

This also clarifies the place of the modern subject. The subject should not be treated as the origin of geography. It is one of the relays called forth once world must be oriented from within. Once the world can no longer be secured by an external guarantee, it requires internal points of orientation, judgement, and synthesis.

Geography produced a new kind of world. But such a world required an internal point of anchoring. A world organised through geometry, mapping, and projection requires orientation – a from-here-to-there, a view-from-somewhere. This centre is not simply where the subject happens to stand. Rather, it becomes the internal reference point that makes standing, seeing, projecting, and relating possible at all. It becomes the axis from which all positions became positions in the world. This is where the ‘modern subject’ enters the scene: it is the internal reference point through which the world coheres.

In our reading of this history of modernity, the emergence of the modern subject refers to two things at once: on the one hand, the historical contingency of the birth of the subject during the European ‘Age of Exploration’, and, on the other, how, during geography’s emergence as a new ontological regime, this subject came to appear as structurally necessary. The modern subject marked the requirement that a spatial system contain a fixed

internal point that is not itself spatial – capable of ordering space without being dissolved into it. This is why it came to be characterised as ‘transcendental’ and why modernity articulated a human/nature divide.

This transcendence is not however theological but geographical. The subject’s apparent independence from the world does not derive from divine authority, but from the structural requirement of a world that must generate its own coherence internally and therefore requires an interior point from which that coherence can be organised. This point is well made by Daniel Barber:

The division between this world and another world [the world in its becoming], or the transit from the former to the latter, is enabled by the division between man and world: man, due to his division from (this) world, provides a space of action that can produce or discover a (new) world; the independence of man from world – the invocation of an actor that, while intertwined with and affected by the world, is not ultimately defined by this world – provides the ground for transit to another world. (Barber, 2016: 194)

The capacity of the world to hold many worlds, for the world to be worlded, and for the world to become otherwise depended upon Man’s separation from the world. However, the agency of becoming, an agency that Man was capable (like all forms of life) of instrumentalising, was an immanent one. The divine omniscient view of pre-modernity was not transferred from God to Man but replaced with a regime in which transcendence is internalised as functional necessity.

This was the struggle of early modern and Enlightenment thought. The emerging modern subject did not inherit God’s transcendence but reflected its absence. It organised the world yet did not originate it. It is the centre yet is constructed by the more foundational system – geography – its centres. The instability of the subject arises not from human finitude alone but from geography’s structural demands. Descartes’ (1984) *cogito* codifies rather than inaugurates this regime. The thinking subject does not ground the world; it anchors a world already understood as contingent field. For Descartes:

Archimedes, that he might transport the entire globe from the place it occupied to another, demanded only a point that was firm and immovable; so, also, I shall be entitled to entertain the highest expectations, if I am fortunate enough to discover only one thing that is certain and indubitable. (Descartes, 1984: 4)

Geography requires the subject not as detached observer but as structural function – an interior point through which the differentiating field of world can stabilise itself. The subject is the anchoring illusion geography installs to make the world hold together. Its apparent sovereignty is therefore derivative: the subject appears to ground the world only because geography has already made world the register through which grounding must occur.

To clarify though, the argument is not that ‘geography’ acts instead of Man, but that the intelligibility of acting, justifying, and authorising comes to depend upon the ‘world’. Geography does not eliminate human agency; *worldability becomes the ontological condition of agency itself – the condition under which any action, justification, or authority can function at all*. The familiar narrative in which Man replaces God, articulated by Yusoff in relation to Kant and Lisbon, is therefore not wrong, but incomplete. The ontological cut required by geography names the move by which earth becomes answerable to world and only what becomes worldable can count.

Once coherence must be secured through spatial ordering – through relation, position, and comparability – there can be no appeal to an external principle to guarantee it. Order must be generated from within. In this shift, ground ceases to function as principle and becomes effect. What stabilises coherence is not foundational authority but the ongoing success of spatial organisation. Geography operates as a ‘groundless ground’: not a base beneath the world, but the structural demand that the world continually secure itself as coherent.

This is why geography is both ground and groundless. It is ground because it installs the condition through which modern claims to order, harm, responsibility and repair must pass. It is groundless because it cannot finally secure that condition beyond the worlding it continually performs.

Geography does not solve the absence of transcendental guarantee. It operationalises that absence by requiring the world to continue as if it could ground itself.

Violence, on this account, is not episodic or merely political. It is structural. It names the continual labour required to maintain coherence where no transcendental ground remains. Where order must be spatially generated rather than divinely guaranteed, differentiation becomes necessary. Sylvia Wynter’s (2015) distinction between ‘map’ and ‘territory’ clarifies part of this dynamic. Wynter shows how, through the violent forging of the New World, the genre of Man overrepresents itself as the Human and how racialisation functions as differential coding within this genre. Her intervention exposes how Man universalises through geography.

From our perspective, however, such overrepresentation presupposes something prior: the supposition that the earth functions as the register through which coherence must be registered and secured. Before Man can be overrepresented, the world must already have been installed as the authorising horizon of legitimacy. Late medieval transformations in cosmology and cartography begin this reorientation: authority is relocated from divine transcendence to the ordering of the earth. Enlightenment philosophy does not initiate this shift; it stabilises it. Man becomes central not because he replaces God directly but because the world was already becoming the site in which order must be generated. Man functions as the internal reference point or relay required to secure this worlded order.

World, once installed as authorising ground, cannot stabilise without differentiation. Coherence requires division and hierarchy. Racialisation becomes one of the most powerful mechanisms through which differentiation is secured and maintained. Geography – understood as the transformation through which the worlding of being becomes the condition of order – renders such differentiation both possible and necessary. Lisbon marks the moment when this condition becomes unmistakable. When divine causation recedes, catastrophe can no longer be absorbed into transcendence. The world must account for itself. Order must be produced from within the earth. From

this point onward, coherence depends not on God, but on the successful worlding of the world.

This is the sense in which worlding has no end. Geography does not produce a completed world. It installs the demand that the world continue. The world may be unfinished, broken, violent, and internally divided, but these conditions do not suspend geography. They become occasions for more worlding. Crisis demands response. Violence demands repair. Opacity demands relation. Rupture demands reconfiguration. The failure of one relay does not end the demand; it calls forth another.

This is the condition from which abyssal geography begins. The displacement of Man does not end geography's demand; it changes the relays through which that demand is carried. Earth, geos, inhumanity, rift, opacity, and repair can all become sites through which the world is asked to bear more.

Abyssal geography

Abyssal geography does not name a hidden depth, a lost outside, or a more radical position from which the world could finally be refused. It problematises the situation in which worlding has no end and in which subordination to world is required without either a stable ground to guarantee it or an external tribunal to which interruption might appeal. Geography, in this sense, is not simply the discipline that studies world, earth, or space. It is the foundational ontological regime through which worldability becomes the minimum condition of sense, action, and legitimacy. Whatever interrupts must become something the world can bear: claim; injury; relation; repair; history; depth; refusal; opacity; possibility.

This is why Yusoff's work matters so strongly for the argument. *Geologic Life* does not offer a simple reparative geography, nor does it turn easily from violence to world-mending. Its force lies in the way it turns to earth, geos, rift, and inhumanity in order to press against the limits of Man and the racialised world Man secures. Yet this also makes it a crucial pressure point for abyssal geography. The question is what happens when the broken, rifted, and inhuman earth becomes the terrain

through which critique seeks to continue after Man. The issue is not that Yusoff simply mistakes earth for world but that her work shows how far the investment in worlding now extends: into earth, geos, buried histories, inhuman intimacy, opacity, and repair.

Here, Tyrone Palmer's formulation is useful. Palmer observes that 'the affective drive toward the World's destruction is converted into a demand to better relate to the world' (2020: 269). This captures the mechanism at stake. The desire to end the world can be translated into a demand for deeper relation, fuller accounting, more capacious repair, greater attentiveness to harm, and more expansive forms of endurance. Critique does not oppose worlding from outside. It can become one of the means through which the world demonstrates its capacity to absorb, recalibrate, and proceed.

Roland Végső's (2020) account of worldlessness helps clarify the same difficulty without requiring abyssal geography to identify a purer outside. Végső shows that worldlessness repeatedly needs a figure through which it can be represented within the world. Interruption must appear somewhere. It must take form as agent, position, force, negativity, or limit. This is the difficulty abyssal geography seeks to name. Once worlding is installed as the condition under which anything can count, even worldlessness risks becoming a worldly position: a bearer of rupture, a site of possibility, or a depth from which another world might be drawn.

The issue, then, is not to discover a more authentic representative of rupture. It is to ask how rupture itself becomes representable, actionable, and consequential only by entering the terms of worlding. Abyssal geography does not contest otherwise geographies by claiming to be more abyssal. It asks how the desire for interruption is repeatedly converted into further forms of world continuation.

A division of labour begins to emerge across contemporary critique. Man is identified with the world of devastation: racial division, colonial dispossession, ecological destruction, extraction, and mastery. Earth, geos, inhumanity, and rift then become the figures through which another relation to the world might be imagined. The more worlds are denied or destroyed, the more the demand for

other possible worlds intensifies. Geography holds this movement because it does not require a completed world. It holds the world as open, layered, unfinished, and available to further articulation. The openness of the world therefore functions as a pre-emptive answer to the possibility of its own end. Ending is met not with negation but with reconfiguration: another arrangement, another depth, another relation, and another demand that the world carry more.

When worlding has no end, endurance becomes the currency of critique – and the inhuman becomes the site where that currency is extracted. In Yusoff's account, the inhuman does not occupy an exterior position from which coherence might be threatened; it is situated at the point where history is borne, where harm is registered, and where relation intensifies. The world does not recede under this pressure; it thickens. This is the point at which Yusoff's account becomes most important for abyssal geography: the rift does not simply mark a break in worlding but also becomes a site through which histories, harms, and relations are made to carry further critical weight. It grows heavier, 'the endless saturation of the material world' (Yusoff, 2024: 46). As this accumulates, the rift takes on another role: not only resistance but reserve. Those coerced into the rift are figured as opening a 'fullness in the register of the world' (Yusoff, 2024: 283), where the rift becomes a site of working through – 'somewhere to dig in and plot' (Yusoff, 2024: 478) – and where the past remains active and available for recalibration.

What begins as ethical responsiveness can therefore become requirement. In Yusoff's shift from 'struggle to a medium of survivance' (2024: 36), the inhuman becomes the site through which the world's violence is registered, borne and reworked. This is not a simple redemptive gesture. It is marked by geotrauma, proximity, coercion and endurance. Yet it also reveals the pressure abyssal geography seeks to clarify. Capacity to remain open to the world becomes one of the means through which critique is rendered possible. Intimacy does not loosen this pressure; it can intensify it. Models of kinship that permit a rock in the family, shared gravity with the shocks of the earth, and inhuman intimacies

between race, matter and space draw the inhuman closer to the work the world requires: to 'turn the weaponization of inhuman proximity into forms of inhuman intimacy and tender' (Yusoff, 2024: 36). Harm is registered as sedimented, material, ongoing and durational. Yet this recognition also asks the world to carry more.

Opacity appears, at first glance, to offer a different register. Drawing on Glissant, Yusoff names opacity as relation without transparency: a refusal of full intelligibility as the condition of legitimacy. Opacity does not signify interiority or withdrawal, but the insistence that relation need not be exhaustively known. Yet within the wider investment in worlding, opacity does not necessarily stand outside incorporation. What resists clarity can be accommodated as density. Refusal can become texture. What cannot be fully rendered legible may prompt further adjustment, attentiveness and relational elaboration. In this way, opacity can become another mode through which the world learns to carry what it cannot fully know. It marks a limit, but a limit that can be folded into the deepening of worlding relation.

In this sense, 'otherwise' emerges too late when it arrives only as modulation. By the time it is spoken, the disturbance it might have signalled has often been translated into a task of recalibration. Vocabulary shifts; orientation adjusts; the requirement that worlding persist remains intact. What remains is a world that responds to critique by becoming more layered, more capacious and more internally differentiated. This is not a world that closes against critique, but one that incorporates critique by making incorporation a response in advance.

Barber helps sharpen what is at stake in this movement. If critique becomes the means through which the world demonstrates that it can hold more than presently given domination, then critique no longer simply opposes the world. It participates in the reproduction of the world as the horizon of possibility. Barber's formulation is therefore important: 'Critique does not oppose so much as reproduce the world' (2016: 182). The question for abyssal geography is how this reproduction operates when critique turns not to Man, reason, or mastery but to earth, geos, rift, opacity, and

inhumanity. What if the world is expanded rather than ended precisely through those terms that appear to place it under the greatest pressure?

This is where abyssal geography locates the structural prior condition of modernity. Before the question of how the world might be reconfigured, another question has already been settled: worldability functions as the silent criterion through which existence is rendered legible, actionable, and contestable. Even a critique that seeks to displace Man by expanding stratigraphic depth, geologic force, or cosmic scale can continue to operate within this requirement. Indeed, it may extend it. The issue is not that earth, geos, or the inhuman are false alternatives. It is that, once geography has installed worlding as compulsory, even the displacement of Man can become a further demand that the world expand, absorb, and hold.

Abyssal geography insists that the cut which binds sense, legitimacy, and endurance to worlding precedes the differentiation between colonial and otherwise geographies. It is this prior binding – this demand that interruption be translated into terms the world can bear – that secures continuity. For what is secured is the frame within which disagreement, rupture, and catastrophe must be rendered processable. Interruption does not disappear; it is reformatted. It must become claim, injury, resource, depth, history, or futurity – something that can be registered, administered, expanded, or metabolised. Because this ontological cut is racialised from the start, rupture is not simply excluded from worlding; it is repeatedly drawn into circulation as injury, history, depth, endurance, or repair.

Even refusal must take form as position. Even destruction must present itself as transformation. Abyssal geography therefore names a situation in which no appeal to ending can exceed the world's capacity to absorb it because the capacity to absorb is already installed as the condition under which anything counts at all. Continuity is enforced not by repression but by translation: whatever would suspend the world must first become intelligible within it.

From this perspective, critique remains downstream from the dawn of geography. The problem is no longer confined to reductive grids of space and time, nor to the sovereign subject who claims

to master the world. Through the inhuman, geography becomes stratigraphic, geologic, intimate, and cosmic. The world continues to absorb harm, to expand, and to hold, not despite the force of critique but through the forms in which critique becomes consequential.

This is why Yusoff remains the crucial pressure point for the paper. Her work does not evade the violence of the world. It insists upon that violence with extraordinary force. It turns to earth, geos, rift, and inhumanity precisely to contest the world secured through Man. Yet it is here, in the turn beyond Man, that abyssal geography locates the problem of worlding without end. The world is not maintained only by denying rupture. It is maintained by translating rupture into further demands for relation, endurance, depth, repair, and continuation. Abyssal geography therefore names a world that survives its own critique by making critique worldable. It does not require confidence in progress, mastery, or redemption. It can proceed through brokenness, exhaustion, opacity, and geo-trauma. The more the world is exposed as violent, the more it demands to be carried otherwise. This is the engine of worlding without end.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged *Geologic Life* as a pressure point: a text in which the contemporary investment in worlding is articulated with unusual force through earth, geos, rift, inhumanity, capacity, repair and endurance. Reading Yusoff in this way has allowed us to stay with a wider condition in contemporary geography: critique increasingly proceeds by asking the world to hold more. Violence is not denied. Rupture is not simply dismissed. The earth is not treated as passive ground. Yet critique is repeatedly organised through the labour of continuation: registering violence, deepening relation, expanding responsibility, and turning rupture itself into an occasion for further worlding. What comes into view is geography not simply as a site of analysis, but as the ontological regime through which worlding continues to operate.

The argument has therefore been that worlding without end is not a contingent feature of recent

critical vocabulary. It follows from geography's foundational role in modernity. Once the earth is required to function as world, and once world becomes the register through which order, harm, responsibility and repair are made consequential, critique is drawn into the same field it seeks to transform. This is the problematic of abyssal geography. The point is not that critique is impossible, but that critique operates within a regime that converts its force into further demands for worlding.

This pressure is evident in contemporary calls for reorientation rather than rupture. Work gathered under the banner of 'another geography' explicitly resists both transcendence and exit, insisting instead on remaining with the world's immanent conditions while seeking to think and act otherwise from within them (Oswin, 2020). Similarly, calls for more 'consequential geography' seek to deepen responsibility, redistribute labour and make critique matter within the world (Derickson et al., 2025). These interventions register the condition under which critique now proceeds. The world no longer needs to deny violence or contradiction. It can proceed by requiring that they be carried, remembered and rendered consequential within an expanding field of endurance, exhaustion and adjustment.

In this sense, what Yusoff names through the inhuman is not an exception to this condition, but one of its most concentrated expressions. The inhuman marks the point at which worlding continues without requiring a sovereign figure to guarantee it. The burden of worlding migrates into earth, geos, rift, opacity, intimacy and endurance. 'Otherwise' does not necessarily name a break from worlding. It can name the promise that worlding can be recalibrated: expanded, deepened, made to carry more. Abyssal geography names this predicament. Geography is the ontological regime through which exit is neutralised in advance, not by refusing critique, but by making critique available to world-continuation. The world's capacity becomes the recurring answer to limit.

ORCID iD

David Chandler  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2766-7169>

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