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ABSTRACT
In this special issue on 'extraction', we think critically about two urgent and entangled questions, examining the political economy of mining and Indigenous interests in Australia, and the moral economy of Indigenous cultural difference within Cultural Studies and Anthropology. In settler colonial states such as Australia, Indigenous cultural difference is now routinely presented as commensurate with, rather than obstructive of, extractive industry activity. Meanwhile, the renewed interest in 'radical alterity' across these disciplines has seen a movement away from regarding authoritative claims about 'others' as morally suspect – as only extracting from or mining Indigenous worlds for insights and academic prestige. The 'ontological turn', however, leads us to question the empirical status of the ontologies circulating through academic discussions. What happens when Indigenous people disappoint, in their embrace of environmentally destructive industries such as mining, for example? We argue that in cases where 'they' are not as different as 'we' might hope them to be, scholars should be concerned to foreground the potential role of colonial history and processes of domination in the production and reduction of ontological difference. Second, we call for critical assessment of the political, epistemological, and social effects of both academic and societal evaluations of difference. We conclude by urging for a scholarship that does not pick and choose between agreeable and less agreeable forms of cultural difference.

KEYWORDS Alterity; difference; Indigenous people; mining; Australia

Introduction

This essay explores the extractive industry's changed relationship with Aboriginal cultural difference in Australia, and the changing relationships between Indigenous difference, Cultural Studies, and Anthropology. We take the focus on 'extraction' as an invitation to think critically about these two urgent and, we argue, entangled questions. We are concerned to analyse, on the one hand, the political economy of the extraction of materials – minerals pulled from subterranean strata, often from lands with Indigenous inhabitants,

legally recognized Indigenous interests, and which its Indigenous peoples never ceded. On the other, we think critically here about the moral economy surrounding Indigenous difference in the two academic disciplines we work across, which are both engaged with indigeneity. In recent decades the potentially extractive – by which we mean exploitative – relationship between Indigenous knowledge and scholarship has been a matter of central concern. What is the status of these questions as Anthropology and Cultural Studies evince a renewed interest in radical alterity? Is there something inherently morally suspect about looking at or *for* cultural difference, or is this just a morally complex undertaking? Is it perhaps more morally suspect again to opt instead to look away, being content to 'read' representations of difference? In other words: What does Cultural Studies and Anthropology want *from* Aboriginal cultural difference? What does the Australian mining industry want *with* Aboriginal cultural difference? We posit these questions as 'urgent' because, as Povinelli (2011) writes, the possibilities for being radically 'otherwise' in Australia are ever shrinking. In the midst of hostile conditions, what do Indigenous people want from an industry like mining?

Mining might still be unwelcome on the basis of culturally different relations with sites the extractive industry proposes to commodify, or might offer prospects for forms of sought-after equality. That is to say, our use of mining as an empirical case study leads us to question the extent to which the kinds of Indigenous or ontologically alter worlds that scholars seek out are extant, or are better understood as fundamentally enmeshed, in violently unequal ways, with 'our' world. Instead, we argue for the importance of engaging with contemporary Indigenous realities. Scholars, amongst others, should not avoid or disqualify those places where Indigenous people confront, confound, or disappoint in the form their lived difference takes.

Entangled questions

In 1992, Australia's High Court rejected as erroneous the legal doctrine upon which the continent had been colonized – *terra nullius*, a land without owners. The conceit that Indigenous inhabitants did not hold proprietary rights owing to a perceived lack of social organization and political institutions was judged as 'repugnant and inconsistent with historical reality' (1994 [1993], C1). Native title rights based on Indigenous cultural traditions had, the Court found, survived settlement, except where they were extinguished by the Crown. Like many in his sector, the Chief Executive Office of Western Mining Corporation Hugh Morgan (1992) promptly declared the (settler) 'law of property' to be in 'a state of disarray', further warning that communistic plots to establish a separate Aboriginal state were coming to fruition. This was not Morgan's first comment on the issue, having suggested, in 1984, that the Australian 'public should reject Aboriginal claims to sacred sites in the same manner

as it has refused to sanction other features of early Aboriginal life such as cannibalism, infanticide, and cruel initiation rights' (in Gardner 1999, p. 29). As Aboriginal cultural difference came to make claims on the nation in the 1970s and 1980s in the form of land rights and heritage legislation, such interventions represented a desperate attempt to portray Aboriginal people as too different to accommodate into the workings of a modern liberal state. When, for example, the Queensland government prevented the sale of pastoral properties to experienced Aboriginal cattlemen in the late 1970s, it was because, as the responsible Minister explained, they were 'not satisfied at this point in time that Aboriginals can handle mortgage documents' (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 534). Within such comments it is an imagined corporeal primitivism, rather than colonial arrogance, that is regarded as both repugnant and innate to Indigenous people (see Povinelli 2002).

Over two decades later, a new generation of mining company executives in settler colonial nations such as Australia and Canada espouse quite contrary opinions on the nature and importance of cultural difference. In Australia, demonstrating continuity of distinctive Indigenous cultural traditions and connections with place are critical to securing legal recognition of rights to land and water ('country'), such as native title rights and interests. Like other forms of land rights, native title provides claimants and holders with no rights to consent over resource extraction or development, however most third party land uses, such as mining, trigger opportunities to negotiate compensation or 'benefit' packages with developers. In the resulting 'native title market' (Ritter 2009b), these third parties are delivered security and a 'social licence' to operate, while state and territory governments reap the benefits of royalties and infrastructure investments and Indigenous stakeholders are compensated via some mix of financial payments, employment targets, services and training, procurement policies, and so on. Internationally, the mining industry has made much of its embrace of a new era of 'agreement-making', however, as legal scholar David Ritter points out, such agreements are simply mandated by law in Australia; they are not the outcome of corporate goodwill, however much of this may also be genuinely brought to the table. Indigenous groups with greater political and economic resources routinely achieve more equitable agreements, suggesting that agreement-making is 'a means of managing risk' (Langton and Palmer 2003, p. 17) that should be ultimately regarded as contributing to increased returns for miners and settler governments (Ritter 2009b, p. 29).

Within this discourse of agreement-making, Aboriginal culture is now valorized as a benefit to the industry, as Aboriginal residents are amongst the few willing to stay in remote and regional areas targeted by mineral extraction. A majority of the mines in Australia are adjacent to Indigenous communities (Scambary 2013, p. 10), whose ties to kin and country make their populations, it is argued, the ideal workforce for projects located far from the nation's

major urban centres. During Australia's latest mining boom, between 2004 and 2014, the world price of its mineral exports more than tripled, with investment in the mining sector increasing from two per cent of Gross Domestic Product to eight per cent (Downes *et al.* 2014). However, with falling commodity prices and a sector-wide transition to production away from (investment intensive) exploration, it is widely accepted that the 'boom' is now over, prompting state and territory governments to further 'reform' or deregulate development planning, particularly in regards to downgrading the protection of Aboriginal heritage sites, in the hope of encouraging further investment.[1] Whereas many have previously defended mineral extraction in the name of Aboriginal economic development, it is unclear how this transition, and the renewed search for transnational capital and payable deposits, will shape Aboriginal peoples' involvement in mining.

On what basis do we pair these pressing social concerns with attention to more immaterial shifts within two academic disciplines? Anthropology's 'ontological turn' and Cultural Studies' ontological excursions into new materialism see these disciplines currently remapping overlapping theoretical terrain. In the shadow of a global environmental crisis – itself driven by the extraction and consumption of coal, iron ore, and other minerals – scholars within these disciplines have recently renewed their search for alternate forms of dwelling with, thinking about and relating to non-human others. Determined to avoid the 'modern' scission between nature and culture detailed by Latour (1993), these scholars often cite Indigenous 'perspectives' or 'ontologies' as exemplary, repositioning Indigenous difference as the site of recognition and value.

Morgan's comment about cannibalism then, however abrasive, was carefully chosen. Not only has the perception of cannibalism, even where scant evidence for it existed, played an over-determined role in differentiating Indigenous people in settler societies such as Australia historically (Pickering 1999),[2] but the changing relationship of Anthropology to the practice-cum-spectre of cannibalism provides an insight into the recent disciplinary shifts that concern us in this essay. We revisit here a debate begun in decades past. In 1979 the anthropologist William Arens sought to definitively demonstrate that cannibalism was a 'myth'. In Arens' (1979, p. 145) opinion, no satisfactory, reliable eyewitness accounts existed that could establish the truth of this practice. Instead, he proposed:

> The assumption by one group about the cannibalistic nature of others can be interpreted as an aspect of cultural-boundary construction and maintenance … [Meaning,] one group can appreciate its own existence more meaningfully by conjuring up others as categorical opposites.

Anthropology, he suggested, is itself such an exercise in 'conjuring up' categorical opposites. The discipline developed in tandem with colonial regimes of power, which perpetuated images of primitive difference and inferiority. The

origin of the word 'cannibalism' itself was instructive, as when Christopher Columbus encountered Indigenous Arawaks they warned him of the fearsome flesh-eating Caribs who inhabited other islands; 'Caribs' mispronounced became 'Canib' and then 'cannibal'. Subsequently, a 1503 proclamation prohibiting the enslavement of islands' inhabitants made an exception in the case of 'cannibals', a category synonymous with those who continued to resist the colonists efforts to impel them to work on plantations and convert to the Catholic faith, argues Arens (1979, pp. 49–51). For Arens, the 'myth' of cannibalism always served such powerful ends, and Anthropology's own fascination was indicative of assumptions about the inferiority of the colonized. Others pointed out that the constant across both the works critiqued and the critique was actually the desirability of a prohibition on consuming bodies of the deceased (Gardner 1999). Perhaps Arens shared something with Hugh Morgan: the idea that anthropophagy is inherently disgusting. Otherwise, why would he be so affronted by accounts of it?

Arens' critique does not emerge in isolation. By the late 1970s, the discipline of Anthropology was in crisis. We will not retell a familiar story here, it is sufficient to summarize that the discipline wrestled internally with: the historical relationship between colonial thought, colonial techniques of governance and the field research undertaken by anthropologists (Asad 1973, Said 1989); the persistent assumption that 'exotic' ethnographic subjects were unchanging others removed from modernity (Fabian 1983); and, the use of ethnographic authority and key rhetorical devices in representing and constructing otherness in text (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Abu-Lughod 1991). Anthropology, from within these critiques, appeared a suspiciously colonial exercise which built the parameters of knowledge so that it could ostensibly access others' worlds, but not vice versa. As such, it was reliant on making authoritative claims about 'others' and extracting, or mining, their lives for insights and academic status.

Anthropologists such as Arens were not alone in questioning problematic modes of *representing* otherness, though the critique of representation was both advanced and responded to differently in other disciplines. In the emergent field of Cultural Studies, responses included: addressing the role of media production in the construction of cultural categories (Hall *et al.* 1978); focusing reflexively upon the politics and poetics of textual representation (Benterrak *et al.* 1984); and, deconstructing the inherited categories of self and other through close reading (Bhabha 1990). If power over oppressed others was exerted through representation, then one answer was to avoid exercising further 'symbolic violence' and remain content instead to analyse representations, attentive to their historical, political, psychoanalytic, and philosophical dynamics. While, in this vein, Anthropology would attend to the historical construction of one set of objects – the field, ritual, the ethnographic subject, anthropophagy – Cultural Studies and

allied disciplines would attend to others – the body, the subaltern, queerness, travel, and so on.

As Joel Robbins has recently argued, anthropologists also responded to the critical work cited above by moving to foreground questions of suffering rather than cultural difference throughout the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Ong 1987, Scheper-Hughes 1992, Bourgois 1995, Farmer 2010). The discipline's subsequent interest in groups subject to inequality, structural violence, or social suffering – the move from the 'savage to the suffering slot' – is now waning, Robbins argues, in light of a reinvigorated interest in radical alterity. Other signs point in the same direction. At a 2014 seminar in Sydney, for example, James Clifford wondered aloud if the critique of exoticism had gone too far. Discussing the sorting of non-Western ethnographic objects into 'culture' and 'art' in museum spaces, he commented that perhaps 'we threw the baby out with the bathwater'. To indulge the idiom: in trying to dispose of the dirty 'bathwater', which swirled with rhetorical tropes long fostered by positivist social sciences to describe others, perhaps those heaving the tub, such as Clifford, discarded the important 'baby' of alterity, otherness, or radical difference. As we will elaborate, it is not coincidental that such doubts about the status of alterity are re-emerging now, as disciplines such as Anthropology and Cultural Studies shift to both new and familiar fields of enquiry, influenced by new materialist philosophy.

Another significant development should be noted at this point, as we return to the Australian context. With Crystal McKinnon (Vincent et al. 2014, p. 14), we have elsewhere summarized the rise of Indigenous Studies programmes within Australian universities. The consolidation of these offerings coincided with the professionalization of degrees in education, nursing, social work, policing, law, and health (Rhea and Russell 2012, p. 19). The 1970s and 1980s, in particular, saw a new emphasis on training programmes for Aboriginal workers in education (Norman 2014). The professionalization of Indigenous Studies was complemented in the 1990s by the emerging scholarly focus on indigeneity, as well as the already noted critical perspectives on authenticity and representation. These courses with an Indigenous focus were increasingly being taught within traditional Humanities disciplines by non-Indigenous academics. As Norman (2014, p. 42) documents, Indigenous-themed courses, where Aboriginal scholars assumed 'the role of teaching about "us"', often had to be wrestled from non-Indigenous anthropologists. Such programmes, Dudgeon and Fielder (2006) suggest, became important Indigenous-directed spaces for Indigenous people to engage in and critique 'discourses about themselves' and privilege Indigenous knowledges. By 1999, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 4) wrote of a 'burgeoning international community of Indigenous scholars and researchers' who were 'talking more widely about Indigenous research, Indigenous research protocols and Indigenous methodologies'. Much of the important work published

in this field is anti-essentialist in its thrust (e.g. Grossman 2003), and we can find little evidence of Indigenous scholars in Australia intervening in the topics outlined in this paper. Notably, where 'ontology' appears in these scholars' work, it tends to *name* an absolute difference of Indigenous people rather than give it content, ethnographic, or otherwise. It is this difference that settler colonialism seeks to variously verify, police, and proscribe (e.g. Moreton-Robinson 2003, Watson 2014).

More recent developments still have seen Cowlishaw (2015) defend the history of early anthropological interest in Aboriginal Australia. Over the past two decades, the discipline has attracted significant criticism, particularly from Indigenous Studies scholars, 'as wolves in sheep's clothing, exploiting Aboriginal knowledge', a blanket condemnation that, Cowlishaw argues, ignores the discipline's distinction as virtually the lone white voice documenting and placing value upon Aboriginal peoples' social worlds before the 1970s. Her impassioned defence is striking, in part because she has herself long advanced a critical perspective on the discipline's legacy, an early article outlining the ways in which remote-dwelling Aboriginal people in the continent's north have been designated as the only subjects worthy of scholarly interest, in so far as they embodied colonial ideas of 'tradition' and cultural otherness (Cowlishaw 1987). Yet, recently, she takes to task an imagined and ill-defined academic enemy – variously labelled 'cultural studies' and 'postcolonial critique' – for disparaging Anthropology while itself remaining reluctant to countenance the uncomfortable reality of encountering embodied cultural difference. Too many, she writes, seem overly satisfied to deal solely with representations. We are sympathetic to the more acute point: the routine of critique requires no interest in or engagement with the social realities of actual Aboriginal people. This is the 'moral failure' of a nebulous 'postcolonialism', Cowlishaw concludes, in that it implicitly enacts its own 'refusal of radical difference' by remaining at a distance, fixated on representations, whether out of timidity, convenience, respect for the represented, or, we add, because of the influence of identity politics and the concomitant stress on Indigenous self-representation.

Cowlishaw's tone suggests she sees herself as embattled in her efforts to redeem an academic tradition. Suspicion of Anthropology and other social sciences certainly remains prevalent within Indigenous Studies in Australia (e.g. Trudgett and Page 2014), as well as Cultural Studies, notwithstanding the latter's enthusiasm for its own forms of ethnography. But we see Cowlishaw as one voice among many pressing for a renewed interest in alterity. Why has attention turned again to fields of inquiry and concepts only recently ruled distasteful or ethically suspect? Or, to rephrase the question: *why now*?

Four 'moods' across disciplines

Following anthropologist Michael Scott, we identify four present 'moods' surrounding the turns to ontology in Anthropology and Cultural Studies. Scott proposes that any 'intensified mood of wonder' may actually be 'a clue that received ontological assumptions are in crisis and undergoing transformation' (2014, p. 44). His own concern is Arosi people, on the island of Makira in the south-east Solomon Islands, whose contemporary imaginings, he contends, centre on a conviction that Makira 'constitutes and conceals a marvellous power' (2014, p. 42). This power is sequestered within an underground realm, an urban–military complex of superordinary capabilities, which will one day rise to restore the original language and custom of Makira above ground. Unfortunately, we do not have space to discuss the Arosi's drive to purify and upraise autochthony.[3] We are foregrounding here the 'mood of wonder' that, as Scott shows (2013), also surrounds some of the anthropological work associated with 'the ontological turn' and which indicates a disciplinary rupture. Various anthropologists (Viveiros de Castro, 2004, Poirier 2005, Rose 2011), their work widely cited in Cultural Studies, have turned with wonderment to Indigenous others whose ontological precepts are contrasted with the categorical dualisms of 'the modern'. Scott summarizes these anthropologists as suggesting that the non-dualist or multinaturalist orientation of the Indigenous others with whom they work is morally preferable to a 'Western' ontology that reproduces a radical Cartesian separation between mind and body, subject and object, human and non-human, and culture and nature. By contrast, those Indigenous others are seen as receiving others in wonder, a stance which, certain proponents imply, anthropologists themselves should also adopt; resisting analysing and explaining others and in the process domesticating wonderment (Henare *et al*. 2007, p. 1).

The second mood, already identified through Robbins, is the mood of exhaustion born of a centripetal focus on representation and a concomitant commitment to 'witnessing' social suffering. Robbins' own hope is that a reinvigorated anthropological interest in radical alterity will complement the foci of the period it now eclipses, endeavouring to describe the social conditions of the world, and the unheroic lived pain these conditions produce, while also inquiring into and taking seriously their potential for optimistic and idealized 'otherwise' future worlds. The mood of exhaustion is echoed within Cultural Studies, where a level of anxiety about the purpose and direction of the discipline has long been a feature of the field (Turner 2012). The archaeologies of knowledge and concepts such as the nation, race, and nature that marked its rise to prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s are touchstones for contemporary scholarship, however the spoils of cultural critique and discourse analysis are not what they once were, in part because these methods have been adopted by other disciplines. An efflorescence of activity has recently come

from another 'ontological turn', though one that is a bifurcation between Deleuzianisms: new materialism and affect theory. For the former, indebted to actor-network theory, the corollary to the 'end of nature' is the end of determined matter; non-humans, once regarded as passive, have instead been revealed as 'lively' participants in contingent worlds (Bennett 2010). The emphasis falls upon lived material entanglement and 'the heterogeneity of always emerging assemblages' (Blaser 2014, p. 49), whose potentialities are of far more concern than their boundaries. Alternately, affect theory has presented a non-representative response to textualism by making the affected and affective body 'the universal ontological substance of the real' (Grossberg in Bollmer 2014, p. 303). If new materialism places difference outside the human, in intensive and emergent relations, affect theory places it inside 'the untrammelled ontological' of bodies (Hemmings 2005, p. 595). In either instance, the politics of specific groups are secondary to ecological and biological entanglements.

Third, a mood of possibility surrounds these ontological turns. By this we mean, more specifically, a mood of political possibility as distinct from the imaginative possibilities evinced above. This mood of political possibility takes two forms. First, there is Hage's (2012) oft-cited argument that a rapprochement between radical political theorists and actors and the discipline of Anthropology is not only possible but desirable. At its core, Hage (2014, pp. 201–202) argues, Anthropology takes account of other possible modes of life and proposes that such 'radically different modes of being' reveal us 'to be other to ourselves'. Grasping the reality of these other possible ways of organizing life, which are eclipsed and enmeshed by dominant realities, fuels an alter-politics, alerting us to the possibility of other ways of organizing *this* life. Second, as articulated most clearly in the collection *Thinking through things* (Henare *et al*. 2007), an optimistic mood of possibility surrounds the proposition that we should cease to apply 'our' concepts to seek to understand 'their worlds' (a curious reconstitution of a problematic binary which we do not have the space to address here). The editors argue instead that attention to ontology offers a decolonized 'germ of a new methodology' of grasping Indigenous concepts and thinking with them (Henare *et al*. 2007, p. 3). Other worlds, which are taken as extant, cannot be grasped via the concepts generated to explain 'our' world: to do so involves subsuming, again, others' worlds under the weight of imposed and deficient conceptual frames. Instead, thinking with informants' concepts allows for 'concept production that makes worlds' (Henare *et al*. 2007, p. 19).

Finally, there is a mood of crisis, which refers this time to conditions more material and more terrifying than that which heralded the crisis of representation. We refer here to the global environmental disaster that currently unfolds as anthropogenic climate change and species' loss accelerates.

Climate change has forced a realization that the traces of human action are, as Latour notes, 'visible everywhere'. In confronting a greatly 'agitated and sensitive Earth', he writes (2014, p. 5), we encounter

> an agent which gains its name of 'subject' because he or she might be *subjected* to the vagaries, bad humour, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of 'subject' because it is also *subjected* to his or her action (emphasis in the original).

Faced with the prospect of an uninhabitable planet, these ontological turns share with environmentalist imaginaries a tendency to exalt Indigenous or non-Western others as symbols of inspirational environmental ethics, modelling interspecies interconnectedness and reciprocity contrary to a Western 'will-to-destruction' (Rose 2011). Despite Latour's own criticism of this very move (2004, p. 43), he nonetheless recruits Amerinidians as exemplars in his search to overcome the poisonous nature-culture division that stand in the way of 'making a common world' (Tresch 2013, p. 312). Indigenous groups avowedly 'make available imaginative elements' that might transform 'the dominant modern social formation', as Blaser (2009, p. 874) states, a move in concert, we argue, with the relatively recent construction of Indigenous peoples 'as repositories of ecological wisdom' (Argyrou 2005, p. 72). Alternately, Viveiros de Castro (2014, p. 6) sees Amerindians as having something to teach 'us' 'in matters apocalyptic'; 'people whose world has already ended a long time ago' may know how to survive the coming catastrophe.

We are wary of the possibility that we may sound cynical, particularly as we are avid readers of the work discussed above and have been deeply influenced by writers such as Deborah Bird Rose. After all, Birch (2016), among others, is determinedly, if cautiously, optimistic about the possibilities for ethical dialogue between Indigenous knowledge systems and non-Indigenous people facing a shared and uncertain future in times of ecological crisis. As we have summarized elsewhere (Vincent and Neale in press), Rose's work remains indispensable for thinking settler contexts. Rose (2014) outlines that non-Indigenous arguments about Indigenous people and conservation often involve enacting a 'monologue' in which Indigenous people are interpolated as either the 'noble savage' or 'dismal savage' to suit various ends. Whereas the dismal version is assumed to have exploited available resources, making only a minimal impact because of the 'primitive' epistemologies and tools at their disposal, the noble version is portrayed as an ethical subject, so attuned to the non-human world that they make little impact on it. These are both pervasively colonial images, and the conversation is structured in such a way that Indigenous people are condemned only to exist in terms of another's desire to either confirm its technological superiority or to find its non-modern Other. To adopt Rose's terminology, as others have (Weir 2009), we are seeking to establish in this essay whether or not

ontological turns are dialogical. Where do they leave our capacity to take account, for example, of Aboriginal people who embrace environmentally destructive practices, such as mining, forestry, and pastoralism (i.e. Davis 2004, Langton 2013)? Do they, as critics have postulated, keep at bay 'actually existing Indigenous realities' (Bessire and Bond 2014, p. 443)? It is to this question we now turn.

'Actually existing Indigenous realities'

There is clearly much overlap between the four moods sketched here, so we move now to question a specific network of assumptions shared between them, which we see as potentially problematic. These assumptions centre on the positive projection of actually existing and discoverable, if not analytically separable, radical alterity. The ontological turn requires, of course, a multiplicity of ontological differences, leading to a set of questions about the empirical status of the ontologies circulating through our academic discussions. What if 'Western' peoples are not actually as distinctly modern in their subject–object distinctions, admitting the presence of 'supernatural' agents, for example? Or, more acutely, what happens when Indigenous people disappoint? Are 'they' always as different, in an ontological sense, as what 'we' might imagine or hope them to be? Where they are not, we should be concerned, first, to foreground the potential role of colonial history and processes of domination in the production and reduction of difference.[4] Second, we should critically assess the political, epistemological and social effects of both academic and societal evaluations of difference. In sum, we contend that it is imperative to enquire into the 'purifications', to use the Latourian lexicon, mobilized in the ontological turns, attending to their diverse histories, causes, and consequences.

To backtrack for a moment: in his assessment of Anthropology's shifting interests, Robbins revisits Trouillot's (2003) well-known essay on the 'savage slot' to remind us of one of its key, but less discussed, points. Trouillot argues that the differences between Western and non-Western peoples had become 'blurrier than ever before', producing what Robbins (2013, p. 449) calls 'an "empirical" history of the vanishing savage'. Wari' people, for example, have desisted in the respectful and mournful consumption of their loved affines' remains, a cultural practice that ensured predator–prey reciprocity; since the 1960s they have been forced by missionaries and the Brazilian state to bury their dead in a cemetery (Conklin 1995). In the four 'moods' we surveyed, the prospect of this vanishing is muted if not absent. This is not to suggest that we (or Trouillot or Robbins) subscribe to the thesis that the forces of colonization or globalization result in cultural homogenization, but that we question how analytically separable, for example, Aboriginal or settler worlds are in a state such as Australia. Like many

others (see Smith and Hinkson 2005, Gibson and Cowlishaw 2012, Dalley and Martin 2015) we see Aboriginal lives as always enmeshed in broader material and discursive relations of power, including discourses about the nature and value of their cultural difference; Aboriginality, like the nature-culture divide, is a basic political coordinate of contemporary life. In Australia, where conservative commentators continue to argue that cultural difference attracts significant economic benefits and is exploited by undeserving beneficiaries (see Griffiths 2012), there are in fact considerable costs associated with being too different or not different enough (Merlan 1989, Cowlishaw 2010, Cowlishaw, 2011). As Merlan states (2006, p. 101), pre-colonial Aboriginal 'tradition' is the 'currency of indigeneity' within the late liberal state, and it is 'elicited' via state-designed mechanisms such as the native title claim process (Weiner 2006). This currency is neither consistent nor controlled by Aboriginal people who can be, variously, deprived of land rights due to a perceived deficit of traditional culture (Moreton-Robinson 2015) or pathologized as retaining a surfeit of traditional culture incompatible with 'modern' social norms (Sutton 2011, Neale 2013).

The workings of the contradictory moral and political economies of difference within which Indigenous lives become ensnared are glaringly evident in Eve's field site, the small South Australian rural town of Ceduna. Here Pitjantjatjara-speaking Anangu (Aboriginal people), who visit the town from more remote areas, embody the alterity of poverty, disorder and a difference that threatens the moral and aesthetic order of town life (Morris 2013, pp. 49–50). Their embodied difference – their barefoot players on the football field, their sitting, sleeping, and pissing in the park, their alleged spitting in front of the supermarket – renders Anangu the target of a series of local repressive measures. Since 2008, for example, the local council has engaged a private security firm to patrol the streets with two guard dogs, moving the disruptive presence of Anangu public drinkers from view. And yet, in local Aboriginal discourse, these are often the same kinds of Indigenous people who are also held to *potentially* embody the alterity of radical cultural difference; local Aboriginal people refer to large-scale male initiation ceremonies conducted over summer within the communities these visitors hail from, for instance. The situation becomes more complex still when the settler colonial state senses the possibility that these axes of difference, which seem of two distinct orders, are not neatly separable (see Kowal 2015). A 2011 coronial inquest into six Anangu deaths that occurred between 2004 and 2009 highlighted the existence of a 'culture of excessive alcohol consumption among the transient Aboriginal population in Ceduna' but also noted the deleterious health effects of many people's preference for open air sleeping: the coroner duly noted that an Indigenous worker in local social services had explained to him that one of the deceased 'was subject to Aboriginal Tribal Law which commands men to sleep outside to be at one with the land' (Schapel 2011,

p. 20). Aboriginal people's persistent efforts to act according to their own priorities, and in ways that run counter to the interests of their biological health were, understandably, distressing to the coroner. His repressive response, however, was telling, calling for greater powers and resources to detain patients committed to sobering-up facilities.

We are echoing here an argument advanced by Bessire and Bond (2014, p. 450), in asserting that Indigenous people live in 'a shared world of unevenly distributed problems' (see also Bessire 2014). While a significant amount of the Anthropology and Cultural Studies work embracing the ontological does so in an attempt to 'disrupt' or 'unsettle' the categorical scissions of Western modernity, this occurs at the cost of taking account of 'the disruptive beings and things that travel between ontologies' (Bessire and Bond 2014, pp. 446, 443). A passage in Lévi-Strauss's Tristes tropiques comes to mind. Lévi-Strauss mused about the futility of 'chasing after the vestiges of a vanished reality', which he sensed himself doing, perceiving that '[a] few hundred years hence, in this same place, another traveller, as despairing as myself, will mourn the disappearance of what I might have seen, but failed to see' (1976, p. 51). For Bessire and Bond (2014, p. 443), Amerindians might just as well be described as 'historically dispossessed populations obliged to live in part through our models of their being but who still ride buses, make art, take antibiotics and go to work' as they might 'multinaturalists'. As they go on to state, and we are at pains to emphasize, the point is not that a 'true reality' (dispossessed people taking antibiotics) is being hidden by wishful thinking (an original state of 'undifferentiation' between humans and animals is a virtually universal notion among Amerindians) (Viveiros de Castro 2012, p. 55). Rather, what is significant is the fact that 'some (all?) versions of Indigenous worlding take up modern binaries and their mimetic opposites as meaningful coordinates for self-fashioning' (Bessire and Bond 2014, p. 443) The settler colonial state demands of Indigenous people self-conscious and strategic efforts of self-fashioning, wherein their capacity to fulfil others' expectations of Indigenous difference comes to play a crucial part.

A complementary point is made in David Graeber's recent critique of certain ontological Anthropology, particularly in regard to its purifying and conservative character. That is as Holbraad has stated (in Alberti et al. 2011, p. 903), despite the promise of unsettling 'our' categories, such work often actually 'protects our "science" and our "common sense" as much as it protects the "native"' by presenting both as autonomous and whole orders of being. Within their respective spheres, Graeber notes (2015, p. 7), the Cuban diviner and the Western scientist are 'protected from challenge'. This has a number of minor consequences, such as an inability to take account of disagreements within 'worlds' about the nature of reality, as well as three more significant issues. The first, following Graeber, is that it creates an equivalency between concepts and reality that resembles classical philosophical

idealism. Understanding that an island is a fish carcass, a flood is divine wrath, or a pill is an antidepressant all have an equal status, as such, abstracted from the political and affective context in which these ideas might be put to work or regarded as meaningful. As such, a broader second problem is that the efflorescence of ontological scholarship is often sustained by categorical boundaries that are empirically dubious. 'The Magalasi', 'the Merina' and others are presented in a 'conceptual bubble', Graeber shows (2015, p. 9), purified of the dialogical confrontations and interactions – the hybridity and heterogeneity – that make up their everyday lives and discussions. Interpreting without imposing external concepts – the radical decolonizing premise of proceeding outlined in *Thinking through things* – relies on imported separations. Third, this presents a set of ethical and political issues. For example, such work grants Indigenous groups and others 'authority over determining the nature of reality itself, within their designated territory, whether or not the individuals in question actually wish to be granted such authority' (Graeber 2015, p. 32). Such a critique can, we suggest, be extended to new materialists who, as we noted earlier, have been more interested in potentialities than boundaries. Nonetheless, the latter are implied everywhere in the frequent assumption of 'modern', 'Western' or 'Indigenous' ontologies as conceptually whole and autonomous.

Aboriginal cultural difference and the mining sector in Australia today

We return now to discuss more fully whether Aboriginal involvement in extractive industry activity serves to enable or corrode the expression and living out of Aboriginal cultural difference. The relations between Aboriginal people and mineral extraction in Australia today, we suggest, are characterized by forced proximity (see 2016, in press). Deposits of valuable minerals such as iron ore, gold, and uranium are typically found in remote areas where, first, Aboriginal people make up a majority of the resident population and, second, where most of the over 2.3 million square kilometres of land that has either been acquired through Aboriginal land rights laws or forms of native title since 1966 is also located. While, in Altman *et al.*'s (2009) words, this 'Indigenous-owned estate' amounts to over 31 per cent of Australia's landmass, most in remote and regional areas, the estate contains only 12 per cent of the national Indigenous-identifying population. In short, though a minority of Aboriginal people live in areas affected by the mining sector's pervasive networks of exploration, prospecting, and extraction, this group are disproportionately 'proximate' to them not only in the sense that they are typically the majority population in such areas but that, in addition, they are the majority landholders and local workforce. The effect of this proximity is the present ubiquity of mining companies in remote Aboriginal life,

and vice versa, bound up in optimistic discourses of development, legal contracts and everyday relations of employment, service provision, sponsorship, art production, friendship, enmity, and so on.

Earlier we suggested that the reasons for this situation of proximity were, in a sense, cultural: ties to kin and country see Indigenous populations staying (and, in fact, rapidly growing) in areas that non-Indigenous Australians find few reasons to live in. However, as Dombrowski (2010, p. 130) points out, this Indigenous condition of 'staying behind' contrasts with global rural-to-urban movements, and has been underwritten in Australia, Canada, and elsewhere by successful land claims which have, in turn, fed the 'voracious appetite of capital for the raw material basis of modern manufacturing'. Today, the poverty in remote Indigenous communities is naturalized as a cultural phenomena, Dombrowski contends, obscuring the fact that while life at these economic and environmental margins has become 'marginally more possible', this state of affairs has facilitated massively profitable extractive projects. Whatever the reasons for it, this relation of proximity holds three consequences: first, it is no longer tenable to describe Aboriginal people as simply external to the sector. They are extensively engaged as employees, contractors, lobbyists, business partners and (potentially) proponents in extraction complex arrangements that are poorly understood (Langton and Longbottom 2012). We note, for example, that a substantial amount of Indigenous employment in mining is of non-local Aboriginal people, with Markham and White (2013, p. 42) estimating that only 58 per cent of Indigenous people employed in the sector live within 100 kilometres of a mine site. Second, this proximity has produced a legal architecture which ostensibly protects Aboriginal values such as sacred sites and resource use rights, undermining the ability of Aboriginal people to articulate those values themselves (Ritter 2009a). Third, this formation has reduced the political and legal opportunities for Aboriginal people to oppose mining, whatever their reason (e.g. Trebeck 2007). Aboriginal people who hold out against the future promise of mining may well find themselves frustrated by decision-making processes, locally and socially isolated, and unable to pursue their visions through existing structures (Vincent 2013).

As to the purported benefits associated with participation in the extractive resource industry, an opportunity many Aboriginal individuals no doubt pursue, poor data on the overall picture clouds the larger argument. There are over 1000 Indigenous Land Use Agreements at present (ATNS 2011), and though many avowedly promise forms of compensation, such as employment, their actual content and subsequent reporting is typically considered commercial-in-confidence (cf. Cameron and Levitan 2014). Only at marquee moments are terms made available, such as the 1997 Gulf Communities Agreement, which pledged an estimated $60 million over 20 years to land trusts and regional infrastructure projects; as the mine now closes, a

commissioned review suggests that there is 'considerable frustration in Aboriginal communities' that the mine has not improved circumstances more (Everingham *et al.* 2013, p. 5). More broadly, a handful of demographic and anthropological studies of mining areas offer a mixed picture (e.g. Altman and Martin 2009, Scambary 2013), suggesting that disadvantage has 'changed little' during the mining boom (Taylor and Scambary 2006, p. 1). As Ritter states (2009b, p. 61), the assumption that mining agreements reduce Indigenous 'socio-economic indigence should be regarded as an arguable proposition'.

Alongside chaotic policy interventions by agents of the settler state (Lea 2012, Strakosch 2015), these extractive entanglements constitute the actually existing Indigenous reality that needs reckoning with. Ethnographies attending to the distinctive non-dualist ontology of specific Aboriginal people, wherein country is 'sentient' and co-constitutive with the self, remain highly significant (e.g. Rose 2000, Povinelli 2002). However, these accounts are ill suited to the parts that they are often assigned to play, whether as a gloss for 'traditional' Aboriginal ontologies or, more frequently, an exemplar of 'Indigenous ontology' within broader arguments about modes of relation or ecological crisis. Putting aside debates about the precise classification of Indigenous relations with country (Peterson 2011), we argue that there are two further reasons that the radical difference of these ontologies cannot serve as the endpoint of analysis. This is because, first, where Indigenous people want to assert the incommensurability of their relations to country with extractive industry relations to that same country they routinely find their position untenable (Trigger 2000). It seems a cruel irony that academics, ennobled by settler regimes of power and knowledge, would choose to praise forms of difference in abstract that are, in practice, variously deemed unintelligible, archaic, pathological, and/or falsified by hegemonic forms of public political morality, policy interventions, and legal regimes. Second, we cannot deny Aboriginal peoples' aspirations for economic development and an embrace of environmentally destructive projects, just as we cannot deny that structurally inequitable processes condition this embrace. To do otherwise would to risk reproducing yet another colonial sorting of indigeneity's types, parsing the 'real' from the 'hybrid', the radically different from the remediably different, and the analytically separable from the indistinct. In short, anthropologists, Cultural Studies scholars and others should not pick and choose between the differences they find agreeable and those they do not, mining Indigenous alterity at their convenience.

Conclusion

We close this essay by outlining two of many possible responses to the critique we have presented. These responses make explicit certain implied

positions animating the present field. What might be called the 'inspiration' response implies that whether or not accounts of given Indigenous people are ethnographically accurate, deploy categorical separations that are empirically problematic, or are implicitly essentializing is not the real question. These are far from trivial issues, but they are also not fatal for those whose driving interest is 'the common world' that we 'earthlings' are making collectively, in Latour's terms. This first position is stated clearly by political geographer Sian Sullivan (2013, p. 61), who suggests that it is not that 'animist culturenature conceptions, experiences and value practices' are interesting because they emanate and can be learned from Indigenous peoples. Rather, these ontologies and their corresponding conceptions and praxes are important because they 'might have effects that are relevant for coming to terms with being human in the Anthropocene'. According to this first position, *all* of the Earth's inhabitants need information on modes of relation which can act as models, 'richer ontologies' to draw 'us' out of our 'ontological poverty' (Viveiros de Castro 2004, pp. 482–484), and 'imaginative elements' to disturb our present torpor. Certain Indigenous groups may act as a singular inspiration here, as guides to a remaking an inhabitable planet. This position carries with it a necessary compromise, which is rarely made explicit. As Bessire and Bond (2014, pp. 449–450) eloquently state, such thinking 'reifies the wreckage of various histories as the forms of the philosophic present', establishing 'exceptional concern' for the usefully different. The many Indigenous people who, through settler colonial and capitalist exploitation, find themselves today amongst the ranks of the dualist 'moderns' have no special status; they too, along with the other naturalists and analogists, must take their cue from the animists and totemists.

A second position might be named the 'articulation' response. While admitting that there is considerable merit in letting others 'set the terms' of reality, Graeber, as noted earlier, objects to the conceptual idealism and categorical purifications of such work. These matter, he suggests, not only because it is distorting to suppose that any group exercises autonomous authority 'over determining the nature of reality' within its own 'world', but also because it is mystifying to immunize the worlds in question from one another, eliding the exchanges and mimesis that constitute 'us' and 'them' alike. In Graeber's recent work we see an echo of arguments made from a different direction by Clifford – whose work bridges the fields of Anthropology and Cultural Studies. Clifford questions the proposition that 'indigeneity is essentially about primordial, transhistorical attachments', suggesting instead that indigeneity is better understood as 'articulated' within contexts, comprising heterogeneous elements from here and elsewhere, now and elsewhen (2001, pp. 472–478). Indigenous difference is a social fact, a category invoked in manifold settings whose meaning is always contingently articulated. In Australia, for example, 'Indigenous tradition' may be the dominant currency of indigeneity, but it is

not the only one, and the defence of Aboriginal peoples' autonomy occurs on many grounds other than their cultural alterity; ideas of econationalism, civil rights, decolonization, and economic justice are all regularly mobilized to such ends. An articulation response then has an empirical basis, and is focused less upon broad concepts such as 'Indigenous ontology' and more upon the existence and potential arrangement of shared worlds, as they are lived within and struggled over. It is these worlds we see ourselves as being a part of, and urge engagement with.

Notes

1. This point applies particularly to Western Australia where the state government has been widely criticized for deregistering many sacred sites and proposing to weaken heritage legislation. Further, Bennetts (2015) outlines a recent shift over the same period towards 'industry-friendly site assessment outcomes' and staff appointments with industry backgrounds.
2. Pickering's (1999) detailed examination of the Australian material leads him to conclude that anthropophagy was not a cultural feature of any Indigenous society across the Australian continent prior to colonization.
3. Historical developments, including the 1998–2003 civil violence in the Solomon Islands, have led to a 'hardening' of 'already incipient ethnicised insular categories' (2014, p. 45) among the Arosi, Scott finds. The Arosi are not multinaturalists, and are increasingly closed to others: Scott details 'calls to purify Makira of foreign ways and people' in order to revitalize the 'power of their core Makiran ontology' (2014, p. 43). He argues scholars should approach ontological differences having suspended evaluation, engaging instead a 'wonder' at otherness that precedes moral judgement about the nature of that otherness (2014, p. 50).
4. Geographer Kathryn Yusoff (2016) recently questioned the uncoupling of questions of ontology and questions of 'territory', a point especially pertinent in Australia as policy developments indicate that state governments and the Commonwealth government are increasingly unwilling to resource small, remote settlements in which Aboriginal people live on their ancestral country.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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