

CHAPTER I

The World as Abyss

What can I do?

I must begin.

Begin what?

The only thing in the world that's worth beginning:

The End of the World, no less.

(Césaire 2013 [1956], 38–39)

In 1939 Martinican writer Aimé Césaire first published his book length poem variously translated as *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, *Return to My Native Land*, or *Journal of a Homecoming*, in which this epigraph appears. As the colonial powers were taking the world into an era of mass destruction, Césaire drew upon a Caribbean imaginary to counterpose to the apocalyptic violence of so-called Western ‘reason’ (Jones 2010, 162). Césaire’s call was later famously echoed by another radical Martinican activist and intellectual, Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, first published in 1952 (2021, 96). *The World as Abyss* is about a contemporary return to the Caribbean and the radical ‘abyssal’ call for the ending of the world, at a time in which Western ‘reason’

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similarly appears to have led the world into an epoch of devastation and destruction. This epoch is known as the Anthropocene, the fundamentally changed world of climate catastrophe and habitat and species extinction.

It might seem counterintuitive that an abyssal paradigm of critical thought should arise at just the moment that dominant approaches to the political sphere are concerned with saving the world amid multiple and ongoing chronic crises. For much contemporary thought, the 'end of the world' is understood in the literal terms of the impact of global climate change and the indirect impact of the climate crisis upon assumptions of modernist progress and human dominium. This 'reality check' has facilitated a fundamental rethinking of liberal social and scientific assumptions built upon strict categorical distinctions and separations. Much critical theory – we are thinking here of a range of new materialisms and more-than-human approaches – can be seen to index this internal crisis of faith in Eurocentric or Enlightenment reasoning. Contemporary critical thought, dominated by the relational and ontological turns, has questioned assumptions of the human/nature divide and foregrounded how modern reasoning has led to the instrumentalisation of nature and (often unintentionally) caused the collapse of climate and environmental stability.

This book is about a distinctive approach to the crisis of modernity that reflects a radically different set of stakes. In this framing, influenced by contemporary critical Black studies, another understanding of the world – as *abyss* – emerges. As we expand upon in what follows, rearticulating the world as abyss foregrounds the foundational violence of Indigenous dispossession, chattel slavery and the Middle Passage via the assembling of a figurative position without ontological security – the structural perspective of the abyssal subject.¹ This figurative positionality holds the radical

¹ As we draw out in this book, what we call the abyssal subject is the figurative assembling of a critical positionality that cannot be reduced to a subject position in the world. The abyssal subject is a positionality from which it is possible to put in question the ontological assumptions that enable this world to be taken for granted as an

capacity to lift the veil off and to desediment² the world-making project of colonial violence which forged the ‘human’ and the ‘world’. Crucially, the assembling of the abyssal *subject* enables a registration of world-making violence, while being unobtainable on literal, ontological, or ontic grounds. Lacking being ‘in’ the world of a fixed grid of space and time, this perspective provides a generative political and ethical project, putting in question the cuts of entities, essences and spatial and temporal fixity. Thus, the distinctiveness of what we call ‘abyssal thought’ is that rather than correcting the errors of modern reasoning – seeking to secure more productive ontological grounds along the lines of the relational and ontological turns – abyssal thought refuses the lure of remaking the human and the world. As we delineate in detail, figuring the world as abyss develops a form of critique

a priori given. In many places in this book we indicate this positionality through the conception of a barred *subject*, existing under erasure. Erasure was used by Heidegger and later by Lacan and Derrida to indicate that the signifier – ‘subject’ – is not wholly suitable for the concept it represents. We also acknowledge Calvin Warren’s powerful use of erasure in his discussion of black *being* (2018). Thus, our framing of the abyssal *subject* has a very different emphasis from that of John Drabinski’s relational ontology of an ‘abyssal subject’ amid agential ‘rhizomic’ processes of becoming: ‘Rhizome, then, performs the conceptual labour of ontology. That is, rhizome describes the *being* of subjectivity...’ (2019, 115, italics in original).

² Desedimentation is a term often used by Derrida (for example, 1992), but we derive our approach in this book more directly from Nahum Chandler who writes (2014, 65–66): ‘I specifically propose this concept-metaphor here as otherwise than a procedure that might be primarily one of recovery or return. I think of it as a kind of resetting, a setting afoot or apace, a destabilization... Yet, there is in the question of desedimentation as it has acquired its coherence as a concern for me an ineluctable and intractable movement of force as a massive violence which remains, despite all manner of dissimulations, the very terms of the announcement of existence or being as a problem for thought.’

which problematises ontological fixity, rather than engaging in 'productivist' salvific imaginaries of world-making.³

We stress from the outset that this book is about the shifting nature and stakes of critique in the Anthropocene and how a turn to the Caribbean in particular has been very important for the figurative assembling of a critical structural positionality, from 'the world as abyss'. In the critical works we engage, certain readings of Caribbean thought and modes of practice, of resistance and survival – the Middle Passage, Plantation, creolisation, marronage, carnival, *jamettes*, and Caribbean speculative fiction, as just some examples – facilitate the development of what we draw out as an abyssal analytic.

Of course, the distinctive and unique importance of the Caribbean to the formation of modern thought and the world as constituted through colonality has long been stressed by many writers, such as C. L. R. James who wrote:

Wherever the sugar plantation and slavery existed, they imposed a pattern. It is an original pattern, not European, not African, not a part of the American main, not native in any conceivable sense of the word, but West Indian, *sui generis*, with no parallel anywhere else. (James 1938, 305, italics in original)

Fanon himself was acutely aware of this, when, in the Preface of *Black Skin, White Masks*, he wrote: 'As those of an Antillean, our observations and conclusions are valid only for' the Antilles, arguing that 'a study needs to be made to explain the differences between Antilleans and Africans' (2021, xiv), and later that 'black Americans are living a different drama' from those in the Caribbean (*ibid.*, 196). Édouard Glissant, one of the most influential

³ We use the term 'productivist' to indicate the underlying ontological assumptions of productive differentiation which often lies at the heart of immanent and relational theorising. The term, with its slightly negative and modernist implications, flags up questions of force and overdetermination implicit in these metaphysical assumptions of immanence. See also Andrew Culp's use of this term (2016, 66–67).

Caribbean theorists for contemporary theorising, was equally keen to examine the specificities of Caribbean sensibility, particularly the psychic consequences of a lack of national or collective identity (Glissant 1989; see also Brathwaite 1975).⁴

We argue that contemporary readings of Caribbean modes of thought and practice have distinctively drawn upon tropes of displacement, dislocation, suspension and marronage. It is this articulation of a figurative positionality carved out against chattel slavery, plantation economies, coloniality and racial capitalism that has been central to current articulations of what we analytically draw out as the world as abyss. In this book we focus on three key ways: firstly, in that the Caribbean provides the geo-spatial ground for the figurative assembling of the 'abyssal subject'; secondly, that the Caribbean provides a temporal register for narratives of modernist 'progress', given meaning (sedimented) by the repetition of relations of hierarchy and subordination and given material form in the global colour line; and, thirdly, that the region is today being regularly drawn upon to illustrate abyssal modes of practice, what we draw out as 'abyssal sociality', enabling the problematisation of modernist hierarchical divisions.

It should already be clear that this book is therefore not about the Caribbean in all its complexities – its various histories, societies and cultures, its multitude of writers, artists, and poets – but rather about how a particular way of engaging with the Caribbean and Caribbean thought has been enabling for the emergence of a distinct line of critical thought in contemporary debate. This is one which, as we underscore throughout, works very differently from the critical engagements provided by the relational and ontological

⁴ As J. Michael Dash notes in the Introduction to Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, central to his writings about the Caribbean and Martinique is the view of displacement from a modernist grid of the world with fixed entities: 'Martinican man is dispossessed in time and space' (Dash 1989, xxxii). Glissant himself described this displacement in terms of 'an agitated existence, violently and irrevocably severed from the motherland of Africa and painfully, inevitably, and improbably cut off from the dreamland of France' (Glissant 1989, 9).

turns that have dominated critical Anthropocene thinking to date. To reiterate, our concern here is with the particular readings of Caribbean modes of thought and practice in the contemporary emergence of an important ‘abyssal’ paradigm of thought.

The Caribbean as Ground

Having established that this book is concerned with how a highly distinctive approach can be drawn from a contemporary shift in critical thought, we want to underscore how the abyssal framing is not a matter of events revealing some timeless problem of the abstract or reductionist nature of modern thought. Critiques of the modernist paradigm have often depended upon some contemporary event revealing the limits of modernist assumptions. For many theorists the turning point today is the shock of climate crisis, while for an earlier generation of critical theorists, associated with the Frankfurt School, the shock was the Holocaust and the devastating power of nuclear weaponry. For the abyssal analytic, the modern episteme is not understood as a product of abstract or ‘reductionist’ thinking which today needs to be ‘grounded’, ‘adjusted’ or ‘corrected’. The critique of modernity is not that it fails to understand complexity or contingency or relation; that it commits what is often called ‘epistemological violence’ (Rekret 2018, 101). Modernist understandings are not merely a problem of thought or of approach, but a problem ingrained within the materiality of the world. Modernist understandings are understood to be integral to the real material and ongoing reproduction of structural inequity, dispossession, coloniality and racial capitalism. For the work we engage with that enables us to delineate the abyssal analytic, the Caribbean is key to the modern conception of the human/non-human divide and its material reflection in the horrors of the Middle Passage, plantation economies and brutality of chattel slavery, and the ongoing economic and social inequities of the global colour line (Spillers 2003; da Silva 2007; Harney and Moten 2013; Sharpe 2016).

For abyssal work, this world of racial modernity has not ended; and, in fact, it is the ending of this world that is the key task. This task is thus often argued to begin with a recentring of the Caribbean region as the epicentre and ‘vortex’ (Philip 1989, 83) of the modern world-making project. This project of world-making can then begin to be radically rethought in terms of the world as abyss. The abyssal emphasis on materiality and upon the social historical grounding of the modern condition, is not merely a question of bringing social and economic concerns to the forefront. As we stress throughout this book, for abyssal work the question of the making of modernity is, fundamentally, an *ontological* question – the making not just of regimes of knowledge and of governing hierarchies, but also the world and its subject. It is this world which provides a stable or seemingly ‘natural’ ground, enabling specific regimes themselves to change while holding in place the world of being as a background certainty informing what might be known and how these entities, once known, might be governed most efficiently.

Modernity’s Hold

Some theorists of the Anthropocene as our contemporary condition emphasise how the present is ‘haunted’ by the long-term consequences of previous actions, which caused permanent damage to the environment, meaning that the historical past is not something ‘away’ or ‘over’ (Morton 2013, 1; Ghosh 2016). Work within the abyssal paradigm shares an understanding that questions the temporal differentiation of linear time, but also extends the analytic of entanglement. Thus, ‘unpayable debt’ (da Silva 2022) in the present is not merely a question of historical relation to an ‘external’ environment but to the understanding of the disavowal at the heart of the construction of the human as subject. There is a ‘spectre’ haunting modernity, haunting the hubristic fiction of human exceptionalism (the subject capable of the cutting and the casting of the world into objects and subjects, into valued and non-valued). For the abyssal analytic, the problem is the aporia

that is the precondition for the framing of a human/nature divide. This aporia is the disavowal of those humans cast into ‘modernity’s hold’, denied the status of fully human, and displaced without ontological security (Ferdinand 2022, 175; Wilderson 2020, 333). Thus, in the abyssal framing, there can be no easy move beyond the human/nature divide, as in much Anthropocene critical theory, as if the (reformed and improved) human could just be returned to the world as it is currently understood to exist.

In an abyssal framing, when we talk of the ‘human’ we mean a modern human, a human understood as the subject of reason. The human as the rational individual, the liberal subject; the human that is the basis of universal understandings of abstract equality under the law and at the ballot box. For abyssal approaches, the human of modernist social and political theory could only exist on the basis of the denial of humanity to other ‘humans’. As Fanon (2021 [1952], 89) famously reflected, this distinction was carved out in the Caribbean through five hundred years of subjection, where the black(ened) (non)person was reduced to ‘an object in the midst of other objects’. This world-making project, with the Caribbean at its epicentre, which constructed the human based on the denial of humanity to others, is, for the abyssal approach we schematically draw out from contemporary developments, the real price of the human/nature divide. It is a price that is concealed and disavowed by those who wish to talk about the crisis of modernist thought and the condition of the Anthropocene in terms of problems in relating to the environment and in understanding our mutual dependencies on other forms of life. As Malcolm Ferdinand (2022) has recently argued, this understanding is that of ‘colonial ecology’, seeking to address environmental problems without acknowledging the underlying problem of the making of the modern ontology through the ongoing violence of slavery and colonialism.

Critique and the Abyss

This book analytically focuses upon the shifting nature and stakes of critique in the Anthropocene, and it therefore seeks to explore

what is distinctive about the abyssal paradigm, emphasising how drawing upon the Caribbean for the figurative assembling of a critical positionality helps carve out a very different set of starting concerns and methodological assumptions. One key aspect is that this positionality is *figurative* rather than literal, that it draws upon readings of Caribbean modes of thought and practice, but it does so to illustrate a structural positionality rather than a particular fixed identity or set of subject-specific properties. The question of positionality has become increasingly central for contemporary critical thought since the idea of an autonomous subject, capable of standing apart from or above the world, has become discredited due to its association with coloniality and environmental destruction. It would therefore seem perhaps inevitable that critical theorists should be drawn to geographical regions and cultures around the world which seem to offer an alternative to traditional modern notions of the subject.

We see this appeal reflected, for example, in the ‘Indigenous turn’ in Western academia (Whyte 2017; Davis and Todd 2017; Chandler and Reid 2020) and in contemporary posthuman and more-than-human work, and critical Anthropocene thinking more generally. We think that this search for alternative modes of subjecthood and of subjectivation are important drivers in the development of contemporary abyssal thought. Within this search for an alternative conception of the human subject and alternative ethico-political grounds for critique, a wide range of concerns have arisen. For some theorists, there is a desire to avoid reliance on timeless, ontological and metaphysical abstractions and to ground critique in the real-world complexities where coloniality cannot be neatly separated from the world (Povinelli 2021; Zalloua 2021). For others, there is a move away from discourses of immanent salvation and repair which enrol more-than-human and Indigenous modes of being in instrumentalising ways (Karera 2019; Robinson 2020), available to ‘save the West from itself’ (Colebrook 2021, 528), whilst denying the continued centrality of ongoing colonialism as the real, fundamental ‘force of history’ (Povinelli 2021, 2). Such questions,

and the discussions they give rise to, are part of a broader anxiety today around notions of the ‘obtainable’ subject available for instrumentalisation by ethnography and critical theory (Bissell, Rose and Harrison 2021; Laruelle 1991; 2017; Culp 2021; Ruiz and Vourloumis 2021).

Abyssal Geography

In attempting to grasp what it is about particular Caribbean modes of thought and practice that contemporary work finds important for a distinct alternative to both rationalist and relational frameworks, we heuristically set out a paradigm of ‘abyssal thought’ which operates at the level of ontology or, more precisely, the paraontological (Chandler 2014).⁵ The problematisation of the world of modern ontology – of entities, located in fixed grids of time and space – foregrounds the radical distinctiveness of abyssal thought in that it explicitly escapes the affirmative grounds of ontology. Key for approaches which enable us to draw out the abyssal analytic, is that ‘the human’ and ‘the world’ are conceptually and materially inseparable from the violent histories of chattel slavery, coloniality and racial capitalism. For abyssal approaches, this world is not over, nor can some pre-existing or pure world, without the grounding violence of chattel slavery and coloniality, be salvaged or redeemed.

For abyssal thought, the world as abyss is the starting point rather than the world of modernity, of the human, of entities and

⁵ It is important to highlight here that our use of the abyssal as a conceptual paradigm is distinctive from that often found in decolonial work, which tends to take the abyss as an entity within the world; either as a productive resource for immanent processes of self-creativity – for example, An Yountae’s (2016) *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins* – or, as a line of radical exclusion between the West from its others; for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ (2007) *Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges*.

transcendental assumptions of space and time. In contradistinction to leading Western critical theorists of the Anthropocene – from Bruno Latour to Jane Bennett, Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway – who seek to affirm the world of modernity as a launching platform for the development of alternative forms of ontological world-making, abyssal modes of practice reject the lure of the world as a call for subordination. Central here is how relational ontologies operate through the logic of *available geographies*, tracking, sensing, or speculating upon spatial entanglements or extensions and becomings *in* the world. Instead, for abyssal work, as we learn from Denise Ferreira da Silva, the task of critique is the work of ‘negativation’ (da Silva 2022, 44) of refusal: the ongoing call for the unmaking or undoing of the world. As we draw out, the figurative world as abyss is a desedimenting ‘non-spatiality’, ‘the release of matter from form’ (ibid., 161), frequently viewed as analogous to matter held in *quantum suspension* and thus unavailable for delineation. Theorising from the abyss, as we analyse in this book, is desedimenting in that it is world-subtractive rather than productivist, in the sense of being world-additive (see also Colebrook 2021).

Perhaps a useful way of flagging up this distinction is to locate non-being at the heart of abyssal work in contradistinction to what could be called approaches of ‘productive entanglement’, which focus upon levelling or ‘flattening’ ontologies of being. Work that might appear most like an abyssal critique of modern ontology, for example, the work collected under the broader heading of the ‘oceanic turn’ (Steinberg and Peters 2015; DeLoughrey 2016) through a more specific focus upon ‘saturation’ (Jue and Ruiz 2021a), or the focus on atmospheres and ‘suspension’ (Choy and Zee 2015; Simmonds 2017), questions the ‘territorial bias’ in which identifiable and separable entities are often imagined to be entangled like a knotted vine (Jue and Ruiz 2021b, 3). These approaches of entanglement between matter and agency emphasise ambiguity, fluidity, indistinction and opacity, understanding entanglement as central to ontological analysis. These framings of ‘quantum’ entanglement (for example, Der Derian and Wendt

2022) share much with the abyssal approach at a descriptive level,⁶ but the key difference is that these ‘relational’ approaches are all ‘productivist’, they are concerned with production: producing richer, more creative or more differentiated worlds.

In this productivist framing, relations may reproduce hierarchies and oppressions, but they can always be empirically accessed by individuals, activists and policy-makers, thereby (a) articulating entanglement as literally operative in a distinct space and (b) in consequence, making it operable and instrumentalisable, creating new ethical duties – along the lines advocated by Karen Barad (2007) – where humans take responsibility for the choices and ‘cuts’ they make in worlding their worlds (for example, Zylinska 2021, 65). In bringing this distinction to the fore – between articulating different ways of ‘productivist’ being in the world and the ‘problematizing’ positionality of non-being, of lacking ontological grounding, in abyssal geography – this book is titled *The World as Abyss*. We do this to highlight that work in an abyssal paradigm is not constructing an alternative ontology of being, available as an exterior resource to be appropriated or intervened in, to save or improve the world, but necessitates the ending of that world.⁷

⁶ The labelling of approaches as ‘quantum’ can be misleading or ambiguous in that, for some theorists, quantum provides a new and more ‘real’ scientific approach to this world, understanding the underlying pre-conditions of possibility for the actual (the world of being). For other theorists, quantum provides an invitation to theorise what appears as the actual as a product of, ongoing, violent cuts and decisions.

⁷ This fundamental distinction between ‘productivist’ work, affirming a ‘reality’ beneath modernist constructions of a human/world divide, and abyssal work, which seeks to foreground the ontological violence of world-making, can perhaps be illustrated by analogy with Derrida’s essay *Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’* (1992). Derrida makes the point that at stake is not the status of exclusion or inclusion within the authority of law but the regime of law itself. The necessary but disavowed grounding of law is non-law:

This moment of suspense, this *epokhe*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. But it is also the

What we draw out as abyssal thought and work, approaches the stakes of critique in a radically distinctive way, developed from a fundamentally different understanding of the world as abyss.

The abyssal analytic raises the vantage point of positionality on a number of levels. On the one hand, it is important to emphasise that the contemporary attention to the Caribbean is largely a reflection of scholarship in North America. On the other hand,

whole history of law. *This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence.* It is the moment in which the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone. The supposed subject of this pure performative would no longer be before the law, or rather he would be before a law not yet determined, before the law as before a law not yet existing, a law yet to come, *encore devant et devant venir.* (1992, 36, italics in original)

The point that Derrida is making is that law and non-law come into being at the same time but all that appears is law. Non-law or non-being do not pre-exist the cut of the modern ontology. From within this world, of the cut: 'Every "subject" is caught up in this aporetic structure in advance' (Derrida 1992, 36). From within the world as constituted, it is difficult to challenge the arbitrary violence of the cut:

Here we are dealing with a double bind or a contradiction that can be schematized as follows. On the one hand, it appears easier to criticize the violence that founds since it cannot be justified by any preexisting legality and so appears savage. But on the other hand, and this reversal is the whole point of this reflection, it is more difficult, more illegitimate to criticize this same violence since one cannot summon it to appear before the institution of any preexisting law: it does not recognize existing law in the moment that it founds another. (Derrida 1992, 40)

Thus, the abyssal problematic is that of bringing to the surface the 'ontological violence' of the foundational violence of modernity, a violence that is both savage and arbitrary and at the same time seemingly cut apart or veiled from a modernist gaze. It is from the starting point of the world as abyss that a figurative assembling of an alternative structural positionality is possible.

abyssal work very much draws from the writings of Caribbean thinkers, such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo (2001) and Édouard Glissant (1997), and upon Caribbean tropes and imaginaries of displacement, suspension and marronage (Ferdinand 2022). For Benítez-Rojo (2001, 4, *italics in original*):

...the Caribbean flows outwards past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance, and its *ultima Thule* may be found on the outskirts of Bombay, near the low and murmuring shores of Gambia, in a Cantonese tavern of circa 1850, at a Balinese temple, in an old Bristol pub, in a commercial warehouse in Bordeaux at the time of Colbert, in a windmill beside Zuider Zee, at a cafe in a barrio of Manhattan, in the existential *saudade* of an old Portuguese lyric. But what is it that repeats? Tropisms, in series; movements in approximate direction.

Today, it is the importance of refusing the human and the world, which, for abyssal work, seems to make particular readings of Caribbean modes of practice and Caribbean writers generative. As we draw out from the work of Fred Moten, rather than seek admission into the realm of the human, abyssal work seeks to ‘sit with... rather than disavow’ ontological insecurity (2016, 16). The Caribbean, understood as the birthplace of the global colour line, of those said to possess ontological security and those said to lack it, is figured as particularly important for this line of critical thought.

Work drawing upon Caribbean history and culture has become prevalent more generally in contemporary critique, which increasingly mobilises aspects of this region as a potential entry point for challenging modern and colonial reasoning (Gordon 2008, 108; Ruiz and Vourloumis 2021; Ferdinand 2022). As Deborah A. Thomas (2022, 1) reflects in her essay *What the Caribbean Teaches Us*, ‘insights from the Caribbean create portals’ which are understood to help reshape the broader pathways of critical thought. Recent years have witnessed a substantial interest from academics working outside the Caribbean – for example, Kathryn Yusoff (2018), Elizabeth Povinelli (2021) and Gayatri Spivak (2021) – underlining that the Caribbean has become what

Katherine McKittrick calls ‘an analytical and methodological gift’ (quoted in Keohane and Smith 2022). As Kerry-Jane Wallart notes, leading thinkers, such as Dionne Brand (2011), Paul Gilroy (1993), and Carole Boyce Davies (2013) have presented ‘the Caribbean as a matrix for globalisation, for diasporic cultures around the globe, for creolization under any form and latitude’ (2019, 87). She argues that over the last thirty years the framing of the Caribbean has radically changed via a ‘critique of the colonial representations of the Caribbean islands as “small” spaces, as fragmented and disconnected spaces, as provincial, as forlorn, as archaic, as reduced to the size of a sugar plantation where nothing prevailed but the violence of greed’ (2019, 87). Today, increasingly, the Caribbean is viewed as anticipatory, as central to and at the heart of contemporary meaning-making, as ‘a very modern space indeed’ (ibid.).

Aware that the Caribbean has long been enrolled in the development of wider critical thought (Palmié 2006; Sheller 2003; Boyce Davies 2013), in exploring and developing an abyssal analytic, in no way are we claiming to speak for the region or its peoples, neither do we present an empirical or ethnographic study. Instead, we are drawing out a distinctive *abyssal analytic*, which, we believe, reflects an important current juncture in critical thought. As in our last book, *Anthropocene Islands: Entangled Worlds* (Pugh and Chandler 2021),⁸ we are interested in how certain engagements with histories, geographies and cultures become enabling for contemporary critical thought.

⁸ Our open access project and publications on *Anthropocene Islands* examine how the figures of the island, islander and ‘islandness’ are generative for thinking through relational entanglement as a key problematic of the Anthropocene (see <https://www.anthropoceneislands.online/page-3.html>). In a similar vein, our abyssal project draws out how Caribbean modes of thought and practice have become read generatively for the development of abyssal approaches. Both projects are interested in how geography and modes of being are engaged in the development of contemporary critical thought.

The Book

The body of this short book is organised into four chapters. The second chapter introduces what is at stake in figuring the world as abyss through the Caribbean, drawing out from contemporary works which engage Caribbean thought and practices the figuration of an ‘abyssal subject’, ‘abyssal sociality’, and ‘abyssal geography’. Chapter 3 highlights how the abyssal is read to be grounded in the force of history in the Caribbean as the epicentre of the construction of the modern world. It reads contemporary critique as facilitating an understanding of ‘abyssal temporality’, of the Caribbean as modernity’s ‘hold’. The concluding chapter (Chapter 4) turns to how abyssal thought works with a radically distinctive relation to politics and to epistemology; what Nahum Dimitri Chandler (2014) calls a ‘paraontological’ approach, that consistently delegitimises the claims of colonial and modern world-making. We draw out how an abyssal framing can be understood as opening a line of critical thought which moves to not only trouble, but works towards the ending of, both the human and the world. Throughout the book, we explore why and how abyssal thought, as a radically distinctive mode of critique, might be appealing for critical thought today.