

Precarity



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School of Arts,
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The Centre for
Interdisciplinary
Research in the
Arts and Languages



Elizabeth Povinelli (Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University)

10 February, 5-7 P.M.

Samuel Alexander Building, A113

Primitive Accumulation and Original Precarity: Vulnerability Outside Settler Geontopolitics

Public Lecture

As global temperatures rise and toxins spread, wars pound states, insurgents, and civilians alike, and the world splits into two great extremes, the 1% and the unruly stateless, incarcerated, crumpling middle class, green radicals and militant theologians), many in the global North seem on edge, precarious, and vulnerable. Everything seems suddenly exceptionally uncertain. It is not the social clashes alone that signal the epochal moment for many. What have placed people on edge are a new set of antagonists and the nature of their unpredictable interactions—the clash between man and nature; between societies and natures; and between entangled species and the geological, ecological, and meteorological systems that support them. Marx may have thought the social dialectic was leading to the purification of the fundamental opposition of human classes, but what many believe we are now witnessing is a new war of the world as an antagonism between classes of existence take center stage. The cause of this new form of uncertainty is usually paraphrased as anthropogenic climate change and toxicity, the moment when human existence became the determinate form of planetary existence—and a malignant form at that—rather than merely the fact that humans affect their environment.

In this talk, Povinelli examines how the longstanding antagonism between myself and my other so vital to governance in late liberalism is unraveling in the rising toxic temperature of the times. Where am I and it, the self and the other, if the other which threatens to undo me, re-flesh me, is already within me, and it is my offspring? In this swelter how does the problem of precarity and uncertainty move from the question of who, or what, are the antagonists/antagonisms of our time to the problem of antagonism in the context of an original entanglement.