



Call for Papers

The Necropolitics of Environmental Decline

A Special Issue of
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This special issue connects the view of the living earth as a limitless bounty from which infinite capitalist accumulation can be extracted with necropolitics (which explores the “subjugation of life to the power of death”) to unravel the political ecology of death and its attendant violences as related to environmental decline (Mbembe 2019: 91). Given the weddedness of the extractive economy to varied forms of violence, necropolitical considerations that decode how death is directed, monetized, politicized, and normalized by actant powers is part and parcel of conducting environmental criticism in the era of anthropogenic climate change.

Necropolitical interventions have evolved considerably in the two decades since Mbembe suggested we revise Foucault’s discussion of biopower by placing death at the centerfold of our political analyses to better negotiate the imperialist past and still-colonial present. Jasbir Puar has articulated a necropolitics that examines how queer, racialized subjects are implicated in a “bio-necro collaboration,” variously instrumentalized as symbols of life and death to advance nationalist and geopolitical agendas (2008). Rosi Braidotti discusses the inseparability of bio- and necropolitical regimes and the need to incorporate “situated knowledges” (Haraway) as well as diverse Anthropocene discourses to better understand the interpenetration of life- and death-making assemblages in our contemporary climes (2013). Alexander G. Weheliye proffers the insights of black feminist scholars (Wynter, Spillers, Hartman) to critique the universalization of “life” in biopolitical discourses by attending to the stratification of life into variable degrees of human- and non-humanness, evincing how this determination is historically anchored in racialized and gendered bodies subjected to death with impunity (2014). All of these discourses explore the surplus of necropolitical practices at the heart of political and economic machinations, which ensure certain bodies are strategically cultivated for life while others are marked for death, relegated to the role of expendable biological excess.

However, what is deemed to be biological excess for the purpose of economic and political gain is not and never has been limited to human populations, since the death of non-human animals and ecosystems has always been a centerpiece of human world-making. The logic

of extermination—which does away with anything that interferes with the geo-political stability of states, the unmitigated growth of human industry, and the economic pursuit of profit—has never merely been leveled at the human.

We can therefore consider the connection between environmental decline and necropolitics in at least two senses. First, by attending to the numerous challenges environmental decline presents for human populations. Rising sea levels; the surge of climate migrants fleeing heat, flooding, and drought; uncontrollable wildfires and super storms that inflict damage on human infrastructure; soil erosion and degradation—these are urgent examples of the perils that afflict humans in the age of biospheric collapse. Particular populations are more at risk than others of suffering at the hands of climate change, and this differential exposure to death (cutting, as always, along racial, gender, class, and geographic lines) has traceable historical, social, and political geneses. The socio-political relegation of particular populations to the immediate or downstream effects of acute climate precarity (via restricted movement and migration, forced displacement, using poor communities as toxic wastelands, etc.) is not accidental or incidental but consistent with the operation of military and state bureaucracies.

However, there is another way to consider necropolitics and environmental decline that sees non-human life as similarly targeted by sovereign power, deemed inconsequential or else utilized to directed ends. What is the relationship between the politics of death *and the environment at large* (an environment that is entangled with the human but also inclusive of non-human publics)? Stories of animal extinction, biospheric disturbance, resource diminishment, and ecocide must be included as we envision environmental futures. Given that the logic of sacrifice not only pervades human relations but indexes the historical treatment of non-human species and ecosystems, can necropolitics be thought beyond its habitual anthropocentrism?

Contemporary theorists are increasingly attending to the interrelatedness of human and non-human life (in the wake of Indigenous communities and scholars like Todd, Whyte, Justice, TallBear), exploring environmental resilience and multi-species survival by attending to plant and animal worlds (Coccia 2018; Morton 2016; Alaimo 2016). Languages cataloguing the co-implication of various ecosystems are working to de-partition persistent humanist binaries such as nature/culture, human/animal, and subject/object to better understand our reciprocal relationship with earthly materials and creatures. This has been phrased through critical posthumanisms (Braidotti); Indigenous “place-thought and agency” (Watts 2013); object-oriented ecologies (Morton); inter-species sociality (Haraway); the “web of life” (Moore); “queer animacies” (Chen), and so forth. However, such discourses tend to converse only peripherally with necropolitics as methodology, concerned more with expanding ontological notions of relationality than addressing the material conditions of multi-species life laboring under extractivist necroeconomic regimes.

This call takes for granted that necropolitical analyses are inextricable from capitalist critique and vice versa—we similarly cannot consider the anthropogenic drivers of climate change without attending to the logic of capital. Mbembe has called “necroliberalism” the

prevailing ethos of our contemporary moment, in which the logic of sacrifice becomes not only a political and environmental logic but an economic one (Bercito 2020). Fatmir Haskaj terms climate change-related disasters powered by economic incentives “necroeconomies,” within which death is seized upon as a profitable commodity (2018: 1149). The understanding of how human and non-human life is co-implicated in this picture hinges on whether we are willing to understand endangered “life” according to the anthropocentric and eurocentric logics of earlier biopolitical discourses (Agamben, Esposito) or whether we include the life that surrounds and supports human life in our bio- and necropolitical considerations.

This special issue is concerned with the centrality of the politics of death to the histories, geologies, and aesthetics of imminent ecological decline. It hopes to test the durability, pliability, and reach of existing necropolitical frameworks when applied to acute environmental pressures hastened by capitalogenic climate change, while posing the equally important question of how necropolitical infrastructures will be reshaped by ungovernable environmental disaster. This issue will continue the work of uncovering invisibilized horizons of human necro-subjection—but as connected to ecological violence and climate depreciation and bolstered by non-anthropocentric perspectives.

Potential topics can include but are not limited to:

- Ecomarxist and eco-feminist approaches to necropolitics
- Apocalypticism read through human-centered or natural histories (Grove; Connolly; Maynard/Simpson)
- Environmental technologies and the politics of their implementation
- Problems of scale in necro-ecological discourses
- How the Necrocene (the bio-geological system that drives extinction [McBrien]) interacts with the Capitalocene (“a system of power, profit and re/reproduction in the web of life” [Moore])
- Black critical studies approaches to violence, the body, life, nature, and exclusion (Hartman, Wynter, Mbembe, Fanon, Weheliye)
- Necroeconomies and necrospeculation (Haskaj, Manjapra, Skeggs)
- Environmental necro-subjectivities (Rosas), the “living dead” (Mbembe), and “social death” (Patterson) beyond the human
- Sci-fi, cli-fi, speculative fiction, and afro/Indigenous/queer/cyber/ecological futurisms that negotiate or neutralize repressive necropolitical regimes
- Necroecologies in literature, poetry, visual art, and film
- Climate reparations as restorative processes targeting the necro-subjected (Wallace-Wells, Táíwò)
- Animal/plant/object studies approaches to necropolitics
- Indigenous environmentalisms and knowledge practices (restoration/erasure)
- How ontological discourses (new materialisms, new realisms, neo-vitalisms) can/cannot “ecologize” necropolitical theory (Lopez, Rosenberg, Jackson)
- The role of grassroots activism in contesting necropolitical subjection in the context of environmental collapse (Extinction Rebellion, Landback, Fridays for Future)

Please send an abstract of approximately 500 words and a short bio to Nicole Grimaldi (nicole.grimaldi@nyu.edu) by **30 June 2023**. Abstracts should include a title, topic outline, and information about the type of text (essay, statement, scholarly article), including the approximate length of the planned piece. Submissions can be in the form of a traditional journal article, but this is not a requirement. Experimental and collaborative pieces are welcome. The editors will get back to you by **15 July 2023**, and full articles will be due on 15 December 2023. Please read the journal's submission guidelines: <https://coilsoftheserpent.org/submissions/>

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