

## A Political Ecology of Modernist Resistance: Turning the Tide on Ecomodernism and Ecofascism in the New Climatic Regime

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### Abstract

This article claims that the material and epistemic disruption of climate and ecological collapse engenders a feedback of ecomodern and ecofascist resistance that undercuts democratic capacities for mitigation and adaptation (IPCC 2022). Moreover, that opposing these positions engenders second-order adversarial feedbacks, which further hamper climate action. Analyzing this modernist resistance in an “ecology of practices” (Stengers 2005) shows it to occur in defence of a modern timespace and on behalf of affordances of Whiteness. To mitigate this resistance, the article concludes by calling for a ‘politics of life’ that decentres humanistic agency as the locus of historical progress and territorial integrity by emphasizing habitability in an emergent field of environmental relations.

### Keywords

Climate Crisis; Ecomodernism; Ecofascism; Ecology of Practices; Extinction Rebellion; Politics of Life.

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## A Political Ecology of Modernist Resistance: Turning the Tide on Ecomodernism and Ecofascism in the New Climatic Regime

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But this “we” cannot be immune to who is writing and mobilising this history and the implications of its telling for who is granted agency in the shaping of the present and the future.

— Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018).

The mounting pressures of the climate and ecological crisis are beginning to organize politics under a “new climatic regime” (Latour 2017, 3). In this shifting political landscape, ecomodernist and emerging ecofascist positions are of particular concern. With their politics of deferral and denial, these positions hamper climate action, undercutting democratic legitimacy of, and popular support for, climate mitigation and adaptation policies. Given the inevitable further degradation of Holocene climate and ecological systems (IPCC 2022), we should anticipate an intensification of this resistance in the years and decades to come (Millward-Hopkins 2022). With nothing less than liveable planetary futures at stake (IPCC 2018), understanding how liberal and fascist discourses intersect with—and feed off—climate disruption is an urgent issue. This is the case in particular for the Global North, with its historical responsibility for climate action and reparations (Hickel et al. 2022, Sultana 2022).

Anno 2023, the smooth certainty of ecomodernism and the violent pull of ecofascism are distinct, if distributed, phenomena. While the prevalence of ecomodernism and its ethos of planetary control are a global policy reality, the ecological inflection of fascism is just emerging on the coattails of a far-right resurgence (Malm 2021, x). This article describes ecomodernism and ecofascism in terms of a common affirmative experience: of a spacetime afforded by Whiteness that is defended against the material and epistemological disruption of climate and ecological collapse. By analysing them in conjunction, a particular ecology of modernist resistance emerges where ecofascism and ecomodernism form “counterpoints in the same rhythm” (Schinkel & van Reekum 2019, 18).

By engaging in an ecology of modernist resistance, this paper sets up a twofold challenge. First, to describe the constitutive feedback loop between climate change and modernist resistance, where climate and ecological disruption stimulates politics that defer and deny adequate climate policy, which in turn exacerbate the disruption, etc. Engaging in this ecology, we encounter the second-order challenge of an adversarial feedback that drives modern politics to “mobilize and transform the border into a defence against their outside” (Stengers 2005, 184). Analysing modernist resistance to climate disruption, we must acknowledge the generative quality of this adversarial feedback if we are to avoid inadvertently stimulating the processes degrading planetary habitability that we seek to mitigate.

This analysis will allow for two conclusions. First, that epistemological disruptions are by no means bloodless affairs (Bateson [1971] 2000, 337-338). The material and conceptual disruptions with/in the climate crisis are affective, causing trauma that impacts intertwined mental, social, and environmental ecologies (Guattari [1989] 2000). From this follows,

second, that moving beyond adversarial co-constitution is possible by reorienting the political field in terms of environmental relations. A political ecology emphasizing such a ‘politics of life’ stimulates collective response-abilities to environmental upheaval (Haraway 2016, 34), interrupting the modern feedbacks that mobilize publics as so many shipwrecked sailors, clutching the wreckage they mistake for a lifeboat.

### **A Performative *A Priori***

Grasping the first-order feedback of modernist resistance without succumbing to second-order opposition involves a key methodological question for political ecology. These second-order, adversarial feedbacks oblige us to acknowledge that our analysis influences its subject, drawing us into the phenomena we seek to describe and foregrounding the situated nature of our analysis (Haraway 1988, Julien 2021). This partiality is incommensurable with *a priori* definitions and essentialized categories, which depend on the modern assumption of the radically separate observer: the “n+1” (Deleuze & Guattari [1987] 2013) or “zero-point” (Castro-Gómez 2021) perspective. A performative epistemology (Pickering 1995, 16) allows for situated observations that avoid the modern logic of separation. Rather than operating “after the socius is crystallized” (Guattari [1973] 2007, 160), performative approaches to theory are understood to “participate in this very crystallization,” rendering them “immediately political” (2007, 160). Practices are thus temporally emergent (Pickering 1995, 141) together with their environment (Foucault [1970] 1981, 67), by which I understand modernist resistance *and* its description to jointly constitute a political ecology, in terms of an ecology of practices (Stengers 2005).

This raises the always-specific question of how performative practices interact with their environment. To operationalize this relation in explicitly materialist terms, I employ a diffractive technique (Barad 2007; Julien 2021). Diffraction, the “cutting together-apart” (Barad 2014) of phenomena, is based on a relational understanding of causality where observer and observed *imply each other* in terms of “intra-action” (Barad 2007, 236). Taking this mutual implication as the basis for analysis entails a “mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps *where the effects* of difference appear” (Haraway 1991, 300; italics added). With interference as a basic analytic unit, diffraction procedurally acknowledges the co-emergence of phenomena with their analysis. Moreover, this procedure, as Iris van der Tuin notes, makes “explicit the destabilization of the dis-embodied and dis-embedded subject position” (2014, 238). Diffraction is therefore well-suited to the performative analysis of complex systems, in particular those involving zero-point positions, such as between modernist subjectivities and environmental collapse, among antagonistic modernisms, and between these phenomena and the present analysis.

The relevance of grappling with the feedback of modernist resistance extends beyond self-identifying ecomodernist and ecofascist positions. Diffractively—as interference patterns—these modernist positions are to be analysed as *effects* of underlying commitments in the encounter with climate disruption. Such underlying commitments are rendered, following Félix Guattari, as “existential territories” (1992) that circulate as part of a mental ecology ([1989] 2000) in which, “rather than speak of the ‘subject,’ we should perhaps speak of components of subjectification” (2000, 24-25). This distributed notion of subjectivity

allows us to register the widespread effects of modernist commitments in contemporary societies. In the following, I will show how ecomodernist politics, co-emerging with climate disruption, mark a particular, modern timespace, which legitimates a particular, modern mode of agency and its assurances of ongoing societal stability along a tenuous path of technological optimisation and green growth. Ecofascist resistance further marks these agencies as lively affordances of Whiteness (Wekker 2016; Malm 2021), whose interference by Holocene collapse can be accounted for as a trauma set in a “great chain of humiliations” (Negarestani 2011, 26).

### **Inevitable Entanglements**

On February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists set up a “temporary unsanctioned exhibit,” *The Extinction of Homo Sapiens*, in the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Alongside two specimens of early 21st-century humankind—Ray-Ban-sporting, Starbucks-swigging 30-something urbanites—a sign read:

Homo sapiens roamed the earth for a brief 200,000-year span. Their extinction was precipitated primarily by rapid climate change during the geological period known as the Anthropocene... Archeological evidence suggests that Homo Sapiens had discovered solar energy long before their extinction. But their primitive form of social organisation and rudimentary ability to share resources prevented them from addressing the global threat in time. (Extinction Rebellion NYC 2020)

Indeed, the climate and ecological crisis highlights the relationships our societies embrace and erase with the living world. Presently, it is no longer in the “apocalyptic or salvific” allegories of scripture (Haraway 2016, 1) but rather *as* historically inhabited timeplaces (Bawaka Country 2019) that the existence of humans and other animals is in question (Trisos et al. 2020). The action by XR is therefore well situated in the Museum of Natural History, questioning how human societies will respond to planetary crisis, or whether the human species, among many others, will become part of a museum that then no longer exists.

The inability to organize effectively and share resources memorialized by XR recalls the “nagging paradox” raised by Félix Guattari in his seminal work of 1989, *The Three Ecologies*:

Wherever we turn, there is the same nagging paradox: on the one hand, the continuous development of new techno-scientific means to potentially resolve the dominant ecological issues and reinstate socially useful activities on the surface of the planet, and, on the other hand, the inability of organized social forces and constituted subjective formations to take hold of these resources in order to make them work. ([1989] 2000, 22)

In the thirty years separating *The Three Ecologies* from XR’s impromptu exhibit, this nagging paradox has intensified, becoming a debilitating crisis that envelopes the world in an uneven landscape of pandemics (IPBES 2020), flooding (Brunner et al. 2021), wildfires (Sullivan et al. 2022), melting ice (Boers & Rypdal 2021), crop failure (Gaupp et al. 2019), species

collapse (Song et al. 2021), and the apparent inevitability of futures with over 2° C of heating (Meinshausen et al. 2022). In the face of these abysmal futures, corporate and political actors continue to resist commonsense mitigation and adaptation policies with tactics of denial, disinformation, and delay (Stoddard et al. 2021, Wentz & Franta 2022). Thus, although sufficient technological capacities are available to avert the worst predictions (Way 2022, Minnesma 2019), refrains of salvific techno-futures and apocalyptic social imaginaries continue to lead us, wide-eyed, off a cliff.

Activists often chant: “another world is possible!” Given current scientific consensus, another world is indeed inevitable. Although the risks of societal collapse as a consequence of climate chaos remain understated in scientific discourse (Kemp et al. 2022; Servigne et al. [2018] 2021), the certainty that climate science affords is the cascading collapse of Holocene climate and ecological systems (Armstrong McKay et al. 2022). Terrifying as this may be, approaching the collapse of Holocene Earth systems as a shared geo-social condition (Yusoff 2018, 25) might provide a productive and inclusive framework for our epoch (Julien 2022). Holocene collapse, both as predicament and outlook, foregrounds the differential impacts of the climate and ecological crisis, involving every-body in uneven, uncertain ways to form a patchy landscape where

the confluence of local power imbalances, uneven creation of vulnerabilities and production of risks end up merging global climate breakdown with scalar intersectional factors from the planetary to the body, thereby creating more complex tapestries of outcomes in different contexts. (Sultana 2022, 5-6)

Amidst Holocene collapse, the Anthropocene then represents more of “a boundary event than an epoch” (Haraway 2016, 100). In it, modern cosmologies of growth, individualism, and control come crashing down among the tatters of a stable climate and flourishing biosphere, drawing the “nocturnal side” of the liberal firmament (Mbembe 2019)—of colonialism (Wekker 2016), enslavement (Ferdinand 2022), and generalized warfare (Grove 2019)—into ever starker relief. At the same time, crossing into a naturalcultural world blurs distinctions between epistemological and physical dynamics, making a mess of humanistic agency (Barad 2007).

This complex boundary event, as an interference pattern, foregrounds the self-enclosed horizon of modernity as well as its unparalleled destructive force. It highlights the necessity of leaving behind modern epistemic habits, including those perpetuated by Anthropocene narratives (Yusoff 2018). Such habits have even ensnared environmental movements, as Bruno Latour points out: “After 50 years of Green militancy, people continue to oppose economics to ecology, the demands of development to those of nature, questions of social injustice to the activity of the living world” (2018, 46). Escaping this paradox entails moving beyond premises of opposition, antagonism, and pure alterity, as such premises only reinforce the second-order feedbacks of modern politics. Guattari, among others, shows how these epistemic habits are generated by dualistic *culs-de-sac*, or

dualisms in an impasse, like the oppositions between the sensible and the intelligible, thought and extensity, the real and the imaginary, [which] involve a recourse to

transcendent, omnipotent and homogenetic instances: God, Being, Absolute Spirit, Energy, The Signifier... Transcendent value presents itself as immovable, always already there and thus always going to stay there. ([1992] 1995, 103)

Modern habits oscillate to a refrain of transcendently tethered dualisms, provoking a vicious cycle of oppositional politics that arguably characterizes much of late modern history (see also Schinkel & Van Reekum 2019). Hence, the modern “choice between subversive or imperative solutions” (Bataille 1979, 86) cannot *but* repeat a reckoning of the Romans and the Palestinians, and thereby “creates more members of the civilization which we are here criticizing” (Bateson [1972] 2000, 432). Therefore, acknowledging the lively presence of an “ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds” (2000, 489) is necessary in order to grasp—rather than negate or oppose—the coherence of positions contrary to our interests, morals, or even survival, if we are to overcome the presumption that they *must remain so*.

Facing the boom and bust of “rationalization and excesses” in modern politics, Michel Foucault suggested that “the fact they’re banal does not mean they don’t exist. What we have to do with banal facts is to discover—or try to discover—which specific and perhaps original problem is connected with them” (Foucault 1982, 779). Rather than taking an *a priori* objectification as the basis for analysis, he proposed to analyse power relations in terms of antagonistic, and thus responsive, strategies. Later, Isabelle Stengers situates this discursive approach, adapting Foucault’s antagonistic stratagem to a dialogic tactic. She proposes an “ecology of practices” (2005) on the basis of approaching any practice

as it diverges, that is, feeling its borders, experimenting with the questions which practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions, rather than posing insulting questions that would lead them to mobilize and transform the border into a defence against their outside. (Stengers 2005, 184)

Stengers’ ecology of practices is tactical in the sense that it *co-emerges with its technique*. The resultant ecology is “cosmopolitical” insofar as the individual is no longer able to fix the system’s overall conditions, boundaries, or equilibrium states (Stengers 2010), thereby opening up to non-scientific (and indeed more-than-human) epistemic practices. Acknowledging their partiality in a relational ecology, Stengers offers a generative method to situate border making—including antagonistic strategies and dualistic impasses—as partial practices in an emergent, non-totalisable ensemble.

Instead of erecting a system fuelled by antagonistic totalities, this approach is borne out of the finite, living practices that constitute its ecology. Its generative capacity is affirmative in the sense that “finitude... is not something that one resignedly endures as a loss, a deficiency, a mutilation, or castration. Rather, finitude entails existential affirmation and commitment” (Guattari [1985] 1996, 181). Such commitments are shared across the living world, and are embodied “in the irreversibility of the being-there of existential Territories” (Guattari 1992, 28); affective formations of living processes whose agency is not tethered to transcendental impasses, but rather emerges from particular environmental engagements. Not only are these engagements affective, they are also self-referential, in the sense that they are “adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an *alterity that is itself subjective*” (1992, 9; emphasis added). The

subjective quality of worlding captured in existential territories shows the complementarity of *resistance against* disruption and *defence of* existential commitments, creating an opening for dialogic engagement that side-steps second-order feedback loops of adversarial dualism.

An ecology of practices, emphasising existential commitments, provides an approach to understand modernist resistance in affirmative terms of self-referential environmental engagements. Threading together epistemic and subjective components, such resistance can be read as “repetitions that function, through an infinite variety of rhythms and refrains, as the very support of existence” (Guattari [1992] 1995, 26). Therefore, rather than seeking to reduce modernist resistance to a rationally coherent objectivity at the cost of rendering its lively commitments amorphous or in apparent self-contradiction (cf. Toscano 2017), the following will trace affirmative dimensions of ecomodernism and ecofascism as they emerge and feed back in relations of interference with Holocene collapse.

### **A Shared Modernity: Ecomodernism**

Since its founding in 2007, The Breakthrough Institute of Oakland, California has been a leading voice in the articulation of ecomodernism. Encountering its fair share of controversies (Thacker 2014), the institute insists on the primacy of the human over the living world: “We believe that ecological vibrancy results from human prosperity, not the other way around” (Breakthrough Institute 2022). Through their efforts among those of others (see also Fresco 2014), ecomodernism has become a distinct discourse that responds to climate and ecological disturbance by reiterating the foundational premise of modernity—of progress untethered from its environment.

Ecomodernism, as an extension of modernity adapted to ecological times, has become the discourse of preference for sensible technocrats and centrist politicians world-wide, aligned with late-capitalist ideas of incremental reform-by-innovation and design-thinking. Thus, ecomodernists “embrace Modernist logic and reform-based initiatives, but reject universal solutions and instead utilize local materials and gender/culturally sensitive ideas” (Benson & Fine 2011, 166). Illustrating the ecomodern conception of life as a design-object, “local materials” become subject to the interventions of an external agent. According to this refrain of separation, Breakthrough’s *Ecomodernist Manifesto* affirms

one long-standing environmental ideal, that humanity must shrink its impacts on the environment to make more room for nature, while we reject another, that human societies must harmonize with nature to avoid economic and ecological collapse. (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015, 6)

Emphasising the nature-culture divide, ecomodernists eschew socio-ecological entanglement in favour of delineated, knowable totalities separated from the observer. With this divide, a control-based and reform-oriented hopeful pragmatism becomes possible to ‘manage and innovate’ environmental relations. In conversation with the Breakthrough Institute, Bruno Latour emphasizes the practical challenges posed by this approach:

There is not one single case where it is useful to make the distinction between what is ‘natural’ and what ‘is not natural.’ It does not work for gay marriage, for organic

food, for abortion, for conserving redwoods, for fighting drought, etc. ‘Nature’ isolated from its twin sister ‘culture’ is a phantom of Western anthropology. (Latour 2015, 221)

Latour illustrates how scientific inquiry must, in practice, recognize that borders are not spontaneous occurrences. If anything, the evidentiary weight of anthropogenic climate change rebuts the *a priori* distinction between humanity and the living world, drawing innumerable pathways across the ostensible divide. And yet, the ecomodern edifice balances on this precarious commitment to environmental separation. What affordances and commitments motivate this obscure “phantom of Western anthropology” (see also Foucault [1964] 2008, 117-118) and its ongoing refrain of separation?

To situate the self-referential value of this nature-culture divide, its borders need to be understood as relations within an ecology of practices. This begs the question of an environment beyond the self-enclosed ecomodern horizon. Cary Wolfe provides an ecological schema for such dialogic border work, where it

is not a question of a biological or ecological substrate but rather of thinking the forms and processes by which the system / environment relationship is stabilized and managed by systems that find themselves in an environment of exponentially greater complexity than they themselves possess. (Wolfe 2018, 218)

Wolfe’s second-order cybernetics allow the border of ecomodernism to be understood as an existential territory that renders “alterity... itself subjective” (Guattari 1992, 9). As Wolfe argues, the self-constitutional quality of environmental relations follows from the fact that, by definition, our environment exceeds our capacities to register it. This structurally excessive, and therefore situated relation to the environment is foundational *and then* suppressed in ecomodernist discourse. First, the separation of nature and culture is asserted, foreclosing environmental excess and promising humanistic control. In contrast to the dialogic recognition of the situatedness of boundaries within an ecology of practices, this gesture of separation is *then* rendered as its own basis, providing a tacit platform for an external observer who “observes without being observed” (Castro-Gómez 2021, 8). By asserting an *a priori* totality, the nature-culture divide obfuscates the role of the observer (now neutral), effectively *closing off* the latter’s self-referential loop from its environment. This closure installs the “phantom of Western anthropology” (Latour 2015, 221), a vanishing observer affording itself a relationship of monitoring and control with the (now separate) natural realm. Thus, ecomodern insistence on the nature-culture divide serves to contain environmental excess in a closed system, yet it does so at the cost of *only* being able to register the environment *insofar as it is constrained by, with, and for the human*: “a good Anthropocene demands that humans use their growing social, economic, and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world” (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015, 6). The seemingly benign promise of “a good Anthropocene” temporally defers the excesses of Holocene collapse by inhabiting the position of a neutral observer whose expanding agency is capable of sustaining a manageable system.

The 2015 Paris climate accord under the United Nations Framework Convention on



Climate Change is perhaps the ultimate expression of ecomodern resistance to the collapse of the nature-culture divide, indicating its pervasiveness in contemporary climate politics. The accord presents a framework for global consensus that, facing its own potential downfall, reiterates the vision of a gilded modernity ‘sustaining’ environmental control. The accord relegates the *change* in climate change to a smooth timespace—from troubled present to safe future—in terms of delimited, incremental reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. All the way to 2050, the accord guarantees the absence of excess by achieving pre-determined goals. These net-zero trajectories provide a false sense of certainty based on questionable socio-ecological modelling practices (Stern et al. 2022) to achieve a temperature limit that far exceeds the possibility of a safe future for many (IPCC 2018). This tenuously constrained decadal phase space enables optimisation, promising continued control while necessitating ongoing separation from the environment. This includes the “unwarranted simplification or omission” of the costs of a >1.5C world in favour of a narrow focus on the monetisable costs of transition (Köberle et al. 2021), a transition guaranteed by yet-to-be-realized technological capacities (Izikowitz 2021). Generic ‘carbon capture and storage’ devices promise to literally suck up physical and existential disruption, sustaining the nature-culture divide by sheer inspiration. Remarkably, these proposed techno-fixes historically maintain a self-referential relation to goal-setting. McLaren and Markusson show how, since the Rio accords of 1992, “technological promises [are] elicited by climate politics and policy” (2020). These promises are “mediated through developing practices of modelling that shape targets and other policies, and the imagined technologies needed to meet them,” in “an ongoing cycle that repeatedly avoids transformative social and economic change” (2020, 1-2). The Paris climate accords, as the latest iteration of this cycle, illustrate the prevalence of ecomodernism in the new climatic regime and the efficacy of reiterating modern claims of mastery over an environment that is recognized only insofar as it ‘appears’ within the former’s scope of control.

Decadal goal setting, driving geopolitical cycles of ‘pledge & forget’, exemplify the promise of modernity: a world free of excess is always one step away. This logic of deferral is tended on the separation of nature and culture, which allows ecomodernism to restrict planetary futures to a *sustaining of the present*. This sustainability is guaranteed by technological innovation, which paradoxically materializes only as part of the future it is said to enable. This somewhat strange proposal, in which the future enables the present, implicitly assumes the ongoing primacy of the agencies making the proposal. In this way, ecomodernism reaffirms a particular self-referential sense of time, where “it makes little difference that the clock hands rotate in circles, for they are thought of and acted on as if they were wheels moving down a single road called progress” (Wildcat quoted in Barad 2018, 60). On the road of progress, its agents become the vector of time, asserting ongoing techno-scientific dominion over an increasingly chaotic environment. Karen Barad recalls that this mechanistic timespace is recursive, installing a new present-future duality at each interval in what

Walter Benjamin poignantly calls “homogenous empty time.” Whether calibrated to a projected future, an individual event, or a periodically recurring phenomenon, time is attuned to a succession of discrete moments, where a moment is understood to be the thinnest slice of time and where each successive moment replaces the one

before it. This is the time of capitalism, colonialism, and militarism. (Brad 2018, 60)

This deterministic sense of time, installed by an unobserved observer, renders the future as a linear succession of discreet and knowable totalities, each overwriting its precursor. As inheritor of this tradition, ecomodernism is able to promise (and forget) the containment of excess time and time again.

Maintaining the modern timespace of control, even reiterated as a “good Anthropocene,” projects a particular, totalising timespace on everybody’s futures. This “belies plurality and denigrates or makes invisible non-human understandings and experiences,” as Bawaka Country (2020, 298) attest to:

Indigenous scholars and people working with Indigenous cosmologies have long emphasized the plurality and ontological situatedness of concepts like time and place as well as the importance of weather, beings and becomings such as winds, snow, and seasons, in shaping time, place, self and culture—and vice versa. (2020, 298)

Historically, the incommensurability of progressive time with other cosmologies has been dealt with by relegating those other cosmologies to modernity’s past; thus a “silent ordering of people” (Wekker 2016, 63) was imposed over centuries of colonialism (Castro-Gómez 2021, 22-23). Today, this silent ordering is reproduced by ecomodernism. Closely aligned with economic orthodoxy and managerial techniques of governance, it grounds “narrow techno-economic mindsets and ideologies of control” (Stoddard et al. 2022, 1) that are buttressed by extensive corporate lobbying (Franta 2021) and endorse ever-expanding “sacrifice zones” (Andreucci & Zografos 2022). Climatic techno-optimism thereby continues “the universalization and Eurocentrism in how climate is presented and understood, filtered through colonial science and gaze, differential valuation of human and non-human life and systems across Eurocentric and Other spaces” (Sultana 2022, 8). The discreet charm of ecomodernism lies in the obscuring of its participation in an inhuman timespace of colonial violence. This obscuring is achieved by inhabiting the position of a vanishing observer, the phantom of Western anthropology. This inhabiting allows ecomodern affordances to be widely enjoyed as part of the political and cultural liberalism of the Minority World without the cost of acknowledging its corollary of violence and exclusion. These self-enclosed agencies of time without excess are rudely disrupted by Holocene collapse, prompting ecomodernists to double down on their defence of futuristic techno-agencies, deferring politics to ever more Elysian futures in an effort to sustain the affordances of a particular humanity.

### **A Shared Modernity: Ecofascism**

Compared to ecomodernism, ecofascism articulates far more visceral responses to environmental disruption. An encounter of far-right and climate denial positions, ecofascism is here approached as an emergent response to Holocene collapse around themes of nativism, xenophobia, and eco-anxiety. Ecofascism does not rally around policy manifestos, nor is it ratified by global climate accords. Its fledgling coherence is not rational but affective, generated in feedbacks often characterized as polarisation (Roberts 2021) and stimulated

by demagogues increasingly taking hold of political and media ecologies (Citton [2014] 2017, 53). As Harriët Bergman outlines “eco-fascism is an understudied subject within both fascism studies and environmental studies” (Bergman 2022, 3), arguing that “just as material disenfranchisement can politicize someone, so can environmental degradation and extreme weather events” (2022, 3).

According to Georges Bataille, fascism can be understood as affective relations between “homogenising” impulses that prioritize utilitarian societal orderings, and the radical “heterogeneity” of a sovereign, specifically “royal,” power (Bataille 1979, 75-76). The question is how ecofascism partakes in the timespace of modernity—what “royal power” is acknowledged in the face of Holocene collapse according to particular, often vitriolic refrains. Clearly, its commitment is not to the glittering techno-agencies of ecomodernity. Such elite politics are either inaccessible or suspect to those (fearful of being) excluded from the material and conceptual affordances of globally managed progress. Theirs is a politics closer to the abyss, inhabiting the homogeneous, selfsame time of modernity not through a commanding agency hopefully grasping technology, but through a racial agency bitterly staking its territory.

Recent commentaries on the emergence of ecofascism refer to the historical linkages of ecological movements with German nationalist and Nazi movements. As Biehl and Staudenmaier note, mystical commitments to the natural world have historically provided an affirmative, nativist essence with which to oppose the futures promised by modernity:

‘Ecology’ and a mystical reverence for the natural world are hardly new to German nationalism... The völkisch movement of the 1920s regarded modern materialism, urbanism, rationalism, and science as artificial and evil, alien to this ‘essence’ (1996, 21).

Such essentialized enmity—opposing the alien in the name of the ‘natural’—forms an anti-modernity comfortably within the modern paradox of dualistic impasses. This nativist romanticism is again in play today, with scholars identifying tendencies of naturalized enclosure among contemporary far-right communities and politicians. As Roberts and Moore describe, this “far right ecologism” entertains “all manner of highly variegated attempts to produce or reproduce racial hierarchies in and through natural systems” (2022, 13). Intersections between nativist and environmental motives are also identified by Andreas Malm and the Zetkin collective, who approach the linkages of far-right and climate denial positions in terms of agencies of Whiteness: “the anti-climate politics of the far right... has a power to speak *in the name of* white people that must be explained” (Malm 2021, 322).

Whiteness, according to W.E.B. Du Bois, is defined by its “ownership of the Earth for ever and ever” ([1920] 2016, 18). During a protest of German far-right party AfD against the decline of their mining communities, supporters succinctly expressed the relation of existential and physical territories, holding placards declaring: “We will dig coal for another thousand years.”<sup>1</sup> Affirming physical territory as a self-referential basis for worlding promises to guarantee White agency “for ever and ever.” In this sense, ecofascism draws on the deep colonial legacies of what Kathryn Yusoff calls “geosocial formations” (Yusoff 2018, 25) in order to assert the legitimacy of White agency in the face of environmental excess. Yusoff insists on

the importance of situating agencies of Whiteness in the homogeneity of modern timespace: “the future perfect tense of White Geology forces a consideration of where violence is located in geologic practices and its modes of recognition (as geologic ‘event’ and subjective marks)” (Yusoff 2018, 26). White Geology, as a foundational modern geosocial formation, shows how “the past is never finished” (Barad 2007, ix), but mixed into the soil and subjectivity of the present.

Colonial modernity positions Whiteness “as a naming of property and properties,” a confluence of subjective and physical landscapes where “certain extractive modes are configured and deployed to enact dispossession across territorial and subjective registers” (Yusoff 2018, 7). Such dispossession is normally deployed without reference to its naming agencies: “whiteness does not, in ordinary times, speak its name; rather it appears—to whites, that is—as normality itself” (Malm 2021, 61, see also Wekker 2016). Moreover, these agencies “work best when the beneficiaries do not need to give it a thought, but can cash in on it while going about their daily businesses” (Malm 2021, 61). Heralding “the first white president,” Ta-Nehesi Coates highlights the fragility of this arrangement, observing that “Trump’s predecessors made their way to high office through the passive power of whiteness—that bloody heirloom which cannot ensure mastery of all events but can conjure a tailwind for most of them” (2017). Forged in the hope and despair of centuries of colonial expansion and violence, the presence of this bloody heirloom *reverses* the logic of identity politics. Calling attention to the active maintaining of unmarked categories, Coates’ analysis sheds light on the widespread territorial and subjective commitments to White timespace among societies of the global North.

The emotional grit of ecofascist resistance, its overt display of the bloody heirloom of Whiteness, is self-defeating in the sense that it foregoes the benign legitimacy of the vanishing observer. Contrary to its ecomodern counterpart, ecofascist resistance to climate disruption confronts its situatedness qua geosocial formation. This flaunting of the “bloody heirloom” in defence of the existential territory of White spacetime is significant. As a response to the disruption of the coordinates of modern subjectivity, it calls to mind what Reza Negarestani describes, following Stuart Hall’s decentering of the Cartesian subject (1995, 285-290), as a “great chain of humiliations” (Negarestani 2011, 26). This chain reads as a history of repressed epistemological trauma of the West, including

the orbital subversion of the geocentric earth, the Darwinian erosion of Aristotelian essentialism, the Freudian deprivatization of man’s inner sanctuaries, and the expropriation of discrete worlds or fields of knowledge on behalf of an open synthetic continuum under the auspices of neuroscience, synthetic mathematics and unified astrobiology. (2011, 26)

I would propose to add the destabilising of White timespace by Holocene collapse to this chain. The existential and traumatic rupture of climate and ecological disruption, as a “geologic ‘event’ and subjective marks” (Yusoff 2018, 26), deeply impacts epistemic and material affordances of Whiteness. In the face of this disruption, ecofascism sheds its epistemic innocence (Wekker 2016) and asserts its “royal power” (Bataille 1979, 75-76) to stake a racialized, affective claim to the “ownership of the earth” (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 18). This ecofascist desertion of the zero-point platform foregrounds a tipping point in the

identity politics of White timespace—a point that ecomodernism holds at bay by deferring this traumatic encounter to technofixed futures. Facing it, ecofascist resistance seems to pass a traumatic threshold, to fully embrace self-enclosure as the generative condition of modernity, and with it, the violent denial of alterity usually implicit as its limit-experience.

Both ecomodernism and ecofascism resist traumatic decentering by Holocene collapse, yet their epistemic tactics (deferral of politics, denial of alterity) differ according to their respective leveraging of the in/visibility of the zero-point. Acknowledging the epistemic affordances of White timespace, ecofascism articulates commitments only implicitly defended by ecomodernism. This acknowledgement opens a pathway to circumvent the antagonistic feedback of modernist resistance *to* disruption—by approaching it as a defence *of* affordances, as an affirmative position in an ecology of practices. Amidst the manifold trauma of shifting environmental relations, ecofascism shows the political challenge of situating existential commitments to modern timespace away from the centre *without* triggering tipping points of self-enclosure.

Whether obscured or visible, through deferral or denial, the phantom of Western anthropology upholds an *a priori* environmental separation, thereby resisting attempts at becoming situated *as part of* a wider environment. Negating or opposing this phantom of closure triggers modern paradoxes. The way around this resistance is to render the question of self-enclosure environmental. Broadening the scope of self-enclosure to other environmental engagements as a dialogic tactic, the zero-point affordances of White timespace are not replaced in the sense of being ‘succeeded’ *tout court* by a new strategy, but are juxtaposed on a tactical (tactful) basis with other affective engagements *as part of* an ecology of practices. This reiterates what was indicated by the performative *a priori* at the outset of this article: an ecology of practices is always simultaneously tactical and analytical, raising an ongoing question of commensurability of self and environment, as a form of mutual adaptation in a rapidly changing world. “Experimenting with the questions which practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions” (Stengers 2005, 184), potentially entails ‘changing the subject,’ and it is by shifting attention from the center to its environment that those questions can emerge.

### **Conclusion: Politics of Life**

Under the pressure of collapsing Holocene climate and ecological systems, a new climatic regime is emerging. In this “Anthropocene boundary event” (Haraway 2016, 100), the environment “is no longer the milieu or background of human action... because it *participates* in that action” (Latour 2018, 40-42). The now-active environment engages mental and epistemic landscapes in new political contestations, among which modernist resistance is of particular concern due to its incommensurability with climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Resisting environmental interference, ecomodernism and ecofascism emerge to defend the affordances of a racially marked, self-enclosed timespace. Modernist resistance operates a double feedback, reiterating antagonistic politics of modernity against the material and epistemological interference of Holocene collapse, as well as against challenges to their position.

As Guattari points out, “a struggle against the modern forms of totalitarianism can be organized only if we are prepared to recognize the continuity of this machine” (Guattari [1973])

2007, 162). Analysing modernist resistance as a defence mechanism, the roots of ecomodern and ecofascist zero-point tactics become apparent in the cultural archive of the global North (Wekker 2016). The “cutting together-apart” (Barad 2014) of these positions as modernist resistance clarifies what Malcolm Ferdinand calls “the double fracture of modernity,” which “separates the colonial history of the world from its environmental history” ([2019] 2022, 6). The intersection of these fractures in modernist resistance ties together a far-reaching ecology of deferral and denial that legitimizes the self-enclosure of White timespace and affords its inhabitants a ‘royal’ agency to control the “valorisation” (2022, 6) of the world.

The challenge for political ecology is to engage with modernist resistance *without* becoming party to its antagonistic politics, which are tended on dualistic impasses (Guattari [1992] 1995, 103) involving recourse to the phantom of Western anthropology. Specifically, the paradox we confront is engaging the inhabitants of modernity in a “game with three players, where the world makes the first moves, more forcefully than we do” (Serres 2013, 45), while this worldly excess is exactly what is deferred and denied by their zero-point commitments. Traversing the complementary relation of resistance and defence, existential territories (Guattari 1992, 28) illuminate the self-constitutional quality of commitments to environments “of exponentially greater complexity than they themselves possess” (Wolfe 2018, 218). “This is indeed a question of ‘habitat’,” Isabelle Stengers surmises, where practices are understood as environmental commitments that should be approached as they “diverge, that is, feeling [their] borders” (Stengers 2005, 184). An ecology of practices emerges, irreversibly, from this dialogic tactic. As ecofascism shows, the risk of this approach is its application *tout court*, whereby it forces a traumatic decentering that potentially triggers a tipping point of modern self-enclosure. Overcoming this paradox involves tact, acknowledging the need for self-enclosure while simultaneously expanding its range of affective engagements. Thus, an ecology of practices indicates a politics in which human agencies are no longer isolated as self-referential objectivities in an unyielding timespace. Rather, individualized enclosures are situated as emancipatory horizons *within* a more expansive topology of cohabitation. Here, an ecology of modernist resistance opens out into a politics of life.

The proposal elaborated in this article is therefore to engage in a politics of life. Amidst high-stakes climate games (Kemp et al. 2022, Bhowmik et al. 2022), this entails following an ecology of practices, to ‘ecologize’ (Julien 2021) the politics of modernity in the sense that its dualistic impasses are to be tactically enveloped by questions of mutual survival, and perhaps, flourishing. It is a variation on Benjamin Bratton’s proposal for “a positive biopolitics” (2021, 250), specified perhaps, with Amitav Ghosh, as a *micro-politics* of vitality (2021, 232) to emphasize the materiality of living, tactical engagements in a *praxic reorganisation* of the political field. Approaching political relations as self-constitutional material, epistemological, and ethical engagements rooted in living practices, these expressions of lifeworlds precede *and* override any universal grid. By the tactful practice of situating such zero-point boundary conditions in a wider environmental field, adversarial politics can be ‘demodernized,’ allowing us to move beyond the dualistic impasses that defined the politics of modernity—between left and right, labor and capital, economy and ecology, apocalypse and salvation, etc.

The scope of the political field as defined by its environmental engagements recalls the ancient Greek notion of *oikos*, or household. As a prototype for modern timespace, the boundary practice of the *oikos* gave rise to economy and ecology, and with them the double

fracture of modernity. Politics of life turn the environmental logic of this boundary practice inside-out, posing an expansive oikological question of habitability *without* the possibility of assigning to any given answer a totalising master-position. As non-violent practices of cohabitation, politics of life constitute a plurality of world-making practices, insofar as they organize their field “cosmopolitically” (Stengers 2010); according to a second-order principle of *cosmological difference*—where difference is not made from things, but *with* things, in an ongoing game of complementarities called cohabitation. Indigenous cultures are notably rich in such practices, or “existential ecologies” (Rose 2011, 2), working with/in complex kinship systems to navigate posthuman agencies (Bawaka Country 2019). Marked as particular encounters in a wider, mutualistic environment, politics of life form “a bridge of justice” (Ferdinand 2022, 235), welcoming different cosmologies and allowing the question “what about the captain?” (Wekker 2016, 168) to recede in time. What remains is to engage in a politics that centres life and mutual wellbeing by feeling out adaptive modes of emancipatory cohabitation, turning walls into relations as we defend shared lifeworlds amidst collapse.

## Notes

1 As relayed by Andreas Malm in a Political Ecology masterclass at the University of Amsterdam in early March 2020.

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