

## Ecological Grief and Mourning in the Anglophone World (Paris, 3-4 Apr 25)

Université Paris Cité, LARCA & Catholic University of Paris

Deadline: Jun 15, 2024

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"Ecological Grief and Mourning in the Literature and the Arts in the Anglophone World (18th – 21st c.)."

### Abstract:

The work of Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004) drew attention to 'the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary concepts of [...] what counts as a grievable life and a grievable death' (xvi). In her wake, in *Mourning Nature* (2017), climate change and mental health researcher Ashlee Cunsolo and landscape architect Karen Landman have outlined the complexities of thinking about the grievability of the non-human, and, more broadly, 'ecological grief,' this kind of 'mourning that resists the artificial separation between bodies that can and cannot be mourned': 'It is about recognizing our shared vulnerabilities to human and non-human bodies, and embracing our complicity in the death of these other bodies - however painful that process may be.' (Cunsolo 3-4)

This conference proposes to explore the concept of ecological grief and the fast-growing body of theoretical work that is developing around it against the background of the ongoing sixth-mass extinction and biodiversity loss. The broader reflection about the Anthropocene has also highlighted new ways of reflecting, imagining and representing human and non-human relationships by contributing to decentring human subjectivities and offering new understandings of the living. With this conference, we also wish to think about the longer history of ecological grief from the eighteenth century onwards, including by exploring some of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution.

Both writers and artists have explored new ways of 'mourn[ing] beyond the human' (Cunsolo and Landman, 2), grieving for past, present and future ecological losses, attempting to visualise and express ecological grief but also to carve out spaces of remembrance. In literature, the poetic subgenre of the pastoral elegy is built on the poet's acceptance of 'death as natural [...], in line with the season pattern of death and rebirth' (Twiddy 2012, 4). However, the loss of nature itself (turning it into a mirror of human loss) redefines the traditional elegy's search for consolation (Sacks 1987, 3). This redefines the very function of the pastoral, leading to the emergence of new subcategories such as the 'anti-pastoral elegy' (Gilbert 1999, 188) or the 'ecological lament,' thus defined by Timothy Morton: 'In elegy, the person departs and the environment echoes our woe. In ecological lament, we fear that we will go on living, while the environment disappears around us. Ultimately, imagine the very air we breathe vanishing – we will literally be unable to have any more elegies,

because we will all be dead. It is strictly impossible for us to mourn this absolute, radical loss.' (Morton, 186) The very possibility of mourning nature is therefore questioned – is nature grievable? How do we grieve for it? What is the role of writers and artists in this individual and collective process? While to some, environmental grief gives way to desolation or an irredeemable sense of melancholy, others view it as a form of resilience or even a spur to action, a source of activism in art.

The conference welcomes contributions from researchers working in the fields of literature, art history, visual studies, music studies, film studies, game studies, cultural studies, philosophy and anthropology. We particularly welcome submissions that revolve around, but are not limited to, the following concepts and themes:

- The (un)grievability of the natural environment and the non-human
- Old and new forms of elegy and 'ecological lament' (Morton, 186): the (anti-)pastoral elegy, the proleptic ecological elegy
- Individual and collective mourning rituals ; creative approaches and responses to grief, mourning, loss and resilience
- Human and non-human mourning; shared grief
- The politics of grief; activism and literature as a form of environmental activism
- Solastalgia and melancholia
- Eco-anxiety and anticipatory grief
- Extinction
- Epidemics and plagues
- Memorials, memento mori and other ways of remembering
- Ghosts and spectrality

Submission guidelines:

We welcome the following types of contribution: academic/critical papers, video essays, artistic contributions, live poetry/spoken word and theatrical performances. Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words in English, together with a short biographical note (no more than 150 words), to [ecologicalgriefconf@gmail.com](mailto:ecologicalgriefconf@gmail.com) by 15 June 2024.

The conference is planned as an on-site event and will take place on the Campus des Carmes of the Institut Catholique de Paris / Catholic University of Paris (74 rue de Vaugirard, 75006 Paris, France) on 3-4 April 2025.

Organising committee:

This conference is organised by members of the 'Environmental Humanities' research teams of the Research Laboratory on English-Speaking Cultures (LARCA – CNRS UMR 8225) of the Université Paris Cité and the Catholic University of Paris (research unit 'Religion, Culture & Society', EA 7403) and of the Institut d'Histoire des Représentations et des Idées dans les Modernités (IHRIM – CNRS UMR 5317) at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France.

- Héloïse Lecomte (ENS de Lyon)
- Estelle Murail (Institut Catholique de Paris / Université Paris Cité)
- Laura Ouillon (Université Paris Cité)

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