

S12

EROS IN THE END TIMES: DESIRE AND AFFECT BEYOND THE HUMAN

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Georges Bataille's notion that eroticism is "assenting to life even in death" takes on new urgency in the Anthropocene, an era marked by ecological catastrophe, capitalist excess, and the "always-looming threat of extinction" (Thacker). This stream invites explorations of the role of 'Eros' during our seemingly endless 'End Times.' Currently, we exist at a libidinal and existential impasse. As ecological crises render the planet unrecognizable, our once familiar world becomes 'unhomely,' estranging us from our environment and ourselves. This disorientation is particularly manifest in our libidinal desires, which vacillate between the extremes of capitalistic overindulgence and existential withdrawal, distancing us from the tangible, sensual pleasures we once embraced.

How, then, does Eros evolve? The dwindling of our libidinal energies (Pettman) inevitably reshapes our interpersonal connections, sexualities, subjectivities, and intimacies. The question arises whether our desires are shifting toward non-human or non-sexual forms. No one is immune to the negative affects permeating our present apocalyptic moment—even though sex today has been fully incorporated into the logic of capitalism: "We are too overworked to be deeply, collectively horny" (Lewis). We thus explore this question from dual perspectives: how might we conceive of an Eros without 'us' (the human) or alternatively an 'us' without Eros? We recognize that these stances are not mutually exclusive. This inquiry sets the stage for a deeper examination of emerging forms of desire, 'sex,' and connection, prompting a reevaluation of intimacy and eroticism in an era defined by collapse.

"Sex, like man, or like the category of the social, may only last for a while," wrote Baudrillard. If psychoanalysis helped to bring sex to the forefront in the second part of the twentieth century, perhaps it also orchestrated its demise. In the past ten

years, we have witnessed what some would call an 'anti-sex panic,' with a notable rise in asexuality as a sexual identity, an exploration of desires beyond traditional human-centric and heterosexual norms, and frequent reports of declining sexual activity among young people globally (Willingham). How should we interpret these shifts? Rather than viewing them with concern, this might be an opportunity to rethink the role of Eros—or its absence—in our current era. If we once had sex without sexuality, are we now moving towards sexuality without sex? (Giddens) Amidst looming human extinction and planetary catastrophe, is it possible to reconceptualize our relationship with Eros to transcend the anthropocentric perspective, thereby 'assenting to life' even as we confront our possible end?

Building upon critical posthumanities and queer negativity, we seek proposals that address affects at the interstices of Eros and discourses surrounding the Anthropocene and existential risk, such as the current debates around 'peak libido' and libidinal exhaustion, to think differently about intimacies and pleasures 'in the end times.' Various fields are invited to contribute, including posthumanism, eco-studies, indigenous studies, queer theory, feminist theory, critical animal and plant studies, psychoanalysis, and philosophy.

Possible approaches include but are not limited to:

- Insights from posthuman, queer, Indigenous, ecocritical, (xeno)feminist (Cuboniks) perspectives
- Alternative theories of desire: post-Eros and/or post-sexuality (Markiewicz), including critical and speculative posthumanities, various 'posts' (postmodernism, poststructuralism etc.)
- Life, matter, and biopolitics: how biopolitics, new materialism (Bennett), and new animism (Descola) shape our understanding of desire
- Art, nature, and aesthetics: examine how nonhuman elements, sensation, and artifice influence our feelings and attractions (Lingis)
- Digital and artificial desires: desire for nonhumans, such as AI, avatars, and digital objects (Konior), as well as speculative concepts like 'post-planetary' desire or 'xenoeroticism' (Roden)
- Erotic temporalities (Cerankowski)
- Desire for collapse (Servigne), planetary dysphoria (Apter), antinatalism (Edelman), existential risk (Moynihan)
- Negative and ambivalent affects: negativity, resignation, and passivity toward sex, desire, and love (Bersani)
- The absence of Eros: asexuality, autoeroticism, asexual reproduction (Przybylo) and non-sexual pleasures
- Sexuality as a modern construct (Giddens), anti-capitalist critiques of sexuality (McGowan)