ROUTLEDGE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF QUEER DEATH STUDIES

Edited by Nina Lykke, Tara Mehrabi, and Marietta Radomska

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In Times of Anthropocene Necropolitics and the Search for New Ethico-Political Imaginations

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Prologue

Have We Not Yet Learned?

1.
Wars, armed conflicts, a feminist concern.
Gender violence, rape, or gendered dimensions of humanitarian aid.
War and militant masculinities.
The reproductive work of nation-building.
The intersectionality in which violence thrives and vulnerabilities are enacted,
as certain bodies are marked killable for bearing the marks of
gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion.
Yes, war has always been present in feminist discussions,
imagining feminist utopian futures,
or making life liveable for the Other.
But this overlapping connection between feminist thinking and war
has also been concerned with the questions of nature,
the feminised conceptualisation of nature itself,
understanding the intersecting systems of exploitation,
thinking the simultaneous dismantling of
capitalist colonialism, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy,
as the only way to a feminist revolution.

2.
Bombs, guns, fires burning.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
War machineries of the colonial capitalist heteropatriarchy reinventing themselves,
over and once again.
Mourning the loss of lives, human and nonhuman,
this is not a poem but an obituary to the victims.

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3.
Yemen, Nigeria, Syria, Somalia,
Afghanistan, Lebanon, Ethiopia,
Congo, Haiti, Pakistan, Colombia,
Myanmar, Ukraine, Gaza,
the list goes on.
Torn by armed conflicts, call it civil war, terrorist insurgencies,
drug war, war on terror, securing borders, or national security.

4.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
The 50,000 tons of chemical weapons,
legacies of WWII, dumped deep in the Baltic Sea,
as if abandoning material evidence washes away the losses
'but we are here' say the chemicals buried,
refusing to be forgotten.
Here to haunt us.
These are great sources of ecosystem contamination.
Northern prawn, Norway lobster, and hagfish,
witness to the haunting of chemical warfare.

5.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
11 m tons of herbicide Agent Orange,
sprayed on Central and Southern Vietnam by US forces
in pursuit of imperial ambitions.
Environmental, genetic, and biological devastation,
generations after, living it still, with sheer endurance.

6.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
1980s Iran, frequent bombings, mustard gas and other chemical agents,
toxic effects that maim not only bodies,
but lands in the western and southern regions,
diseased soil microorganisms, air pollution, and populations.
The 1991 Gulf War, as the Iraqi military sets fire to 600 oil wells, retreating from Kuwait,
scorching fire and oil spills unleashed on the marine environment and the terrestrial ecosystem,
painting the Saudi Arabian shorelines, lagoons, wetlands, gravel, and sand black.
Crabs dying, seabirds clawing at their oil-soaked feathers
20,000 tons of soot emissions every day!

7.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
Late Libyan civil war and the collapsing populations
of cheetahs, gazelles, and other species.
All connected to the spread of guns for the purpose of war in the region.
Battles in Mali and Sudan,
multiplying the number of elephant killings.

8.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
Russian strikes on Ukraine, Israel's on Gaza
refineries, chemical plants, energy facilities, industrial areas, pipelines,
gone in a second,
polluting air, water, and soil not only with toxic substances,
but also with abandoned military vehicles,
equipment, shell fragments, building debris,
spoiled matter in the shape of uncollected household waste.
Possibilities of viral infection.,,
Some promising potential transboundary disasters,
beyond the carefully guarded (European) borders.

9.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
The long-lasting effects of such environmental disasters.
Yemen, Iraq, Iran, and many war-ridden others.
Not only bearing witness to the lasting effects of such destruction,
but the possibility of new conflicts inspired by the pressing climate catastrophes,
farmers abandoning the deadlands
they lost to drought or chemical infections.
Herders letting go of their animal kin,
young men joining militia in pursuit of liveable conditions,
young girls walking miles in search of water,
people fighting over the few resources,
left by the dying lands and waters.
Such a vicious cycle.

10.
Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?
Can political missions, policies, and treaties stop nature's destruction?

When those sitting at the table making decisions
are complicit in sustaining the intersecting systems of exploitation?
When peace is still
not a good enough argument to stop the mass production
of warfare sold for economic accumulation?

Bombs, guns, fires burning, buildings collapsing, bodies bleeding.
'Green' global conventions.
Have we not yet learned?

Tara Mehrabi (October 2023)

Queer Death Studies Network: A Background to a Journey

The poem 'Have We Not Yet Learned' sets the tone for this *Handbook* and for the networking activities from which it has emerged. It confronts the proliferating death-worlds that so sadly characterise our times, and articulates a passionately concerned, ethico-political critique, an urgently felt desire for change, and the deeply affected search for ways to work towards social and environmental justice-to-come. The *Handbook* grew out of a decade of tentacular activities within the framework of the *International Network of Queer Death Studies*.[2] This is a network that has become a meeting space for researchers, students, artists, artivists, activists, and practitioners from all over the world. People who are deeply concerned about proliferating death-worlds. People who also share a commitment to critical studies of these death-worlds, as well as to an affirmative search for exits in the shape of alternative worlding practices and new political imaginations. Across many differences in terms of priorities and situatedness, network participants and contributors to this *Handbook* share the urge to listen to and address the stories of violence, harm, and destruction of both human and more-than-human communities and spaces, and agree that refusal to listen translates into complicity.

The network has been organically shaping up and shapeshifting in a postdisciplinary fashion since its launch in 2016 during a panel at the National Swedish Gender Research Conference, held that year at Linköping University. The panel was organised by the three co-editors of this *Handbook* together with Finnish queer studies scholar Varpu Alasuutari, Danish gender studies and creative writing scholar Line Henriksen, and Swedish sociologist and death studies scholar Annika Jonsson. The panel attracted a lot of attention at the conference, and our proposal to set up a network was warmly welcomed by the more than 50 participants from a number of different disciplines who attended the panel presentation. Since then, the network has grown and includes now (2024) about 1300 members in our Facebook group.

Our initial aim was to establish the network as a platform for researchers, students, artists, artivists, activists, and practitioners interested in postdisciplinary collaborations around critical studies and debates about the meanings, materialities, ethics, aesthetics, and politics of death, dying, mourning, and afterlife from queer perspectives. To ensure that the network would appear open and inclusive, we started from a broad definition of 'queer'/'queering', understood as 'strange'/'strange-making', rather than defined in any identity-political sense. However, we also wanted to defamiliarise and undo conventional modes of engaging with questions of death, dying, mourning, and afterlife, insofar as they are often governed by normative notions of the subject and by dualist understandings of life and death as being opposed to each other. That is to say, understandings that characterise eschatological patriarchal religions such as Christianity, and that are also linked to an inherent mind/body split and gender binary ideologies. From this kind of queer perspective, the network was intended to critically, yet affirmatively, revisit and expand the well-established academic field of Death Studies from queer perspectives.

Given the warm reception and enthusiasm with which our conference panel was met, we followed it up with a Queer Death Studies networking event in March 2017, which brought over 30 scholars from different parts of the world to Linköping University. A smaller networking event was held at Karlstad University in November of the same year, and a third one, once again with a bigger audience, was organised in 2018 at Linköping University. In 2019, we applied for and received funding from a prestigious Swedish research foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) to organise the first international Queer Death Studies Network Conference: 'Death Matters, Queer(ing) Mourning, Attuning to Transitionings' at Karlstad University, with about 120 participants from many countries.

We recall the history here to illustrate that this *Handbook* is the outcome of years of networking and community-building. Every event attracted more researchers, students, artists, artivists, activists, and practitioners to the network and gave rise to more new, highly passionate, and scholarly conversations, providing still new and innovative perspectives on the question what it means to queer death, dying, mourning, and afterlife, and their study.

This evolving networking process that preceded the curating of the *Handbook* is captured in writing in two previous article collections that we have co-edited. The first of these is a co-edited special double issue of the feminist journal *Women, Gender & Research* (KKF), entitled *Queer Death Studies: Coming to Terms with Death, Dying and Mourning Differently. An Introduction* (Radomska, Mehrabi, and Lykke 2019), and published after an open call for papers that attracted far more qualified proposals from many parts of the world than we had space for; it was launched at our networking conference in 2019. The issue contained seven articles, an essay, and three book reviews, framed by an editorial introduction, articulating our first shared comprehensive outline of the field's contours. Soon after, in 2020, we co-edited a second special issue, *Queer Death Studies: Death, Dying and Mourning from a Queerfeminist Perspective*, for the journal *Australian Feminist Studies* (AFS) (Radomska, Mehrabi, and Lykke 2020). This collection included six contributions by network participants, including ourselves, and a longer editorial introductory article in which we further reflected upon the theorising of the emerging field.

The publication of these special issues provided us with an opportunity to articulate the historical, geopolitical, and socio-cultural conditions, coordinates, and situations to which Queer Death Studies are responding. What was already clear at the time, and has become even more visible since then, is that the most basic rights and liberties should never be taken for granted. Some speak of 'democratic regression', referring to the rise of authoritarian populisms in advanced democracies (Schäfer and Zürn 2024). However, this addresses only part of the picture. Meanwhile, death, in its totalising and structurally reinforced dimensions, has crept further in with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine unfolding since 2022, the war between Israel and Hamas developing since 2023, military aggressions in the Middle East and Africa, intensifying climate change, 'natural' disasters; the list goes on, while always remaining incomplete. We need tools to navigate this complex landscape, and in this introductory chapter, we articulate those that have been most important for our curating of the *Handbook*. However, before engaging with this task, we want to briefly introduce the wider context of contemporary death studies.

Contemporary Death Studies – the Wider Context

As Queer Death Studies has unfolded through networking and our earlier publications, it should be clear that the area is to be seen as an open-ended, tentacular platform, rather than as a discipline-like area with clear boundaries. Still, as we describe the theories, methodologies, and ethico-political entry points that have guided us in the curating of this *Handbook*, it will become clear that Queer Death Studies is also characterised by specificities that mark out the area within the wider landscape of contemporary Death Studies. Death Studies is to be found both within specific academic disciplines and university departments, and in broad, interdisciplinary, and international fora. To contextualise the

characterisation of Queer Death Studies that we aim to provide in this introductory chapter, and make the point that the area exists within a wider context, below we briefly describe a couple of important death studies fora, which, like the Queer Death Studies Network, are profiled through broad interdisciplinary and international platforms.

Let us start with Death Studies, which was established as an interdisciplinary research area in the 1970s. Broadly understood as a field, Death Studies is served by three academic journals: *Death Studies*,[3] *Omega*,[4] and *Mortality*,[5] which have somewhat differing profiles, as well as by the international organisation ASDS (the Association for the Study of Death and Society).[6] As the field is represented through these fora, it stands out as a multifaceted area that, during the five decades since its emergence, has drawn attention to issues surrounding human death, dying, mourning, and afterlife as complex phenomena that require broad interdisciplinary approaches. The kind of Death Studies that profiles these fora addresses a wide range of topics, related to death, dying, mourning and afterlife, such as palliative care, suicide, bereavement, memorialisation, assisted dying, the role of professional caregivers (nurses, care-home attendants, hospice workers), moral and ethical dilemmas, and legislation. Researchers from many different disciplines, predominantly in the humanities and social sciences (anthropology, sociology, history, law, education, psychology, literature, etc.), but also in medicine and nursing, have contributed to the field. Compared to Queer Death Studies, it is evident that the focus is primarily upon *human* death, and the primary links are to disciplines (sociology, law, history, etc.) rather than postdisciplines, where Queer Death Studies finds its primary home (in feminist, queer, decolonial, and posthumanist studies, etc.). However, the boundaries between the areas are porous, and mutually enriching conversations rather than border policing are considered important. It is also to be noted that a new edited volume on Death Studies is underway (Borgsström and Visser 2025) that, according to book's website[7] will be 'the first of its kind to examine key topics in death, dying, and bereavement through a critical lens' – a critical lens which the book shares with this *Handbook*.

Secondly, as a sibling, we also want to foreground, is the Collective for Radical Death Studies,[8] founded in 2018 with the aim of gathering death-care professionals, death practitioners, students, scholars, and activists who work towards the establishment of a better understanding of the deathways of people of colour and marginalised groups. The focus of the Collective is explicitly defined as decolonial. The aim is to critically interrogate Death Studies, decentre whiteness, and call for a radicalisation and diversification of approaches to death and mourning practices, with a point of departure in the perspectives and needs of people of colour and marginalised groups. The Queer Death Studies Network shares a critical decolonising and anti-racist ethico-political foundation for our work with the Collective for Radical Death Studies. We also share an approach that involves the recognition of activist commitments as a dimension of critical scholarship. In contrast to more conventional scholarly approaches, which define science/academic scholarship and politics as separate spheres and their mixing as anathema, we build upon an epistemology of situated knowledges and ethico-politically accountable research (Haraway 1991), and feel strongly aligned with the decolonial and anti-racist commitments of the Collective for Radical Death Studies. However, a difference between the Collective and the ways in which we have constructed the Queer Death Studies platform is our focus on both human and more-than-human deaths, and our intersectional entangling of queering and decolonising commitments with a critical posthumanising and human de-exceptionalising approach.

Queering, Posthumanising, and Decolonising as Navigational Tools

As we have argued throughout our previous writings on Queer Death Studies, a toolset that we have found useful in our own efforts to navigate these complexities, and which has also been met with a

positive response when we have structured calls and invitations to networking activities, including this *Handbook*, is characterised by three crucial aspects. Firstly, navigating the complex landscape of today, we are concerned about necropolitics and necropowers: the creation of death-worlds, the letting certain populations die, through the instrumentalisation of 'human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations' characteristic of modernity (Mbembe 2003: 14). Secondly, such a navigation requires focusing on the planetary-scale mechanisms of annihilation also of the more-than-human. Thirdly, navigating the present also involves a critique of normative and exclusionary notions that understand the human subject in terms of a series of dichotomies that are characteristic of modernity (human/nonhuman; cis- or heteronormative/queered other; 'civilised'/'savage'; etc.), and are prevalent in more conventional approaches to research on death, dying, mourning, and afterlife.

These aspects are fleshed out through three critical-theoretical and simultaneously methodological moves: queering, posthumanising, and decolonising, understood against the background of their intersections with feminist-inspired epistemologies of situated and embodied knowledge. Importantly, these moves are never isolated or sealed off from one another; on the contrary, they are intersectional, both entangled and entangling. Moreover, they need to be considered as processual, which is why we stress their verb forms.

In alignment with common queertheoretical positions, the queering move is understood in a twofold sense. On the one hand, it refers to open-ended processes involving the deconstruction, displacement, and undoing of normativities, constraining conventions, and binaries in their various forms and multiple dimensions; we understand this aspect of the move as, 'objectless' and 'subjectless' queer (Chen 2012; Eng and Puar 2020). On the other hand 'queering' is used in alignment with trans, queer, and femme theorists who specifically target the displacing and abolition of regulations deriving from heteropatriarchal, cisnormative, and heteronormative power structures, and from binary gender and sexuality systems that are regulated and enforced by strict gender-policing procedures (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Hoskin 2020), and governed by reproductive biopowers and reproductive futurism (Edelman 2004). Consequently, queering death in the context of Queer Death Studies ranges from unpacking and problematising modern Western ontologies of death and the life/death binary, grounded in Western philosophical and theological dualisms, to critical analyses of the ways in which misogyny, trans-, queer-, and femmephobia lead to social and sometimes physical death, and how violence towards non-normative individuals and bodies strives to mark their lives and deaths as 'non-grievable' (Radomska and Lykke 2022).

The posthumanising move involves a systematic critique and dismantling of the planetary-scale machinery of annihilation of the more-than-human world in its ontological, epistemological, and ethico-political magnitude. It encompasses critical analyses of the human/nonhuman divide and power differentials that have enabled the reduction of the nonhuman to mere resources and instruments for human actions (Mehrabi 2016). In consequence, posthumanising death involves problematising the philosophical and cultural meanings of extinction (Rose 2012). It requires focusing on environmental violence and ecocide, environmental grief, and nonhuman death manufactured *en masse* through anthropocentric habits of consumption and extractivist destruction. Furthermore, it entails taking seriously the issues of responsibility, accountability, and care *for* and *in* dying more-than-human worlds, while remaining grounded in radical critiques of human exceptionalism (Haraway 2008). One way to mobilise a posthumanising of death is by way of deterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 2004), where our understanding of death and our approach to it is no longer anchored in the value ascribed to the human subject, but instead moves towards 'the multiplex, intra- and interacting ecologies of the non/living' (Radomska 2020: 131).

The decolonising move refers to the undoing of necropolitical violence related to post/colonial structures and the ways in which they interact with capitalist and post/colonial extractivism. It also

means turning towards pluritopic hermeneutics, i.e. a methodology which, from a de-universalising perspective, 'questions the position and the homogeneity of the understanding subject', while moving towards a relational and 'interactive' knowledge building, that reflects 'the very process of constructing the space that is being known' (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009: 18). Here, too, we stress the verb form and process-orientation that implies a focus on 'decolonising' as a tool to critically dismantle, undo, and actively attempt to displace structures of coloniality, Western-centrism, racism, and normative whiteness. Thus, decolonising death means refusing to accept the universalisms of Christian paternalism or modern rationalism's strictly clinical and mechanical understanding of the dead body. Instead, it implies engaging with situated local knowledges and practices of death-care, mourning rituals, politics of remembrance, and ongoing relationships with the dead, for example through efforts to revitalise Indigenous cosmological ontologies and philosophies of life/death entanglements.

These three moves have given us crucial entry points to systematically analyse, critique, and search for ways to undo, unlearn, and resist the entangled structures of global necropolitics which are being further amplified by ongoing environmental, socio-economic, and geopolitical crises, and which also keep deepening intersecting systems of oppression: racism, sexism, speciesism, classism, ableism, queer, trans- and femmephobia (Geerts and Carstens 2024; Lykke 2024, Mehrabi and Straube 2025). In fact, the shifting geopolitical situation of recent years, the renewed imperialism and wars, entangling the erasure of peoples and their livelihoods with the destruction of ecosystems and landscapes together with their nonhuman inhabitants, highlight the necessity of a vital entwinement of queering, posthumanising, and decolonising approaches. It is never 'only' about queering, 'only' about posthumanising, or 'only' about decolonising if we are to truly address planetary environmental disruption, the ongoing polycrisis, violence, colonial and extractive capitalism, renewed imperialisms, and neoliberal modes of governmentality, moulding the contours of non/liveable lives and non/grievable deaths today.

As a shared entry point to the three moves that have governed our curating process, we also want to make ourselves accountable for our feminist engagements. What we mean by 'feminist' here is *not* referring to a disciplined making gender or sex into a 'proper' object (Butler 1997), but rather to a postdisciplinary and post-identitarian commitment to feminist theories, ethics, and onto-epistemologies that unfold in multiple kinds of intersections with queer, decolonial, and critical posthumanist thinking about and trying to enact alternative worlding practices committed to social and environmental justice-to-come. Inspired by the ways in which queer theory framed the need for 'objectless' and 'subjectless' approaches that exceed the address of heteronormativity or queer sexualities as the one and only object of study (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005: 3; Eng and Puar 2020: 17), and more broadly discuss queering as disrupting normativities in all forms (Giffney and Hird 2008: 5), our take on feminism is likewise guided by what can be seen an 'objectless and subjectless' approach (Lykke 2025). A feminism, characterised by a radical, planetary, human and more-than-human, bio- and geo-egalitarian ethics and onto-epistemology, which is engaged in ongoing conversations with queering, decolonising, and posthumanising moves, is also woven into the *Handbook* as an underlying ethos. We consider the insistence on this ethos and entangled and intersecting approaches, as we have described them here, crucial not only on methodological and theoretical levels, but also as situated ethical commitments to alternative, caring and solidaric community- and coalition-buildings in current political climate of powerful right-wing mobilisation against such engagements, arrogantly lumping them together under the pejorative label of 'woke'.

Queer Death Studies: Key Theoretical Frameworks

The idea for a *Handbook of Queer Death Studies* presenting a comprehensive cartography of the field grew out of our research and networking activities, which have enabled further and further

elaborations of our understandings of the 'why', 'what', and 'how' of Queer Death Studies. The process of curating the *Handbook* has been very enriching. The broadly distributed open call for contributions, sent out in 2021, once again greatly expanded our network of contacts to scholars, students, artists, activists, and professionals who brought even more new perspectives. But it has also been significant for the curating process that it has taken place at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the intensified climate and biodiversity crises, etc. have made questions relating to death, dying, mourning, and afterlife even more ethico-politically urgent and important to think through from queering, decolonising, and posthumanising perspectives.

Rather than describing Queer Death Studies as a bounded field in a conventional academic sense, our editorial work during the crafting of the *Handbook* has been governed by an open-ended understanding that sees Queer Death Studies as intersecting with other contemporary critical studies concerned with social and environmental justice-to-come from postdisciplinary perspectives. Moreover, rather than seeing Queer Death Studies as grounded only in academic definitions, we also consider the area to be characterised by the ethical and political concerns of the scholars, students, artists, activists and professionals who have responded to our call for contributions to networking events and activities, including this *Handbook*. Even though different contributors undoubtedly have priorities that diverge, their responses and commitments also reveal shared concerns about the contemporary, global-scale production of death-worlds and mass extinction. It is also characteristic of the contributors that, inspired by feminist, critical posthumanist, new-materialist, eco-critical, decolonial, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, queer, trans, femme-inist, and/or cripqueer theorising, they want to rethink and reimagine death, dying, mourning, and afterlife, using varying entanglements of queering, posthumanising, and decolonising methodologies to explore what it may mean to critically 'rethink' and affirmatively 'reimagine' differently.

These ethico-political concerns resonate with a variety of shared theoretical interests across differences. One of these is to investigate death, grief, and extinction in the contemporary world through the lens of necropolitics and necropowers of coloniality, cis-heteropatriarchy, and racial and extractivist capitalism. These efforts are, as already indicated, indebted to postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe's concepts of necropolitics and necropowers (2003, 2016). Let us, therefore, make ourselves accountable for the approach to Mbembe's conceptual framework that has inspired our curating of the *Handbook*. With the notions, Mbembe conceptualises the ways in which the modern state is not only defined by its biopolitical endeavours to govern life, as described by cultural historian Michel Foucault (2007), but also by its necropowers. These are systematic mechanisms that create '*death-worlds*', understood as 'new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*'. Mbembe exemplifies these death-worlds, among others, by the 'topographies of cruelty' of 'the plantation and the colony' (Mbembe 2016: 92; italics in original).

The ways in which the concepts of necropolitics and necropowers are used throughout this *Handbook* build upon Mbembe's framework. But they are also aligned with efforts to bring 'the queer into the necropolitical' (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014: 3). As queer scholars Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco have argued, giving the analysis of necropolitics a queer twist means taking into account the normalised violence of 'unremarkable' everyday death-worlds, which are governed by racism and gender-policing normativities, but to do so without resorting to an identity-political collapsing of queer with specific identity categories (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014). These kinds of queering of the necropolitical and investigations of death-worlds from queer perspectives, defined in this way, have been important for the curating of the *Handbook*, together with decolonising and posthumanising approaches.

Furthermore, in addition to queering the necropolitical, we have also found it important to posthumanise it, i.e. to elaborate upon the concepts of necropolitics and necropowers in order to make

them useful also for an analysis of the human-instigated shaping of more-than-human death-worlds. Twisting Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco's (2014) formula, we bring the posthuman into the necropolitical. Through these both queering and posthumanising moves, we create a framework for understanding necropolitics and necropowers intersectionally in a broad sense. Our aim is to be able to critically consider the creation of human and more-than-human death-worlds as entangled, rather than as separate issues.

This intersectional approach is also our reason for bringing the concept of the Anthropocene into the conversation. This concept is widely used by critical posthumanist and new-materialist scholars to address the ways in which the whole planet today is being put under deadly pressure by post/colonial, racial, and extractivist capitalism, which is leading to the acceleration of what extinction studies scholar Deborah Bird Rose calls 'double death' at a global scale (2006, 2012). Double death is conceptualised as death that marks the end of generations in a human and more-than-human sense, rather than preparing for new lifecycles. When this *Handbook* connects the concepts of the Anthropocene and necropolitics (Lykke 2019), we are aiming to forge links between Queer Death Studies research and art that focuses on necropolitics and necropowers, seen from post/decolonial, anti-racist, and queer perspectives, and Queer Death Studies research and art that does the same from posthumanist and feminist new-materialist angles. Efforts to bring such contributions into conversation are visible throughout the *Handbook*. Queering, decolonising and posthumanising efforts are not separated into different parts. By contrast, all these moves are in varying ways included in all the *Handbook*'s seven parts.

Intertwined with the efforts to critically address the Anthropocene necropowers of today's globalised world from intersecting – queering, decolonising, and posthumanising – perspectives, we also want to challenge the dichotomies and hierarchical separations that characterise modernity, based on normativities and exclusionary notions of the human. These are notions that cast the death and dying of those who differ from the normative human subject, 'Universal Man' (Haraway 1992; Lykke 2018), in terms of gender, racialisation, sexuality, class, geopolitical situatedness, able-bodiedness, able-mindedness, and species as less or non-grievable (Butler 2004), or views such subjects as outright disposable (Mbembe 2003) or killable (Mehrabi 2016, 2020, and Chapter 5 this volume). The *Handbook* thus addresses the processes of desubjectivation and subordination that are systematically applied as an effect of the ways in which the necropowers of extractive and racial capitalism, coloniality, and cis-heteropatriarchality structurally and discursively relegate large segments of human populations and more-than-human subjects/agencies/vibrancies (both biological (defined as 'life') and geological (defined as 'non-life', Povinelli 2016)) to death-worlds.

However, based on the belief and the hope that a search for alternatives can form the basis for resisting, undoing and transmuting contemporary necropolitics, the curating of the *Handbook* has, moreover, been guided by a dual approach, combining criticality and affirmativity. Critique of the necropolitical forces governing the here-and-now world and reflections upon alter-ontologies, based on an ethics of affirmation (Braidotti 2006a, 2006b), should go hand in hand. Such an ethics requires criticality to be combined with affirmativity, and with embodied, desiring, and affective modes of figuring ontological and ethical alternatives. This means that, when speaking of affirmative alter-ontologies in the context of Queer Death Studies, we are not focusing only on critiques of current necropolitical frameworks, norms, and oppressive structures. We are also aligning ourselves with efforts to critically-affirmatively reontologise the life/death relation and develop speculations about how this relationship can change in an envisioned situation of social and environmental justice-to-come, where death and dying are allowed to unfold vibrantly as integrated parts of intergenerational human and nonhuman existence.

Against this background, our process of curating the *Handbook* has been inspired by immanence philosophical, queer, feminist new-materialist, and Indigenous cosmological ontologies of

life and death (Braidotti 2006a, 2013; Bennett 2010; Anzaldúa 2015; Radomska 2016; Lykke 2022; MacCormack 2025). We see life and death as part of a dynamic material continuum, rather than in opposition to each other (Braidotti 2006a, 2013). Moreover, we suggest that death can be reimagined and rethought as potentially vibrant (Lykke 2022, and Chapters 26 and 63, this volume), i.e. as a vibrant part of the cyclic, intergenerational, shapeshifting processes of more-than-human becoming and decomposing within the framework of bio- and geo-egalitarian ecologies of planetary companionship and co-evolving. Furthermore, we suggest that the life/death, becoming/decomposing continuum can be conceptualised as non/living, beyond a dichotomous division between the two (Radomska 2016, 2020, and Chapter 3, this volume). In alignment with these suggestions, our curating process has among others been guided by a wish to include contributions that approach death in ways that are helpful for transmuting negative into positive affects – for example, in a sense that resonates with the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza ([1677] 1996). However, it should also be noted that the ways in which we understand such affirmative transmutations do not in any way imply legitimisations of the deaths and death-worlds (human or nonhuman) produced by necropolitical conditions and power asymmetries. We emphasise that an affirmative approach to death requires a complete rejection of practices that de-subjectivise bodies, be they human or more-than-human, and render them disposable, killable, and non-grievable.

As part of this outline of what Queer Death Studies means in this *Handbook*, it also deserves mentioning that the understanding of the life/death relation upon which our curating is based contrasts with the linear and dualist framing that is foregrounded in eschatological religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In our approach, death is not conceived as an endpoint along a linear trajectory, but rather as part of a cyclic shapeshifting. This implies a radical rethinking of the concept of 'afterlife'; instead of being imagined and reflected upon as something that comes 'after' life in a chrononormative linear sense, it is instead considered as an integral part of a metamorphosing cyclicity.

As part of these disclaimers, we also find it important to note that thinking differently about death and mourning along the lines of ethico-political concerns and commitments to social and environmental justice-to-come, and an affirmative bio- and geo-egalitarian ethics that have governed our curating process, means that we firmly reject the elitist understandings of death embedded in transhumanist thought (Boström 2005).

In contrast to critical posthumanism, which is part of the intersecting schools of thought that inform the contributions to this *Handbook*, transhumanism is focused on the idea that current social, medical, and environmental problems can be solved by technological (quick)fixes. Death is envisioned as a phenomenon that, in due time, can be abolished through technoscientific enhancement (cryo-preservation, digital mind uploading, the biomedical overcoming of ageing processes, an exodus to Mars if life on Earth collapses, etc.). We firmly reject this kind of thinking. One reason is that, even if implementation were possible, these technological possibilities would probably only become available to a privileged elite, and only for a limited period of time. Already existing global health disparities would be likely to become exacerbated due to the costs of such measures, and the energy consumption that their broad materialisation would require would lead to a global ecological collapse. However, another reason to reject this kind of transhumanist proposition is that death must be seen as a necessary part of intergenerational existence. It is important to recognise that death within all species whose life is based on sexual reproduction is a way to make space for new generations.

Death in the Anthropocene

As part of this making ourselves accountable for the key theoretical frameworks that have guided our curating process, we also want to pay attention to the Anthropocene-concept. We have already argued

for our way of linking it to the concepts of necropolitics and necropowers. However, because heated debates for and against the use of the concept have taken place in recent decades, we want to also situate ourselves in these debates, not only underlining the potentials of the concept and our reason for using it, but also critically addressing its problems and limitations.

Let us first note that the Anthropocene has been discussed as the designation for a new geological age in Earth's history, the Age of Man. That is an age, characterised by such significant markers of human activity that the argument has been put forward that it can be registered as a geohistorical shift towards a situation in which human transformations and terraforming are having decisive, permanent, and all-encompassing geological effects on the planet as a whole. A disciplinary disagreement among geologists on the timeliness of acknowledging a geohistorical shift from the Holocene to the Anthropocene has been ongoing for more than a decade.[9] What is important in the context of this *Handbook* and our linking the Anthropocene-concept to the kind of global-scale necropolitics that we argue characterises the present times is that it has become widely used among critical intellectuals in the humanities and social sciences. Thus, the concept of the Anthropocene has come to play a central role in current global debates on the systematic planetary-scale terraforming processes, with their extremely deadly consequences for both human and nonhuman bodies and environments, that are taking place today. These take the shape of anthropogenic climate change, biodiversity crises, the destruction of high proportions of ecosystems and habitat loss for wild plants and animals, and the global dispersal of substances in waters, earth, and air that are toxic to the majority of Earth's biological critters (humans included) through the intensified chemicalisation of agriculture, industrial production, household practices, waste disposal, war technologies, and military testing which have characterised the period since WWII.

Among researchers who consider the Anthropocene-concept to be useful, there has been much debate about which historical events and dates should be recognised as the originating ones. Are modern colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, or industrialism – or all of them in combination – to be counted as the initiator? Alternative names for the new epoch, such as 'Capitalocene' (Moore 2016) and 'Plantationocene' (Haraway, Tsing and Mitman 2019) have been suggested to address this issue (cf. Lykke 2024; Berger 2025), the former referring to capitalism as the prime agency in the shift, and the latter to colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, as well as monocultures as integral parts of the plantation, understood as a colonial-capitalist mode of production.

The Anthropocene-concept has also been criticised for its way of drawing on the notion of Anthropos (ancient Greek for human being). As emphasised by Japanese philosopher Osamu Nishitani (2006) and Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2015), it should be noted that Western Enlightenment philosophy and its key figures, such as philosopher Wilhelm Hegel (1807), distinguished between Anthropos and Humanitas. Anthropos was developed to encompass all members of humanity. However, in practice, the concept came to focus on the 'others' under the white colonial gaze, the classic objects of the discipline of Anthropology. In contrast, Humanitas referred to so-called 'civilized' humanity, i.e. the white Western subject itself (Nishitani 2006), Universal Man. This means that the generic use of the root 'Anthropo-' in Anthropocene obscures the highly asymmetrical power relations between Anthropos and Humanitas, and the ways in which colonialist, imperialist, and capitalist necropolitics have left irreversibly destructive marks on the planetary body through intersections of racist, classist, sexist, and speciesist oppressions and exploitations. The focus on 'Anthropo-' conceals the fact that the interconnected powers of social structuration that produced the current socio-ecological predicaments are not the outcome of the activities of an abstract human being, but racial, colonialist, and extractivist capitalism and its ideological correlate, Western modernity (Lykke 2019, 2025). In the same vein, this root also conceals the racist processes of dehumanisation that transformed colonial others into enslaved or indentured labourers, while later enrolling them into the capitalist labour system as the cheapest of cheap labour power (Lowe 2015; Yusoff 2018).

A related line of critique has addressed the problem that the Anthropocene-concept's inherent implication of the 'human' as the prime mover forecloses an envisioning of paths to change. This is because the abstracted human subject, Universal Man, comes to stand not only as the problem, but also as the solution (through His capacity of being able to deliver technological quick fixes to solve the predicament). In contrast, the alternative worlding practices of Indigenous peoples and important and necessary alliances with more-than-human actors are kept out of the public eye, together with their potential to catalyse real change (Crist 2013; de la Cadena 2015; Haraway 2016; Tsing et al. 2017; Neimanis 2017; Yusoff 2018; Lykke 2019). These lines of decolonial, feminist, queer, and posthumanist critiques have led to the suggestion that we need naming practices that affirmatively envision alternatives. Foregrounding alliances between Indigenous peoples and more-than-human agencies, de la Cadena (2015), for example, has suggested a focus on the 'Anthropo-not-seen', while feminist theorist Donna Haraway has argued for the notion of the 'Chthulucene' (2016).

Across the different stances taken in these debates, a shared underlying assumption is that the cluster of global-scale and planetwide phenomena, which the concept of the Anthropocene seeks to theorise, represent something that implies a sad break in the shape of a new planetary scale of environmental destruction, alongside human and more-than-human extinction and depletion. Our reason for using the concept in this *Handbook* is that we think it is urgent to pay critical attention to the decisively new dimensions of the planetary predicament, indicated through such a break. It is crucial to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016), as well as to be able to think through strategies of resistance, undoing, and creating human/more-than-human alliances that may launch the planetary body of which we are all an integrated part into alternative, more joyful, healing, and bio- and geo-egalitarian directions.

Our critical use of the Anthropocene-concept and the way in which we link it with necropolitics in this *Handbook* is to be understood, therefore, as a critical gesture that is intended to underscore rather than erase glaring global inequalities and the deadly and oppressive aspects of our current predicament. As far as the abovementioned 'break' and 'newness' are concerned, we, moreover, want to emphasise that we do not think it makes sense to point out *one* origin story for the coming into being of the current Anthropocene necropolitics. We find it more useful to focus on intersections of different kinds of globalised necropowers (colonialism, extractive and racial capitalism, imperialism, cis-heteropatriarchy, etc.). Finally, we should note that we agree with the critics of the Anthropocene-concept who have warned against the ways in which it may foreclose a move from critique to alter-ontologies and affirmation. In our curating of the *Handbook*, we have therefore taken care not only to remain in a critical mode, but also to ascribe weight to the search for alter-ontologies in line with an ethics of affirmation.

From Anthropocentric Defuturing to Non-Anthropocentric Refuturing

We have now outlined our main navigational tools, and key conceptual frameworks. As part of the description of theoretical frameworks, we emphasised our commitment to an ethics of affirmation. To come full circle with this, we will address the question of potential exits from Anthropocene necropolitics. To sustain our reflections on this, we will address the issue of temporalities, drawing inspiration from the work on Anthropocene defuturing, unsettlement, refuturing and new political imaginations by decolonial feminist philosopher Madina Tlostanova and design philosopher Toni Frye (Tlostanova 2020; Frye and Tlostanova 2020). We will also forge links to reflections upon modernity as a dying patient in need of a hospice in order to finally come to terms with the ways in which its time is running out by decolonial scholar and activist Vanessa Machado de Oliviera (2021). What potentialities can a non-anthropocentric temporality, i.e. one that is situated in unsettlement, and engagements with a hospicing approach to reflections upon the end of modernity, offer to

Queer Death Studies? How can we imagine more-than-human-centric articulations of temporalities orienting themselves towards an ethics and politics of 'refuturing', developing from positions still situated in contemporary registers of the inevitable 'defuturing' of the planet (Tlostanova 2020)? How can we begin to approach modernity as a dying patient whose constraining and destructive effects on our bodies, worlds, sense-abilities, imagining, thinking and acting are something that we urgently need to pay attention to and caringly help to die in order to find exits from the current all-encompassing predicament (Machado de Oliviera 2021)?

In their book *A New Political Imagination* (2020), Tlostanova and Frye make the case that global populations in the Anthropocene are characterised by 'direct or indirect exposure to the electronically delivered world-picture', which generates feelings such as 'fear of a world war, a global environmental catastrophe, the initial signs of the ongoing extinction event, economic collapse, or simply the displacement of one's knowledge and job by "intelligent robotic technology" ' (2020: x). According to Tlostanova and Frye, unsettlement is both to be considered as a state of mind of the current world, and as a phenomenon, materialising in huge numbers of displaced populations, 'caused by civil unrest and conflict, the reconfiguration of the world order, the ever-increasing impacts of climate change and rapid technological change' (2020: x). All in all, Tlostanova and Frye argue that unsettlement has become a general human condition in the Anthropocene, no matter which privileged or deprivileged situations people inhabit. We wonder if Tlostanova and Frye's statement, in their context related to human affairs, can perhaps be extended to the nonhuman world that is also, unattended to by humans, most probably becoming more and more stressed in present times, due to unbearable living conditions. Whether living in drastically shrinking 'wildernesses', or in gloomy conditions of captivity, animals and plants are, without doubt, globally, being thrown into extreme situations of unsettlement and stress today.

While unsettlement, thus, has become a shared condition for all of Earth's critters, there is simultaneously a clear 'disconnect' between global conditions of unsettlement and the politics of governments and world leaders, who lack insight into the complexities of the situation (as does everyone else). They are immersed in epistemologies of ignorance (Sullivan and Tuana 2007). Short-term political goals, related to conflicts between different interests and struggles relating to global and national power, profits, and resources, prevent leaders and mainstream publics from at least trying to address the complexities. This disconnect implies that, instead of relating response-ably to widespread feelings of unsettlement, the political rhetoric of the mainstream becomes characterised by what cultural critic Lauren Berlant (2011) called 'cruel optimism'. Berlant defined 'cruel optimism' as being attached to a desired individual goal, or broader political one (for example, maintaining a modern striving towards 'progress' in terms of the increased availability of consumer goods and opportunities for capitalist profit-making), the materialising of which simultaneously becomes an obstacle to the flourishing of those attracted to it. The overall effect of this situation is that the defuturing forces of looming social and environmental collapses and crises simply proceed and intensify. Against this background, Tlostanova and Frye sum up the relationship between politics and defuturing forces in the Anthropocene as follows:

> So, while in this age of the Anthropocene politics is failing to confront the challenges presented, unsettlement being one of them, the defuturing force of this age will not fail to confront politics.
>
> *(Frye and Tlostanova 2020: 10)*

Or in other words, in the end, we – humans and nonhumans alike – may all die as an eco-political consequence of the hunger for profit and the desire for ever-increasing consumerism in the present-day world.

To complement Tlostanova and Frye's diagnosis of the forces of unsettlement and defuturing that characterise the Anthropocene, let us also turn for a moment to cultural studies scholar Caroline Alphin (2020). Together with political scientist François Debrix, she has analysed the so-called necro-temporalities of neoliberalism that have remade and intensified the connections between temporality, life, death, and necroscapes as a consequence of narratives of production and progress (Alphin and Debrix 2019). The concept of 'necro-temporality' refers to a 'precarious state of existing in times whereby individuals are insecure and the responsibility they have for their own insecurity is intensified' (Alphin and Debrix 2019: 131). This insecurity is not only a psychological condition, but also an existential one created by necro-temporality as it brings about certain forms of death and dying caused by stress and (material/institutional/social) insecurity. Yet, Alphin argues, these deaths are dismissed, pathologised, and alienated as the deaths of weak characters who lacked value and failed not only to compete, but to survive. Necro-temporality exposes populations to systematic exploitation and makes them vulnerable to death by 'limiting time in certain spaces, by forcing continual mobility, increasing time in toxic, violent, and surveilled spaces, and by justifying these necro-temporal policies through racism, neoliberal morality, the logic of intensity, and the naturalisation of the free market and competition' (Alphin and Debrix 2019: 131).

We see clear resonance between Tlostanova and Frye's analysis of defuturing and unsettlement, and Alphin's reflections upon necro-temporalities. Therefore, we want to stress that we feel that these conceptual frameworks are also apt for grasping a widespread ambiance, characterising many critical intellectual and artistic milieux today. We thus think that the attention that the Network of Queer Death Studies has attracted, can somehow be accounted for by desires to publicly share feelings and reflections upon defuturing, unsettlement and necro-temporalities. However, we also feel that it has been an important motivation for networking and for contributing to the *Handbook* that contributors want to reflect upon the ethico-political questions of possible exits 'from the Necropolitical Topography of Injustice?' in a world without a future, as Slovenian philosopher Marina Gržinić put it (2022: 115).

This is of course a difficult and complex question with no easy answers. However, as Tlostanova (2020) suggests there is perhaps a point of exit to be found in the ways in which unsettlement is becoming a 'pluriversal human condition' that, although experienced differently based on one's situatedness in terms of privilege and location, reveals a 'changing human ontology' (2020: 18). This, Tlostanova argues, can perhaps be used as a platform for exiting the Anthropocene predicament.

The human subject, whether living under privileged or precarious conditions, can no longer be imagined as a bounded entity, grounded in linear temporality, lands, and borders. As the human species experiences unsettlement and defuturing with unprecedented intensity, an anticipated end to life on Earth without the prospect of a new beginning, or at best a suspended future, it will perhaps become clear that it is necessary to move beyond human exceptionalism. With imploding capitalism and a dying planet shaping human and nonhuman lives, and Earth's very survival, we (planet and all its critters) are bound together. Therefore, Tlostanova argues, it is urgent to mobilise around 'relational collaborative action which cannot be limited to only decolonial agency and subjectivity' (2020: 18). According to Tlostanova's speculations, this intensified predicament will perhaps mean that the question of refuturing will become foregrounded in terms of an urgent need to find a relational way of being in the world with others, humans and nonhumans alike.

Along these lines, Tlostanova argues that we need to articulate other ways of being in the world and link the feeling of safety to matters that do not demand a 'belonging to some space, community, land, group thinking' (2020: x), but instead to embrace unsettlement. As unsettlement becomes 'the key sensibility for nearly everyone, a negative community of sense, of feeling unhomed in your own body', it can open doors to feminist decolonial and posthuman imagination (Tlostanova 2020: 22). In her short story *The Bedana and the Wanderer,* Tlostanova (Chapter 46, this volume) provides a

beautiful image of such an embrace and the more-than-human companionships it enables, in the shape of a wanderer (a vagabond healer and fortune-teller) teaming up with a quail.

While suggesting that unsettlement, disidentification, and even, at times, depersonalisation, may become an 'act of putting the world and the self back together and giving them a promise of refuturing' (2020: 23), Tlostanova also emphasises that refuturing through unlearning, reimagining, and redesigning another world can only become possible by abandoning the current one in favour of the possibility of collective existence rather than an individual(istic) one. Along these lines, Tlostanova calls upon decolonial feminist scholar Maria Lugones' concept of 'deep coalitions' (2003), i.e., 'solidarities that never reduce multiplicity' and commit to a 'humbled human' position (Tlostanova 2020: 24). According to Tlostanova, these are key prerequisites for an unfolding of 'new political imaginations to refuturing', and for learning 'how to make this immense and boundless, scarred and injured world into a communal home again' (2020: 24).

Tlostanova's arguments in favour of searching for paths to refuturing through deep, more-than-human coalitions and community-building, embracing unsettlement, and developing new political imaginations based on radical un- and re-learning resonate with the ideas developed by the collective *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures* (GTDF), a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers, situated predominantly in Latin America (GTDF Collective 2024). An elaborated version of the collective's suggestions is presented by one of its founding members, decolonial scholar Vanessa Machado de Oliviera, in her book *Hospicing Modernity* (2021), to which we therefore also will draw attention. Like Tlostanova, Machado de Oliviera and the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures* collective take it as an entry point that the current proliferation of death-worlds, and the lack of adequate macro-level political attention, are pulling the whole world towards an endpoint. 'Preparing for the end of the world as we know it' (GTDF Collective 2024) is the title of a position paper from 2020, which argues that we need to work ethico-politically from the 'end-of-the-world'-prospect rather than close the eyes to the situation.

To unfold the point, Machado de Oliviera uses the image of the hospice, where terminally ill patients can receive care during the last days of their lives. Reconfiguring the noun hospice into a verb, hospicing, Machado de Oliviera suggests that it is time to take into account the reality that modernity has grown old and cannot live much longer, and that we therefore need to initiate processes of helping it to die peacefully. This, Machado de Oliviera argues, also requires difficult recognitions of the ways in which modernity has left its imprint on us all, humans and nonhumans, since it has become a globally structuring power. Machado de Oliviera's book (2021) is therefore an encouragement to form deep coalitions to begin the much-needed process of undoing and unlearning this imprinting. We hope that the *Handbook*, with its focus on queering, posthumanising, and decolonising death, dying, mourning, and afterlife, can contribute to this process of hospicing.

Mourning, Lamenting, and Undoing Grief

We have made ourselves accountable for the ways in which our takes on death in the contemporary world have guided the curating of the *Handbook*. To end this introductory chapter, we shall offer some reflections upon the themes of mourning and afterlife that are also key to the book. Although grief is something that almost everyone experiences in different ways, during different phases of life, and for a variety of reasons, it is often understood as something exceptional, connected to a rupture, an accident, or a disaster, rather than a part of life (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Bargu 2019; Tlostanova 2020; Radomska 2023). Euromodern, and religious frames of grief, and medical/psychological accounts of 'normal' grieving, have constructed notions and templates of grief that not only govern the ways in which one should mourn the dead (temporalities of grief, practices and rituals, and relations to the dead, to name just a few) but also whose deaths should be mourned.

According to the powerfully agenda-setting American Psychiatric Association's definition of a distinction between 'healthy bereavement' and 'prolonged grief disorder', grieving time that exceeds one year is a pathologised condition (APA 2021). How one should feel and behave while in mourning, and where to mourn, is another issue that is strictly regulated. Strong emotions and responses to bereavement are often feminised or frowned upon as 'uncultured' or 'backward' (e.g. Kotwasińska 2019; Lykke 2022). Continuing and ongoing bonds with the dead are problematised as either superstitious or pathological, even though mourners all over the world, including in the Global North, have provided ample testimonies to the spectral phenomenality of such relations (Jonsson and Aronsson 2015; Jonsson 2019; Lykke Forthcoming). Interesting to consider in the context of reflections on ongoing relations to the dead, is also biophilosopher Margrit Shildrick's in-depth research on heart transplantation and the ways in which phenomenological interview studies have testified to widespread experiences on the part of relatives to heart donors who often feel that their deceased relative somehow 'lives on' through the heart which is now working in a new body, and who therefore develop complex relations to the recipient (2022). However, while these very different kinds of research dig into the issue of continuing bonds and investigate this issue as part of everyday experiences of many people all over the world, APA has been moving in the opposite direction. Since the 2013 edition of APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5, 2013), excessive mourning has been defined as a disorder – a 'prolongued grief disorder'. Or in other words, the cultivation of bonds, at least when it happens through 'prolongued' mourning, is considered unhealthy and seen as something to get over as soon as possible so that people can go back to being 'good' neoliberal citizens: fully functional, rational, and productive (traits associated with masculinity). However, as decolonial, posthuman, and queer artists, activists, and scholars have argued, mourning is unruly, leaky, and unpredictable (Lykke 2022), although the rituals for practising it vary across cultures, and between religious or spiritual traditions.

Queer, posthumanist, and decolonial scholars argue that grief is not an exception brought about by an unexpected disaster but an everyday part of life for the unsettled, the displaced, and those existing at the margins of modern modes of governance, democratic ones included (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014; Tlostanova 2020). For so long, grief has been second nature for the marginalised and the colonised, for whom death is always already 'life's quiet companion' (Lehman 1997); whether taking the shape of grieving for dead loved ones, and/or for a lost (home)land, culture, subjectivity, and identity. However, as mentioned in the previous section, with the defuturing that the world is experiencing due to the havoc brought by advanced global capitalism, the climate catastrophe, etc., this ever-presence of grief, previously associated with colonised, displaced, dispossessed, and marginalised groups, has expanded to become a persistent reality even for the privileged in the Global North (Tlostanova 2020). For example, one of the co-authors of this chapter (Marietta Radomska) has argued that eco-grief is a contemporary phenomenon which captures the experience of grief connected to 'the present or anticipated ecological losses of species, ecosystems, and landscapes, resulting from severe anthropogenic environmental change' (2024: 212; see also Cunsolo and Landman 2017). As Marietta writes, eco-grief is intimately connected to ecocide and violence against nature, which call forward affects such as

> the despair, grief, frustration, and anger of conservationists whose work is being lost or rendered impossible, the locals whose home landscape is being destroyed, and plainly, the onlookers aware that some species and populations may never return to a given site or might be lost forever. One can notice these affects implicitly or explicitly woven in the expressions of researchers working with the wounded landscape.
>
> *(2024: 213)*

However, as Marietta argues, research into eco-grief often focuses on the 'centre' rather than 'places that tend to escape the attention of international scholarship: the wounded landscapes of semi-peripheries' (2024: 213).

In response to the previously mentioned machinery of death, decolonial, environmental, and queer activists, artists, and scholars have long channelled mourning as a feeling and an affective generative tool for resistance while asking for accountability (Myles and Lewis 2019). For example, coming together in public places to passionately mourn the lives lost in communities, which are marked as 'ungrievable' by colonial cis-heteropatriarchy (Butler 2004) – to share feelings of grief and enact politics of remembrance through public performances that resist the persistent dehumanisation of 'ungrievable' populations. That is populations whose deaths are at best represented as statistical numbers without faces or stories, victimised or villainised without agency. Populations who in life or death are consumed and cast out as though they do not matter (Mehrabi and Straube 2024). In other words, through lamenting, remembering, and celebrating the lost lives that are anchored in disenfranchised rites and voices, mourning becomes a political act and an ethical response-ability that not only disrupts or refuses the universalised 'templated rituals' of grief and grieving, but also unlearns and transmutes them.

For instance, discussing ways to decolonise mourning and mourn the Selk'nam community of Karokynka, the archipelago at the southernmost tip of the Americas, Indigenous writer and activist Hema'ny Molina Vargas, along with ecofeminist scholar Camila Marambio and one of the co-authors of this chapter (Nina Lykke), apply an Indigenous-centred, feminist, posthumanist, and decolonial methodology to undo the 'myth of Selk'nam "extinction"' (Vargas, Marambio, and Lykke 2020, and Chapter 55, this volume). This is a myth that is embedded in the fantasy of cultural 'purity', which is part of the official Chilean historical discourses on the colonial past of the country and was provided with scholarly 'support' by 20th-century anthropologists. The authors argue that such myths, sustained by 'powerful, colonial discourses of white melancholia', enacted among others by influential humanist 20th-century anthropologists, 'lock the Selk'nam into a memorial space where they (…) can only be mourned as relics of the past, while denied access to futurity' (Chapter 55, this volume). Undoing the myth of 'extinction', as well as white humanism's colonial melancholia, the authors instead enact decolonising moves in poetic, feminist-inspired writing practices, while arguing for embodied Indigenous-centred rituals of mourning through the land and through revitalisation of Selk'nam culture.

To make this point, we shall also foreground the work of literature and cultural studies scholar Laura Sarnelli, who argues that undoing melancholia can turn loss into an 'emerging desire' and an imaginative agency that can help resist the colonial dehumanisation of racialised bodies.

So while melancholia can be that which is in need of decolonising, it is worth while noticing that it can also be a path to resistance and empowerment for marginalised groups. Analysing novels of Black US writer Toni Morrison, Sarnelli discusses how melancholia can be imagined as an exit from racial identification understood as a painful melancholic act connected to the traumatic experiences of racism (2013: 147). Sarnelli argues that melancholia, considered as something that is 'collective and personal, cultural and psychological', can be connected to desire, because it is a passionate longing for a 'lost loved object' (2013: 148). Mourning for the lost object (for the millions of bodies of slaves dying in the Middle Passage and during slavery, or for their denied identity, history, or humanity), loving and caring practices of remembering that include recognition of the colonial wound, can, Sarnelli claims, become a healthy process by which the wounded body/self/community can achieve recovery. So, unlike the colonial account, which accuses the colonised other of being unable to forget the past or being pathologically attached to the painful past (a pathological dehumanising), Sarnelli suggests that melancholia can be seen as embodying a 'transformative and innovative power' that may turn a wound into a personal and political matter of resistance and give agency to wounded bodies whose lives have been painfully ruined by colonial nation-states. Thinking with Morrison and

more broadly contemporary African American literature and their articulations of militant refusals to let go of the past, Sarnelli argues that staying with a melancholic desire for the lost loved object can be a way of reclaiming one's identity, self, body, history, etc. In other words, melancholia 'excels when imagination prevails and allows grief to be carried out through forms of behaviours that are "anomalous", namely unusual, multifaceted and unstable' (Sarnelli 2013: 147). These are generative and disruptive modes of grief that free 'melancholic critical agency', revealing 'the dehumanising racial (and gender) logic' of oppressive regimes (2013: 154).

In resonance with Sarnelli's approach to melancholia as a potentially generative and transformative process that is embedded in accountability for desubjectivated, and marginalised bodies, and fuelled by passionate desires for lost loved ones, we argue that what is often pathologised as melancholic behaviour can instead be seen paths to exit constrained articulations of loss and grief, regulated by colonial and other hegemonic necropowers. 'Pathological' melancholia, identified through too excessive absorption in the search for continuing bonds, too unruly public lamentations of officially non-grievable lives, human or nonhuman, or too passionate articulations of eco-grief, should thus rather be considered as potential pathways to exit from constrained articulations of loss and grief, regulated by colonial and other hegemonic powers. Reclaiming melancholia and the position of the 'mourning "I" ' that is 'deeply attracted to death in a desiring manner' (Lykke 2022: 11) can turn death and mourning into something vibrant.

In resonance with these arguments about the transformative powers of unbounded mourning and melancholia, one of the co-authors of this chapter (Nina) has earlier argued that dwelling in mourning (Cvetkovich 2012) and lamenting (Lykke 2022) can metamorphose into vibrant healing. A prerequisite for this, Nina argues, is that the mourning is practised as both spectral and material-spiritual ongoing processes of co-becoming with the dead beloved – processes which lovingly take into account the transmutation that the dead body of the beloved underwent when passing the life/death threshold. Nina emphasises that it is important to acknowledge that co-becoming with the dead is embedded in a changed relationship. It is not a mere repetition of what existed before the loss. To break the 'wall of silence' around the dead (Lykke 2022: 105–30), which modernity has erected through its relegation of continuing bonds to the sphere of 'madness' or 'superstition', it is important to unlearn the ways in which these modern stigmatisations of the excessively mourning 'I' are imprinted upon our bodies and senses, Nina argues. Instead, she embraces the potentialities of learning to allow alternative sense-abilities to unfold, and search for ways to co-become with dead. As Nina and several contributors to Part VI of this volume emphasise, the process of delving bodily into lamenting can facilitate such learning processes.

However, while acknowledging the transformative power of melancholia and excessive mourning, it is also crucial to take into account that it is deeply dependent on historical context and possibilities for resistant community-building. Let us therefore end this section with Black US scholar Saidiya Hartman's reflections upon melancholia. While studying a volume of former slave testimonies from the State of Alabama as part of her PhD research and attempts to trace her ancestors who were deported from Ghana to the USA as slaves, Hartman stumbled upon references to her maternal great-great-grandmother. However, it turns out that her great-great-grandmother for very understandable reasons had been reluctant to testify, i.e. 'to talk about slavery with a white interviewer in Dixie [the southern USA] in the age of Jim Crow [the racist 19th- and 20th-century laws about racial segregation in Southern USA]' (Hartman 2021: 15). This leads Hartman to reflect upon remembrance, and the layers of melancholia it can generate:

> What is it we choose to remember about the past and what is it we will to forget? Did my great-great grandmother believe that forgetting provided the possibility of a new life? Was nothing to be gained by focussing on the past? Were the words she refused to share what I

> should remember? Was the experience of slavery best represented by all the stories I would never know? Were gaps and silences and empty rooms the substance of my history? If ruin was my sole inheritance and the only certainty the impossibility of recovering the stories of the enslaved, did this make my history tantamount to mourning? Or worse, was it a melancholia I would never be able to overcome?
>
> *(Hartman 2021: 16)*

The Composition of the *Handbook* in Seven Parts

To end this introductory chapter, we present a brief overview of the ways in which we have composed the *Handbook*, although, for detailed information about the clustering of the contributions throughout the book, we also invite readers to consult the specific introductions that begin each part.

The *Handbook* is composed of seven parts, and efforts to queer, decolonise, and posthumanise death, dying, and mourning are woven intersectionally together in all of them. This has been an important editorial principle for us, insofar as we consider these three approaches to the study of death, dying, mourning, and afterlife to be entangled and intersectional, rather than separate analytical moves. These intersections are, therefore, apparent in all seven parts of the book, while the specific intersectional priorities vary from chapter to chapter.

The *Handbook* starts with a cartography of key ontological questions arising from its overall efforts to queer, decolonise, and posthumanise the study of death (Part I), and a critical diagnosis of important dimensions of current Anthropocene necropolitics (Part II).

Part I, *Rethinking Life/Death Ecologies and Temporalities*, sets the scene through a cluster of chapters that present a cartography of key ontological questions raised by a queering, decolonising, and posthumanising approach to death. How can we understand death and its relation to life against the backdrop of evolutionary ecology and a deep-time history of life/death on Earth? How can we leave the conventional opposition of life and death behind and instead explore their entangled and interdependent relationship? Can the unprecedented scales of present-day extinctions and Anthropocene necropolitics mobilise different, more ecological, modes of care and mourning?

Part II, *Anthropocene Necropolitics and Extinction*, digs into the question of necropolitics, and the shaping of death-worlds with reference to Mbembe's (2003, 2016) agenda-setting conceptual framework, but also with a commitment to rethinking it through the lens of new geopolitical locations, temporalities, or building blocks. The concept of necropolitics is brought to bear, for example, on Spain and Iran during the COVID-19 pandemic, and on Ukraine and Palestine during times of war. It is also linked to questions related to care work and affect, as well as to different kinds of intersections between queering, decolonising, and posthumanising approaches to the analysis of both human and more-than-human death-worlds.

The framing of the key ontologies and frameworks in Parts I and II is followed by three parts that focus on different modes of queering, decolonising, and posthumanising resistance to necropowers and enforced inhabitation of death-worlds – through caring death activism (Part III), through arts, aesthetics, and the media (Part IV), and through alternative politics and ethics of grieving and remembrance (Part V).

Part III, *Caring Death Activism*, discusses death activism (a term coined by queerfeminist philosopher Patricia MacCormack (2025). Death activism is explored as a practice of care about and for the wellbeing of the dying and death-bound, be they human or nonhuman, and as an affirmative and (self-)caring pursuit of one's own death in response to unbearable life conditions. One key aspect of the discussion is a critique of norms and forms of governmentality that fetishise life as an absolute good. Another is the framing of death activism through ethico-political, social, and environmental

justice perspectives and through a fundamental rejection of all kinds of death-making, exerted by sovereign necropowers, including those disguised as agents of salvation.

Part IV, *Aesthetics and Mediated Imaginaries of Death*, shifts the perspective to another kind of resistance to necropowers and the necropolitical shaping of death. Contributors to this part explore sensual, sensorial, and affective engagements with death, dying, and mourning, articulated through different forms of cinema, and visual, sonic, textual, and digital arts and media that in various ways defamiliarise conventional perceptions of death. Through these engagements, the contributions open up spaces for alternative and novel forms of ethical relations, aesthetic sensibilities, and political imaginations of death. In the process, death itself and its accompanying imaginaries, subjects and objects, mediums, and ways of sensing become 'strange' and queered.

Part V, *Politics and Ethics of Grieving Practices and Remembrance*, queers, decolonises, and posthumanises the normative framing of mourning rituals and grieving practices that have been shaped through the regulating necropowers of colonialism, racial and extractive capitalism, and cis-heteropatriarchy, as well as through forms of biopolitical governmentality that lead the medical systems of modern welfare states to create a taboo around death. The contributions gathered in Part V investigate different kinds of resistant practices – both personal and collective – of grieving, remembering, and decentring violent and normative discourses and regulating power structures that render dead bodies disposable and non-grievable, a taboo effect of collateral damage, or grievable only in certain institutionally regulated ways.

To end in an affirmative mode, the last two parts of the *Handbook* gather together contributions that explore transgressive modes of developing ongoing relations between the living and the dead (Part VI) and speculate about alternative life/death ontologies (Part VII). The turn to transgressive modes and speculations on alter-ontologies of life and death does not mean, however, that the kinds of necropolitical creation of death-worlds that have been in focus in the previous parts of the *Handbook* are neglected. Transgressions and speculations in these last two parts are instead intended as invitations to readers to combine criticality and affirmation.

Part VI, *Co-Becoming with the Dead and Spectral Mourning*, displaces modern-secular imaginaries of posthumous life that conventionally cast the cultivating of ongoing relations with the dead as signs of outdated superstition or madness. Following different kinds of queering, decolonising, and posthumanising paths, the contributions undo these presuppositions and their foundations in conventional modern life/death oppositions. Instead, they explore how poetic, artistic, and mediated formats can help to summon the dead and articulate their phenomenal and spectral presences. Contributors explore ways to open up possibilities for co-becoming with the dead, and learn to listen and pay careful attention to the ethical, political, and personal lessons that we (the still living) can learn from such interactions.

Finally, Part VII, *Imagining Life/Death Entanglements Differently*, gathers contributions that, from queering, decolonising, and posthumanising perspectives, contemplate the horizons that open up when life/death relationships are recognised as vibrantly material ecological entanglements. Contributors explore what it takes to unlearn dualist modes of thinking about life and death as opposed. in order to explore intertwined processes of living/dying, growing/decomposing, they draw on examples such as deadly experiences of cancerous embodiment, making art with decomposing materials, extended spider cognition, the COVID-19 virus as a generative agent, more-than-human ecologies of gifting, and extinction..

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Notes

1 As we want to break with the hierarchising system of first, second, and third author, we emphasise that we have chosen an alphabetical ordering in accordance with last name.
2 See: https://queerdeathstudies.net/ accessed October 1, 2024.
3 *Death Studies*, see www.tandfonline.com/journals/udst20
4 *Omega. Journal of Death and Dying*, see https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ome
5 *Mortality*, see www.tandfonline.com/journals/cmrt20
6 The Association for the Study of Death and Society, see https://deathandsociety.org/
7 www.routledge.com/Critical-Approaches-to-Death-Dying-and-Bereavement/Borgstrom-Visser/p/book/9781032330624?srsltid=AfmBOor6hPJk7HEoponE34QNfVyjxCRidEVOA8pZx0HepnAUI3zbrqr- accessed 2 December 2024.
8 The Collective for Radical Death Studies, see www.radicaldeathstudies.com/
9 In 2008, a committee under the scientifically agenda-setting Geological Society of London decided to initiate a more in-depth investigation of the suggestion to use the Anthropocene-concept to designate that the Earth has entered a new geological epoch where human influences are decisively changing planetary conditions. However, after years of consideration, the Society has opted against the use of the term. See: Witze 2024. However, during the period of prolonged debate, the concept has taken off in critical debates among humanities and social science scholars. The latter debates are the context that this chapter refers to.

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