TWO

ABSENCE AND (UNEXPECTED) PRESENCES

Reflecting on Cosmopolitical Entanglements across Time

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INTRODUCTION

I spent my teenage years escaping from Seattle with a small group of friends as we backpacked alpine lakes at altitudes above two kilometers in the North Cascade mountain range. The range, which includes several volcanic mountains, covers a 270-mile extent about ten miles east of Seattle, stretching from Southern Canada across the state of Washington. One of the highlights of scrambling around on loose rock in thin atmosphere was the opportunity to meet with glaciers; a kind of living geology, met in massive ice formations had taken shape for millennia and continued to actively etch away at these mountains. On warm days, we could sit on the edge of the ice, which was soft and mushy—a strange counterpoint to the massive ancient power these living, moving forms expressed on the hard and unmoving mountains we sat on. Glaciers, at least in my experience, carry a weirdly active presence: utterly silent, pressing away sound, muting the landscape. From our reading in textbooks, we expect them to be static and silent formations, but the more intimate experience of their presence is that of (an albeit paradoxical) dynamism and noise. In the decades since those early alpine adventures, I

have moved to Europe and developed relationships with different mountains, such as Nan Shepherd's Cairngorms in Scotland. I dream of bringing my two sons back to the North Cascades so that we can all sit together and absorb the sound of glacial silence. However, it is increasingly likely that by the time we make a pilgrimage back there, those glaciers will no longer exist. The North Cascades have long been known to have a particular level of temperature sensitivity and thus act as a kind of climate barometer. At least four glaciers have disappeared in the past century, with dozens more retreating rapidly. So it happens that these icy paragons of persistence suddenly begin to melt away, and a scramble by humans to understand and memorialize their significance ensues.

In August of 2019, a group of Icelanders gathered to mourn the departure of Okjökull, a glacier on their island. A century ago, this glacier was fifty meters thick and covered fifteen square kilometers. The terminal decline of this glacier became evident about a decade ago. By 2014, the ice of Okjökull had become too thin to move, and so, in 2019, a group gathered to commemorate one of the first glaciers to officially vanish as a result of anthropogenic climate change. They affixed a plaque with a letter to the future, dated August 19, 2019, etched in Icelandic and English:

> Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier.
> In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path.
> This monument is to acknowledge that we know
> what is happening and what needs to be done.
> Only you know if we did it.
> 19th August 2019
> 415ppm CO_2

A casual observer might be tempted to dismiss this act as more publicity stunt than ritual. The plaque offered a certain level of formality, but in the midst of what the organizers called

an Un-glacier Tour, there were few connections to so-called organized religions or easily recognizable ritual, such as the more overtly ritualized requiem services for extinctions that have begun to emerge.[1] The organizers use terms such as *commemoration* and *memorial*, but given my own relationship with glaciers, I would argue that this act of memorial carried the celebrants into *novel* forms of ritual action, interfacing a range of fields that do not straightforwardly cohere in the modern world: the presence of politicians and other public figures, rituals of mourning, and scientifically measured extinction. There are incursions here of seemingly private rituals into a public sphere and a strange blending of phenomena understood through cold, hard empirical science with more affective sensibilities and forms of knowing. In this way, glaciers also seem to provoke unconventional religious and social hybridities. We might like to have things stay in their bins, but this simply is not the case—nature and culture often intertwine, and public and private life overlap in practice. There are, however, certain examples of intertwining that stand out to us, not because we don't accept the messy world as it is, but because they challenge more deeply held and perhaps less often questioned stereotypes, and thus these examples stand out with a particular sharpness. As many of my coauthors and I have discovered over the course of this project, *religion* and *extinction* are two categories that even experienced practitioners can find unexpectedly challenging to integrate. To return to this Icelandic glacier and the novel ceremony observing its passage, one may be tempted to ask whether this memorial is a moment that one can even call religious. In this essay, I respond by challenging modern expectations of "purity" and instead deploy a postsecular frame that allows us to anticipate how religion is messy, hybrid, and full of lively entanglements. The same is true of extinction. Just as we expect glaciers to be something that closer examination reveals they are not (static, dead chunks of ice), so too can extinction bring an expectation of a pure absence. I consider how

the opposite might be true; we might experience uneasy relationships with persistent but fading life, haunted by departed forms of life and surprised by unexpected newcomers. In essence, I argue that the fabric of creaturely coexistence is woven of complex presences—far more than we might expect it to be—and that this close look at extinction and religion forces us to grapple with this reality. In particular, I will explore whether ecological decline and death actually tend to generate novelty and presence. This onset of novelty is paradoxical and the target of contestation. To be fair, given that extinction is most straightforwardly concerned with disappearance, one of the last things that a person might expect to do is engage in a discussion about its opposite: appearances. Yet, this theme is surprisingly pervasive, noted also in chapters by Maria Nita and James Hatley, and it is this relation to novelty and religious reactions to novelty in the face of extinction that I explore in this chapter.

One of the reasons this discussion is so important is because the impulse to separate private religion from other broader publics has proven so persistent and has dogged professional environmental conservation and activism, which are often described as a resolutely secular affair. It is important to appreciate how these glaciers, like so many other forms of life that have the specter of extinction hanging over them, exist in a liminal space, not yet gone and yet not fully present to us any longer. The status of religion also remains liminal, resurging in ways and places that have confounded the theorists of secularization of the early twentieth century. There are exciting counterexamples, such as the attention given to sacred places in work by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the "Faith Bridge" as a recurring feature of Extinction Rebellion demonstrations (explored in more depth in Nita's chapter in this volume). Yet, in spite of these examples, religion also maintains a kind of persistent fragility in public, not fully present and not fully erased. It is an uneasy persistence, sticking

to many more things than we might expect but also fragile and fleeting.

Bearing this in mind, in this chapter, I explore how this present extinction crisis comes at us as both a living presence and lively absence that are often ambiguous, unexpected, and entangled in forms of religion. This presses at a key question that pervades the essays in this volume—namely, what sort of "thing" is extinction? And what sort of thing is religion? While, as we note in our introduction, the questioning of extinction has been an increasingly regular and fruitful line of scholarship, the questioning of religion, especially in the context of thinking in an ecological way, has been far less common, though it is no less necessary.

Like extinction, religion does not sit so easily in the places where we try to enclose it. We may be happy to marshal speech on the Christian response to extinction or mobilize specific religious communities, so long as their mobilization remains stereotypically religious (e.g., they bring an evangelical Christian form of action to climate change or a stereotypically Islamic presence to a demonstration). But as this Icelandic ritual suggests, there are aspects of this supposedly secular discourse around extinction that are already religious, sometimes in surprisingly overt ways. What might we gain from the recognition that our public and professional response to the suffering biosphere is postsecular, even while resolutely insisting that it is secular? Is the nature of religion just as unstable as these glaciers—seemingly immovable, then suddenly shifting?

I am aware that some background may be in order so that the reader can appreciate my recharacterization of religion, so I will begin by providing some context on postsecular critical theory. Then I will examine a particular space where religion and extinction seem to meet with special force—the space of mourning. As I will suggest, the act of mourning losses (whether ecological or cultural) is unexpectedly ambiguous and fraught, particularly because the object of mourning does not always offer us a stable

sense of absence or loss. This is especially the case in relation to contemporary environmental crises where one finds oneself in mourning for things that are in the process of passing away but have not yet died. In this way, mourning can form the basis for what scholars like Mark Fisher and Jacques Derrida have described as *hauntology*, where loss is never complete. I turn to hauntology later in this chapter but want to stay with the challenges facing our characterization of religion for the time being. This is important preliminary work because the privatization of religion can underwrite a reticence to engage in close analysis or critique of "religious" phenomena. Yet, if we are to try thinking about extinction in the postsecular ways that it demands of us, I suggest that we are pressed beyond the (very important) affirmation of affective response to crisis (such as the one that Willis Jenkins offers in the previous chapter) toward precisely these acts of analysis and critique. I argue that the tools with which we grapple with loss are inextricably religious and accepting them as such opens up the potential for more holistic accounting for this process of reckoning. Undergirding all of this, however, is also a reconsideration of the nature of religion. In particular, I argue that a model of "folk" religion might give coherence to the kinds of *ad hoc* responses that are being mobilized in reaction to the extinction crisis.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY RELIGION

A statement by Peter Berger, in the middle of the twentieth century, captures a commonplace and confident assertion of the ascendancy of secularism. Writing in the *New York Times*, Berger argued, "By the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture."[2] Most notable about Berger's position is his dramatic reversal several decades later: "Far from being in decline in the modern world, religion is actually experiencing a

resurgence . . . the assumption we live in a secularized world is false. . . . The world today is as furiously religious as it ever was."[3] Another notable reversal was that of Jürgen Habermas, who concluded in 2005 that the United States is a postsecular society and has subsequently devoted significant attention to theorizing this new social phenomenon.[4] The reasons for this are various, with one classic turning point being the Iranian Revolution. As political philosopher Michael Walzer recently observed, "Today, every major world religion is experiencing a significant revival, and revived religion isn't an opiate as we once thought, but a very strong stimulant."[5] Postsecular societies are not merely marked by the resurgence of personal religious belief—what Paul Lichterman calls the "Beliefs-Driven Actor"—but also by a persistent, often increased presence of religious reasoning of some kind in public life. Postsecularism has been unpacked in a wide range of ways by scholars such as Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, William Connolly, and José Casanova.

At the same time, a range of scholars in religious studies, aided by postcolonial critical theorists, have called into question the very definition of *religion*. Jonathan Z. Smith points to the appendix of James H. Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion* (1912), "which lists more than fifty definitions of religion." The point of this plurality for Smith is not to show that religion is *unreal*. Instead, he asserts that *religion* "is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second order generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology."[6] Brent Nongbri suggests that "religion is a modern innovation" characterized by a kind of intuitive reasoning, building up an inductively derived definition from anecdotal evidence.[7] For many modern scholars of religion, the closest archetype at hand is Christianity, often implicitly Protestant Christianity. This becomes particularly problematic in the colonial encounter: "Most of the debates about whether this or that '-ism'

(Confucianism, Marxism, etc.) is 'really a religion' boil down to the question of whether or not they are sufficiently similar to modern Protestant Christianity."[8] The structure of this mode of definition becomes one where religion is "to refer to a genus that contains a variety of species . . . individual religions are generally presumed to be different 'manifestations' of some sort of unitary 'Ultimate Concern.'"[9] A key problem with this sort of view is that each "religion" must be enclosed, its concerns sufficiently circumscribed so that it may be differentiated from other concerns, disentangled from politics and culture and kept in its box. Such a view, as Nongbri argues, is anachronistic and misleading. This is underlined by the way that, prior to the early-modern period, Christians themselves used the word *religious* to refer to certain kinds of monastic practice that involved being "set apart" and held them to be in contrast to "secular" people, such as priests who were not any less religious but were noteworthy only inasmuch as they brought their religion *into* the public sphere. In those contexts where environmental management and the efforts of secular environmental campaigning organizations have opened to the salience of religion for their work, this narrow and frequently stereotypical definition is often functionally the one that organizations gravitate toward as they craft messaging and outreach to target various world religions.[10] To give one example of this at work in practice, we can look to a call by the executive secretary of the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change from 2010 to 2016, Christiana Figueres, to "faith groups and religious institutions to find their voice and set their moral compass on one of the great humanitarian issues of our time."[11] On one hand, this direct address by a UN leader to religious groups marked a significant shift in the desecularization of climate policy. However, on the other hand, in that address Figueres focuses exclusively on the forms of religion cultivated in "churches and mosques to synagogues and temples" and upheld by "leaders of faith groups, from Christians and Muslims to Hindus, Jews and Buddhists."[12]

I would argue that this impulse to develop an anecdotal definition of religion is not in itself problematic. The trouble comes when scholars work with a set of anecdotal data that consists of a sample size of n=1. In many ways, I think that an intuitive, bottom-up theorization is precisely the right way to go about defining religion. The challenge is to find a way of theorizing religion that is adequately plural without becoming incoherent. This should be done in a manner that is, as Nongbri suggests, more playful. He notes that in seeking to abandon the quest for essentialist definitions of religion, we might take up a nonessentialist posture where we provisionally deploy religion for the purpose of analysis. As he suggests, this means that we would no longer ask the question "Is phenomenon X a religion?" Rather, we would ask something like, "Can we see anything new and interesting about phenomenon X by considering it, for the purpose of study, as a religion?"[13]

If religion does not reside (at least not exclusively) in institutions, then where? The answer to this question about the "presence" of religion is a bit messy, and there are far too many options for me to review here. However, in seeking to take this kind of provisional, bottom-up approach a bit further, I would like to commend one program that has sought out a similar approach through an emphasis on lived and everyday religion. Part of the appeal of engaging with everyday religion is that it can wrest the study of religion of individual persons from what was a nearly exclusive focus on religious *institutions* like churches in the early part of the twentieth century. Quite early on in 1967, one apologist for this approach, Thomas Luckmann, argued in a now influential volume, *The Invisible Religion*, that the locus of authority had shifted to the *self*. What we find in practice now are forms of religion that draw from a range of belief systems in what Robert Wuthnow calls "patchwork" and Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes as religious "bricolage."[14] So an individual may now feel (and perhaps has always felt) free to construct forms of

belief in more eclectic ways. There has been a welcome increase in scholarly attention toward new religions and neopaganism and the ways that creativity and production can come to play in religious belonging and experience there. But to describe this as a shift *toward* more dynamic expressions may potentially mislead as well. Organized forms of religion, such as Christianity, are not always as static as one might expect. In responding to the critique of Pentecostal Christianity that it lacks a "distinctive religious character," Wolfgang Vondey argues convincingly that it is "held together by an enigmatic theological method: the mode of play."[15] Work by scholars such as Robert Orsi and Sarah McFarland Taylor indicate, in a similar way, that the lived religious experience of Roman Catholics can have very little to do with institutional hierarchy and that many individual Catholics have little clarity regarding official church teaching (e.g., through papal encyclicals) on various social issues. My fieldwork with Christian environmental activists affirms the suggestion that when attempts are made to mobilize religion in relation to environmental issues, reductive and essentialist understandings of religion can undermine efforts to engage with various religious publics.[16] The key point here is that religion has likely always been a heterogeneous force, and we are only just beginning to outgrow narrow late-modern characterizations and appreciate the richer work involved in religious forms of knowing and belonging.

With this definition of religion as full of play and novelty in mind, I'd like to promote a description of religion as *vernacular* or *folk*, and this description applies not just to new religious movements but also to various forms of more supposedly conventional religions, such as Christianity. A key scholar of vernacular religion, Marion Bowman, points out:

> There has been growing academic recognition of the need to challenge the supposed homogeneity of any so-called religious tradition. While we conventionally talk about Christianity as if it is self-evidently one thing, it would probably be more helpful

> and more correct to talk about "Christianities." Similarly, to talk about Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism obscures the considerable variety to be found within such denominations according to time, place, sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Such terms are used as helpful labels, but we should not be fooled into thinking that they represent neat packages of uniform ideas, beliefs and practices that constitute "pure" or "real" religion. Religion is not monolithic. What is nominally the "same" religious tradition turns out differently in different times, cultures and contexts.[17]

For the sake of this chapter and this volume, a focus on folk religion implies a much wider field of conceptualization, including concerns such as hybridity, ritual and other religious practices, material culture, affect, play, and the production of lay knowledge outside professional or scholarly oversight. This approach also commends a different kind of attention to extinction. Rather than looking for what extinction means for some form of enclosed religion(s), we ought to seek to find out what things in this supposedly secular discourse are *already* religious. It then becomes important to ask what it does for us to recognize these things as such.

It is worth noting that the same argument I have been making for an understanding of religion as vernacular, ad hoc, and dynamic has also recently been made with regard to scientific practice and knowledge production. In recent years, scholars across a range of fields have argued for a recovery of lay *scientific* practice with a similar sort of outcome. In some cases, particularly in relation to climate change, this has meant an emphasis on Indigenous forms of natural science and ethnobotany, which, as Timothy B. Leduc argues in his chapter in this volume, are often intertwined with religious or spiritual epistemologies. This shift can also be seen in attempts to champion and represent more localized forms of experience and vernacular understandings of environmental change. My argument for the inclusion of folk religion within

environmental policy and environmentalism may seem unusual, but this push for diversity actually mirrors the shift across the environmental and social sciences toward an acceptance of the kinds of novel productions that result from folk science and lay knowledge.[18] This can be seen in the mainstreaming of "citizen science" initiatives that many environmental NGOs are promoting, not just because of an interest in stakeholder engagement, but because, in practice, laypeople are genuinely good at knowledge production. Given the resituated accounts of religion and environmental science that I have suggested, we might even want to accept that these two fields are, at least in these aspirational cases, seeking to participate in a similar epistemological field. It is worth considering whether these changed perceptions are, at least in part, because these two fields are confronting unanticipated forms and levels of novelty. In both cases, there were premonitions of absence that have given way to unexpected presences.

Having set the scene with regard to the study of extinction and religion and some deliberate entangling of these two themes, for what remains of this chapter, I will unpack some of the connections across these domains. In particular, I will explore some of the layers of (both current and potential) social response to extinction through, as Nongbri suggests, a new and provisional, if sometimes implicit, "religions" lens.

ABSENCES

As I noted earlier, our experience of extinction is often framed in terms of *dis*appearances, and further universalized toward a characterization of living in an *age* of disappearances. The news of the glacier Okjökull's memorialization was taken to be a novel event, on one hand because religion was appearing in an unexpected context and on the other because a creature like Okjökull can seem to be so permanent, huge, and slow but in the face of anthropogenic impacts had been rendered fragile and fast in its

decline. I think that it is important to pause and reckon with the shock that is felt when our experience and self-perception shifts rapidly and unexpectedly from that of strength to fragility. In fact, I would argue that this sense of shock can serve as a lens for interpreting many of the Enlightenment reactions to technology and nature. Seen in this way, Okjökull is yet another recontextualized object in a long line of shifting perceptions, where one began with intense optimism about human enterprise and was overcome by a growing sense of fragility. We experience this with regard to individual creatures, landscapes, cultures, and, most recently, earth systems. Seen in this way, we might say that the late modern period has been characterized by an ongoing oscillation between high self-delusions of civilizational strength and low depths of revealed fragilities. Moreover, I would argue that this awareness of shock has been a catalyst for many (often temporal) human forms of reckoning, like nostalgia, anomie, and, to circle back around to our earlier example, mourning and memorialization.

Though memorialization has taken on what seem like novel forms in this episode with Okjökull and other departed or departing forms of life, it is important to take a broader view and acknowledge that this kind of reckoning with loss is actually not so original. The same juxtaposition of human strength with fragility and impending loss surfaced in a long-running documentary series produced by the BBC from 1970 to 1993, *Disappearing World*, which focused on *human* communities and cultural traditions that were under threat. This series formalized a key goal of the discipline of anthropology, which has from its earliest moments aimed to chronicle threatened cultures for the sake of either rescue or preservation in the context of archives. And even earlier, centuries before this, Bartolome de las Casas wrote one of the first narratives to warn of possible disappearances as a consequence of colonial expansion, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542). Across all these narratives, we find that the sense of a durable world initially open to violent exploitation

has been overlaid with a sense of vulnerability and threat. Forms of presence that were taken for granted were suddenly—and, in many cases, shockingly so—called into question. In observing this juxtaposition of fear and optimism, it is important to note one crucial nuance: this sense of threat has largely been offered as a warning about what *might be* lost in contrast to memorializing what *has truly* passed. It is my conviction that this oscillation between anthropological optimism and grief or between a perception of strength and fragility produces a certain kind of proleptic (that is, anticipatory) grieving. And this specific kind of proleptic reckoning with loss, which often occurs in what can be either covertly or overtly secularized rituals of mourning, carries with it some fundamental problems.

Given the way that extinction has increased and sharpened our awareness of loss, it seems natural that the contemporary conversation about extinction should turn to grief. This has recently been formalized in an emerging literature on *solastalgia*, a term coined to refer to the forms of distress caused by environmental change.[19] In this way, as noted by Nita in this volume, lament and grief have entered the academic environmentalist mainstream. It is also worth noting that this turn is highly relevant to a volume like this one, given how the forms we give to mourning are often shaped in the context of religious rituals. I take this development to be a fundamentally good and important one, but I do want to pause and press some political theological questions in relation to the increased attention to and promotion of affective responses to ecological loss.

In particular, as I find more and more fellow scholars, artists, and activists beginning to grapple with these feelings of loss on a personal level and seeking to integrate these new sensibilities into their scholarly reflection, I want to ask what it is that we are lamenting. Is it the loss of specific species, as with Martha, the last passenger pigeon? Few of us will have had the privilege to live in biodiversity hotspots to tangibly and relationally witness species

decline, so it is unlikely that we will have had any actual experience of these extinctions. If this is the case, then participation in this kind of lament might be a proxy for other kinds of personal losses: the loss of "home," the loss of access to rural landscapes, the loss of "familiar" things, or simply the loss of any forms of stasis in liquid modernity. As we suggest in our introduction, there is an often unwarranted sense of commonality concealing the numerous ways extinction is actually conceptualized by individuals, and it is perhaps the case that while we may have different sources of shock, we find solidarity in the broader shared experience of loss writ large.

There are also questions that need to be raised about exactly how pervasively the shock is felt. There are hazards lurking here that wrap around the anticipated absence of cultures, human peoples, and other animal and plant species. These hazards result from the entanglement of ecological sensibilities with colonialist notions of white supremacy. In one study, Patrick Brantlinger coins the term *proleptic elegy* to refer to the frequent response by colonizing societies to potential future loss. In *Dark Vanishings*, Brantlinger notes how the "future perfect mode of proleptic elegy" that "mourns the lost object before it is lost," such as the imagined extinction of Tasmanian peoples in 1876, "spurred home governments . . . to support colonising projects" and "missionary efforts to save souls of last members of perishing races."[20] To bring Brantlinger's argument into the domain of political theology, proleptic elegies—when exerted on the level of social movements—can manufacture a political "state of exception" where the perception of imminent harm justifies the suspension of ordinary ethical and political apparatus. In a political moment in which far-right fascism has been increasingly visible, it is well worth noting how the political left has its own parallel legacies. In Brantlinger's analysis, proleptic elegies are often mobilized by settler colonists as *part of* and serve as an enabler for colonial projects.

It is important to appreciate this possible hazard, because mourning is often treated as a valorous undertaking, and by extension, the mourner can be placed in a protected, even sacred, category. My argument in this essay is not to dismiss mourning, even proleptic forms of it, but I do want to highlight the lack of questioning that happens with respect to ecological grief. There is room here for increased critical self-interrogation of mourning and mourners. In a corresponding way, the affirmation of the postsecular presence of religion in these environmentalist spaces allows us to mobilize forms of ritual critique and liturgical analysis (as modeled in the chapter by Nita). For the sake of this discussion, I need to first examine the wider critical context that preceded the resurgence of interest in mourning in order to observe some indications of how problems may have been embedded in this project for many decades now.

At the start of the twentieth century, scholarly attention returned to mourning in the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud is significant, not least because the psychoanalytic school he inaugurated began by formalizing what was an early modern disdain for mourning. Freud set up a now-classic contrast between mourning and melancholia. The latter of these represents a pathological condition in which we refuse to let go of the dead. Mourning, for Freud, is characterized by the detachment of one's affection from the person who has departed followed by reattachment to a replacement.[21] As Elissa Marder puts it, "Freud argues that normal mourning is a form of psychic work in which the self detaches from the world and retreats into itself so that it can, slowly and painfully, disengage the energy it has invested in a love object that no longer exists in order to be able to reclaim that lost energy for itself."[22] To be fair to Freud, his own account of these two modes of grappling with loss is much more complex (and ultimately inconclusive) than this neat scheme might suggest, but the schema stuck, and many contemporary interactions with mourning take this binary as given.

More than half a century later, in 1986, psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok took on this Freudian legacy and attempted to better account for the persistence of the dead and how departed persons can carry a spectral, haunting presence for mourners. In many ways, the experience of spectrality troubles easy distinctions between forms of life we take to be either "disappearing" or "appearing." Their account is complex, and I will only note two aspects of it that are germane to this discussion, particularly in light of their subsequent and sustained treatment by Derrida. As Marder notes, their account represents a modification of Freud inasmuch as they suggest that "mourning always entails taking the lost object into the self in one way or another."[23] For Abraham and Torok, grief can consist of two basic processes. The first (and, in their view, nonpathological response), which they call "introjection," is where "the mourner assimilates aspects of the other and makes them part of the mourner."[24] Here, "the departed object is successfully consumed: it is fully 'ingested,' 'digested' and 'metabolised' until it ultimately becomes assimilated into the self. The lost object is successfully mourned when it becomes an integral part of the 'me' who mourns."[25] Fundamentally, this mode of grief involves an *increased perception* of the object of mourning to such an extent that that other becomes a part of the self. In this account, the pathological response to grief is called *incorporation*, and in this mode of grappling, as Marder puts it, "the mourner refuses . . . to swallow the reality of the loss and so swallows the person instead. The departed other, neither living nor dead, disappears, as if by magic, into the hidden crypt which the self secretly builds for it within itself. The disappearance occurs in a flash, as if by magic, and seemingly leaves no trace."[26]

This notion of a crypt occupied Derrida, who suggested that "the inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way

save as living."[27] The crypt represents a place where, by force of will, we avoid the departed other and refuse to affirm our relation to them. As Derrida argues, "By resisting introjection, it prevents the loving, appropriating assimilation of the other, and thus seems to preserve the other as other (foreign), but it also does the opposite. It is not the other that the process of incorporation preserves, but a certain topography it keeps safe, intact, untouched by the very relationship with the other to which, paradoxically enough, introjection is more open."[28]

For my purpose in this chapter, this concept of the crypt is especially important in helping us to understand the inner dynamics of these modes of proleptic mourning. What I would like to suggest is that grief can serve as a crypt where we bury the objects of our concern in such a way that, shielded by the dynamics of sacred mourning, they cannot be interrogated. In a sense, we silence the departed so that they cannot haunt us with their complex presence.

This problem comes into sharp relief when new elegies or rituals of mourning are constructed by privileged activists in response to "extinction" that do not arise from grief about actual material or specific losses experienced locally. These rituals can serve as modes of concealment or obfuscation, because while the real object of (perceived) loss is locked inside a crypt, mourning may actually serve as a proxy in which we covertly mourn the onset of negative feelings about the disruption of an everyday experience that is free from threat and disturbance. To put this another way, these projects of mourning can serve as ways to elegize threats to a privileged existence. So on one hand, the act of mourning actually marks a departure from our connection with the entities being lost and an obfuscation rather than the intensification of our relationship and collective memory of the entities and their presence. At the same time, ecological grief can often represent the deployment of half losses tangled up with personal experiences and entitlements. In this way, proleptic elegies risk

magnifying only indirectly experienced losses—in contrast to, for example, persons whose homes have actually been destroyed by sea-level rise or subsistence societies who find that specific forms of life in which they are related have begun to vanish. Furthermore, these proleptic elegies may also impair our ability to connect with those forms of life that may, in the very midst of threat (like my mushy glaciers), sharpen in their more novel aspects.

In light of this critique, it is important to note that I am not calling for an end to the valorization or normalization of lament in ecological contexts but rather for a more critical but continued performance of it. In the best possible instance, these acts mirror the decline of the Earth and in turn provide ritualized expressions of solidarity with extinct and nearly extinct species. My hope is that we may find novel forms of solidarity that can emerge in these creative spaces of ritual performance, particularly in the midst of a potentially vanishing world. If we are to engage in these forms of solidarity, it is something that must be carefully conceived, lest it turn into an amplification of personal concern, a doubling down on (rather than a challenge to) existing privilege, or, as I will note further, an appropriation of the grief of others.

Part of the reason why this critical engagement with mourning and lament is important is because in many ways, grief and mourning are, as Timothy Morton puts it, "quintessential" parts of ecological concern.[29] Yet, as Morton goes on to suggest, in spite of the ubiquity of this mode of reflection—ever on the rise as anthropogenic impacts become increasingly evident—it is often paradoxical: "We cannot mourn for the environment because we are so deeply attached to it—we are it," and so "ecological discourse holds out the possibility of a mourning without end."[30] Morton wants to argue for a new kind of "dark ecology" that problematizes the sadism inherent in deep green eco-elegy, which "presupposes the very loss it wants to prevent" in a kind of "narcissistic panic" that "fails fully to account for the actual loss

of actually existing species and environments."[31] Actual loss consists of things that are repugnant, possessing "sheer otherness," and so grappling with those things should lack the aesthetic comfort of mourning that (according to Morton) might be digested, whereas melancholia sticks in the throat.

In engagement with Lisa Sideris's book *Consecrating Science*, Courtney O'Dell-Chaib also recommends caution at the ethical possibilities of deep ecoreligious thought that work with "normative relationships . . . shaped solely around ideal visions of love, kinship, and wonder" as a way of teaching biological kinship.[32] In particular, agreeing with a critique voiced in the chapter in this volume by Sideris, O'Dell-Chaib notes how new cosmology promotes a kind of "deracinated wonder" that is "ripped from cultural and historical contexts, thus erasing embodied inequalities and the narratives" and by extension bracketing out the kinds of experienced negotiations with loss and grief that one finds in Black environmental imaginaries.[33] In her analysis, white privilege blurs and obscures the unequal distribution of environmental loss and the impact of ecological degradation. O'Dell-Chaib suggests that Black environmental imaginaries offer significant sharpening of this reflection on ecological loss. This is not to suggest that white scholars should appropriate Black experience but rather to note how existing Black commentaries offer a uniquely salient perception. This is a kind of mourning that has reckoned far longer with spectral presence; it is a "tricky kind of mourning . . . for what might have been but never was—a relationship with nature free from oppression, toxicity, and fear."[34] Following Morton's description, this is a melancholic subject that resists the goal of closure and relief. In a similar way, Jennifer James pushes back against Freud's insistence that "mourning is a necessary but temporary process of grieving" and instead calls for a privileging of lament for "black collective trauma," which she describes as an "inability or unwillingness to 'stop mourning' ecological loss and losses associated with 'the land' in a present where loss continues."[35]

Donna Haraway's insistence, laid out in the title of her recent book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, hangs over all these arguments for ecomelancholia in the face of extinction. Rituals of mourning and lament can be seen to be problematic. In some cases, these rituals can be easily parodied. They may be found to be morally imperfect in their mobilization of privilege. Some observers may argue that they are ambiguously religious. The response to these challenges to what I would suggest is novel religious practice for a truly novel crisis, however, is not to shrink away from them but to continue with forms of practice that are complex and imperfect. In my view, it is precisely in the repetition and regeneration of novel rituals of ecolament, in spite of their raw edges and possible shortcomings, that we begin together to develop new and more mature modes of social response to the extinction crisis. There is a deliberate repudiation of the kind of satiation that might be granted by these new rituals of solastalgic lament. One also finds a kind of authenticity and immediacy to such an approach, particularly because extinction hovers over our present in a way that does not fully settle or arrive. This is captured in the growing awareness of "living dead species," those flight ways that persist in contemporary landscapes but are doomed to inevitable extinction given the irrevocable loss of necessary habitat range and creaturely population.[36]

Yet there is also a tension among the accounts of elegy and melancholia I have summarized. We may want to go with Haraway's suggestion that we find ways to *resist* the horrors of the Anthropocene and the concomitant temptation to adopt a "game over" attitude, yet it would be equally problematic to pursue a cheery enthusiasm for a more open future full of novel appearances. So how can creative grappling with loss engage the contemporary theopolitical imaginary? The answer lies, at least in part, in the methods of care that we extend to those forms of life that do persist and emerge and modes of political life that integrate more dynamic types of reckoning with presence and absence.

An embrace of these modes of care will require a shift in our configurations of lament, especially inasmuch as they might be entangled with the epistemologies of white frailty and given the focus on an assimilation of the spectral other. Though it might be taken as an exclusive affective mode of response to extinction, solastalgia also represents a set of incomplete temporalities—that is, those that entrench our resistance to uncertain and undetermined futures. However, before I offer a tentative constructive proposal, I want to briefly spend some time dwelling with this juxtaposed instance of novelty.

UNEXPECTED PRESENCES

I have already highlighted how novel modes of religion, though always present, have increasingly occupied the scholarly *consciousness* over the past century, from global Pentecostalism to Neopaganism. However, it is of further interest to note that novel appearances have also mobilized the biological sciences. In particular, conservation biologists have been forced to grapple with unexpected novelty and weird presences in recent decades. This comes in particular as restoration ecologists—who are in the midst of formalizing codes of practice that might guide their work in degraded landscapes—keep finding unanticipated ecological innovations.[37] This presents a significant challenge inasmuch as environmental management as a form of landscape practice fundamentally tends to work toward some kind of predetermined baseline, so that as the work of conservation or restoration proceeds, successful outcomes are measured against a return to some kind of former state of equilibrium or aesthetic. Yet, practitioners often find outcomes that undermine the baseline expectation. In a broader sense, we might say that the perception of novelty relies on the production and maintenance of a sensibility about what is "normal" against Queer presences and temporalities that are "strange," "unexpected," or "unconventional."

One example of the appearance of ecological novelty in environmental conservation work can be found in the work underway on coastal ecosystems in the Southeastern United States with the declining freshwater alligator population. A range of interventions have been attempted and in some cases have resulted in a rebound of alligator populations. Beyond these successes, however, researchers were surprised to find a reappearance of alligators in saltwater habitats—an environment that is supposedly hostile to the species. It has been generally assumed that the ability to live for long periods in saltwater was a key point of difference between crocodiles and alligators.[38] Alligators are not the only species to settle into novel ecological contexts in this way, as Brian R. Silliman and coauthors observe; this behavior seems to be occurring across a range of species: "River otters are now commonly found in many marine wetlands, orangutans are found in disturbed forests, coyotes, bobcats, jackals, wolves and hyenas are foraging on beaches and rocky shores, pumas are moving into grasslands, and killer whales have been observed in freshwater rivers."[39]

There are a range of hypotheses that have been generated in response to these seemingly strange behaviors. Certainly, climate change is playing some role here, as even familiar ecosystems are being altered for these "re-inhabitations" as temperatures range more widely and weather shifts into unexpected new patterns. It may also be the case that some of these sightings are idiosyncratic—that is, that some of these animals have wandered into hostile habitats and may not settle there successfully. While these possibilities are plausible, Silliman and colleagues dismiss them and argue that these creatures might be "recolonizing formerly inhabited ecosystems in which their populations once thrived, but were more recently extirpated by human hunting."[40] As the authors observe, this represents a challenge to the very narratives biology deploys about the normativity of contemporary "large consumers" or about exactly how static behavior

patterns are for a given species. In his chapter, Stefan Skrimshire notes similarly the recent (and ambiguous) appearance of grolar bears. Silliman and his coauthors provocatively titled their essay "Are the Ghosts of Nature's Past Haunting Ecology Today?" And this question also presses the question of temporal scale—is normativity about proximate history? Or do we risk more ancient ghosts showing up to haunt our landscapes unexpectedly?

It is important to note that these novel ecological effects are felt at multiple scales. It is a recently observed paradox in environmental science that it is not only individual species that can take unique directions; whole ecologies can do the same, and they do so in ways that are not simply an aggregation of the development of individuals within the system. These two scales of activity can be working out concurrently in an interdependent way. As Shahid Naeem puts it: "Biodiversity is a product of its environment, and the antithesis, that the environment is, in part, a product of the organisms within it, is also correct."[41] The appearance of novel ecosystems at the level of landscape has been so significant that a range of environmental scientists came together to produce an extensive edited volume theorizing novelty at this scale.[42] Here, researchers have identified the development of ecological novelties at the level of a particular landscape (e.g., on urban roofs or surprisingly lively brownfield sites) and the emergence of unexpected ecosystems with their own unanticipated (and perhaps less aesthetically pleasing) forms of equilibrium. These developments are less often linked at the level of local ecologies to more historically distant precedents, but in many ways, the sense of temporal disruption is shared.

The trouble here is that novel forms of equilibria and of life are emerging at the same time that familiar forms of both equilibria and life—"flight ways"—are experiencing mass death and decline. We find increasingly pronounced indicators of extinction and in response put more energy into the formation of culturally situated ways to process and respond to mass death, including

religious forms of ritual and lament. At the same time, our barely managed discomfort at the sharp increase of species and habitat loss is compounded by the arrival of new life-forms. In marked contrast to the naive optimism of our nineteenth-century lay-scientific predecessors—who formed "introduction societies" to introduce flora and fauna poached while traveling abroad to British parks, now often enclosed as botanical gardens—we Anthropocene dwellers can find ecological novelty unsettling and unwelcome, something around which to design interventions. What we confront in our response to these manifold appearances and disappearances is not just a matter of concurrency but also of intensification. These incursions of death and novel life in an age of extinctions can be sudden, unexpected, and accelerating. This presents a kind of double disorientation, as we concurrently grapple with phenomena arriving and disappearing in such sharp ways.

My reason for noting this juxtaposition between concurrent ecological departures and arrivals is that conservation efforts can be framed in multiple ways: Is conservation about holding back decline? Or is it about preventing the emergence of novelty? These are two different kinds of work, but they are often deployed in an entangled way, and the conservative expression of this reaction—especially when regimes of suspicion, control, and eradication are directed at new arrivals, as my coauthor, Skrimshire, observes—is not always benign. Moreover, I would suggest that the work of finding an appropriate response to the appearance of novel forms of life is intertwined with our attempts to fashion a response to other forms of encroaching novelty (e.g., cultural, religious, etc.).

One can find an example of this symmetry in the response to postsecular religion. The results of a quick internet search for the terms *religion* and *extinction* will reveal that the secularization thesis still holds strong in certain digital quarters. Across chat boards and news media, the rise of religious nonaffiliation is often

taken as an indication that religion is facing a similar existential threat of extinction.[43] There is no denial that particularly in Europe, affiliation with institutional religions and weekly attendance at places of worship are generally in decline. Yet here, too, we find the confluence of a perceived decline-toward-extinction with the emergence of novel forms. This can be seen particularly in the rise of new religions, which, though numerically small, are nonetheless a significant phenomenological challenge to the notion of a secular nonreligious future. Further, as the study of lived religion has emphasized, experimentation, bricolage, and novelty—unexpected encounters—are at the core of everyday religion for many practitioners of supposedly "traditional" religion in the twenty-first century, as well. This can be seen in the increased number of people who will claim adherence to a religion while not attending weekly worship, a phenomenon Grace Davie calls "believing without belonging."[44] So, we find the perception of religion in decline in tension with the proliferation of novel forms of belonging and belief; our perception of decline is complicated by the appearance of new forms of religious life. Here, too, novelty—what I have called *folk religion*—both in the context of playful approaches to well-established religions and in the appearance of new religions, is often (perhaps ironically) not seen as welcome but is instead subjected to contestation, eradication, or control.

THEORIZING AT THE CONFLUENCE OF NOVEL LIFE AND MASS DEATH

In my arguments so far, I have called for a reorientation toward novel presences, especially inasmuch as our attitudes toward new life are sharpened by the specter of extinction. Furthermore, I have suggested that attitudes toward religion and ecology, especially as they both experience similar disorientations, have some symmetries, particularly in the conservative ethos that seeks to

avoid or contest unexpected and novel phenomena. The kind of reorientation that I want to argue for should, I hope, be the embrace of new modes of care and collaboration, what the editors of one volume call the *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*.[45] With many of the other authors in this volume, I want to suggest that religion has much to offer as we seek to find viable theoretical frameworks amid the paradoxes of extinction. What I want to prescribe is not simply the appropriation of religious practices, such as lament, in new formulations—though these are definitely welcome. What I would like to suggest is that a turn to religions in the midst of extinction offers us an opportunity to acknowledge the inextricably cultural aspect of our responses to the "scientific" phenomena of ecological decline and extinction and to think in more critical ways *about* the form and content of the practices we adopt.

I have already hinted that part of my emphasis on providing a place for novelty can be described as reaching for a kind of Queer ecology. This is one key starting point toward my suggestion that we need to adopt new forms of care and collaboration. A range of scholars including Morton have called for precisely this kind of thing—particularly because Queer ecology can help us attend to the radical otherness of the unexpected other, even as we seek to repair our damaged planet through fuller collaboration with nonhuman forms of life. What has not been emphasized as fully is the potential for a Queering, not just of relations and spaces, but also of temporality. This is important given the many ways that the various phenomena I have engaged with so far—rituals of lament, conservation strategies, attitudes toward novel ecosystems, and so on—confront us most sharply in terms of the ways in which we reckon with time. So, in my call for a new attention to the place of emergence and novelty, I want to emphasize how this appeal is for a temporal reorientation away from a focus on the past and its ability to determine our present and toward an indeterminate future and the forms of cosmopolitics that can grasp

at the ways that our present situation is a matter of unexpected "becoming."[46] What I'd like to tentatively suggest is that we need to connect process philosophy with Queer temporalities.[47]

In one classic treatment, in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Hans Blumenberg suggests that a defining feature of late modernity is the attempt to flatten out our understanding of time into a linear sense. Blumenberg and Reinhart Kosselek suggest that this reorientation occurs in the nineteenth century. Fundamental to this kind of time reckoning, which sees time as extending outward in a linear way (potentially in engagement with some form of "progress"), is the identification of a "zero point." This is a point in which all subsequent things find their reference and flow forth.[48] Whereas Christian theology has historically identified the Christ event as a zero point (leading to the formation of *BC* and *AD*), modernity supplants this notion, taking revolution as its founding moment, whatever that revolution happens to be, as the new zero point. As Karl Marx observes, "Just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and in this borrowed language."[49]

The point here to be appreciated is that many quite different political philosophies share this linear orientation. One moves forward into the future with some deference toward the traditions of the past, all while assuming that there is only one temporal horizon, which, while complex and textured, is nonetheless shared and experienced by all life. We can see the imprint of this way of thinking in the well-embedded emphasis in conservation biology on the normativity of past ecosystem states. What Blumenberg and many other philosophers of history observe is that subsequent ideologies, such as Marxism or, in my way of thinking, conservation biology, simply take the linear orientation and

shift the normative zero point to some other position. At the heart of these reactions is the observation that the revolutionary aspect of modern discovery tends to generate and reify its own sense of subsequent historicity. This is what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have called the "invention of tradition." To get back to my wider argument, in the context of this kind of temporality, we find that a constructed notion of tradition is used to defend the programs of a current regime from the threats posed by new approaches and phenomena. I would assert that this is the source of the broader cultural reflex that can be found in the struggles of conservationists to integrate novel species in the midst of decline and also with the ways that new religious expressions, including those being formulated in response to mass extinction, struggle to be even categorized as religious.

Seen in this way, reactions to extinction mobilize an intertwined set of commitments. History and the instruments of (albeit selective) archaeological excavation of these pasts can serve as a key ideological tool for hegemonic regimes of control and management.[50] We can find a shared ethos—*Things should continue this way because they have always been this way*—across a number of different domains; as examples, consider the matter of preserving statues of slave traders in public places as "history," the assumption that the use of fossil fuels for transportation is inevitable, the resistance to new forms of liturgy and ritual, or the attempt to preserve familiar species regardless of their impact on a given ecology. My emphasis on folk religion and folk science represents a deliberate attempt to challenge the institutional enclosure of both religion and science.

Novelty and the unexpectedly present *other* is often framed as encroaching on this repristinated past and subsequently managed present. There have been a variety of attempts to undermine the normativity of history when it is used in this sense. One exemplary account is the work of French Caribbean writer, poet, philosopher, and literary critic Édouard Glissant, who coins the term

nonhistory in reaction. Glissant argues for a more encompassing philosophy of history that can still do the possibly restorative and creative work of collective memory. He also observes that our different histories, just like our different social experiences, can vary quite widely, not just in content but also in structure. Afro-Caribbean history, he notes, is not simply linear in the way that white history tends to present itself; it is a "history characterised by ruptures."[51] The challenge that Glissant issues is for white historians and historiographers to set aside what they think of as history and pluralize it.[52]

It was a similar sort of anxiety about history—or (anti)history that is not "regulated by archetypes," as Mircea Eliade said—that led to a program to recover the temporalities of so-called traditional societies.[53] Eliade argued that these societies worked with a cyclical temporal myth of "eternal return" and that this could offer a kind of countertemporality to overly linear and progress-oriented accounts of time that can underwrite technocratic destruction of the biosphere.[54] There are problems with Eliade's account, particularly the homogenization and simplification of "traditional" societies (which is subject to helpful critique in the chapter by Leduc), but this program has proven influential.[55] For my own constructive account, I want to affirm the kind of critique being offered, which calls for a reconsideration of temporality, but follow Glissant instead of Eliade and explore whether and how we might look toward the future in a more anarchistic and nondetermined—perhaps even utopian—way.

It is important to emphasize that I do not mean to suggest that we should watch the passage of anthropogenic extinction and mass death with benign acceptance. There is room for contestation of extinction rather than acceptance in this way of thinking, precisely because this is a (playful) counternarrative. As I see it, the upside of this kind of cosmopolitical approach is that it offers a dual engagement with these themes of extinction both in play or experimentation *and* lament. In this way of thinking, as

Anna Tsing puts it, "freedom emerges from open-ended cultural interplay, full of potential conflict and misunderstanding. I think it exists only in relation to ghosts. Freedom is the negotiation of ghosts on a haunted landscape; it does not exorcise the haunting but works to survive and negotiate it with flair."[56] There is an aspect here of, as Haraway puts it, "making-with" or "staying with the trouble" of environmental degradation in order to resist the "the horrors of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene."[57] By embracing novelty, we open up a more provisional and proximate historical anchoring, a kind of *being with* whatever sort of "oddkin" we find ourselves sitting next to.[58] But taking up this different kind of frame does necessitate a similarly different kind of engagement with loss.

I think that this work of reckoning with loss can be opened up in significant ways if we accept that it will have a religious valence (taking the term *religious* in its widest possible definition): an awareness of and desire to grapple with fleeting presence and haunting, ritual engagement with the dead and an openness to connection with an unexpected and lively biosphere across transcendent avenues of relation. There are battle lines within religious studies to be aware of here—in particular, a tendency to claim dynamism and flexibility as a characteristic exclusive to certain forms of religion. In one example, Bron Taylor has advanced an argument for "deep green" religion, suggesting that implicit and new religious movements have greater flexibility and thus enable more radical forms of environmental work. Fieldwork with Christian activists seems to contest this suggestion, however. As highlighted in the chapter by Nita, her ethnographic research has found a range of more hybrid configurations at work. What I am getting at here is that it is not merely enough to make the environmental humanities more religious or to promote more frequent engagement by environmental charities with religions. There is a need to engage with contemporary sociology of religion in order to grasp at exactly what contemporary religions *are* and

then on this basis seek to reintegrate religion with these fields, including extinction studies.

In seeking to draw this chapter to a close, let me briefly summarize where I have gotten to so far. I think that the crucial task facing extinction studies is not merely confronting extinction as a simple phenomenon. There is a need to look at other intersecting (or intertwined) phenomena when one faces extinction. More specifically, I have suggested that one needs to understand the intertwining of response to mass death with the emergence of novel forms of life. This also makes it necessary to grapple with religion in a more complex way, not merely as something with instrumental value. In many ways, religious epistemologies help us to confront the extinction crisis, particularly if we broaden the scope of what we mean by *religions* and ensure that the contents of this category are actively informed by everyday experience. I would also urge readers to consider how generous expectations can reveal forms of everyday religious performance, belief, and experience that are far more improvisatory, playful, and ad hoc than one might expect.

In light of this renewed and broadened attention to religion in an age of extinctions and my earlier comments regarding the intertwining of these fields of religion and extinction, it is interesting to observe a possible pattern wherein (as is the case with our glacier ceremony) religious performance follows environmental decline. There is something intuitive about the grasping toward ritual and religious alterities that has begun to surface in various contexts, from activist front lines to weekly worship. In this way, I want to celebrate the work being done by Icelandic mourners at the edge of Okjökull.

This reassessment of religion, especially in terms of its everyday character, and my related emphasis on lay experience and forms of expertise resonate with a much broader interdisciplinary reconfiguration underway, which has also prompted reconsiderations of the notion of *expertise* and, by extension, configurations

of hierarchy and power relations in conservation science. There is a claim to be made for much more robust integration and exchange between these two fields of knowledge (e.g., ecology and the study of religion), particularly in "tricky" spaces like extinction studies. One benefit that religious studies may bring to the mass extinction crisis, as several of my coauthors observe, is explicit permission to give our attention to affective responses and spaces in the midst of what we are bearing witness to.

There is a corresponding need to offer constructive critique of the ritual responses to environmental crises that ensue, including the new proliferation of rituals of loss and lament. I have highlighted two specific issues that bear further scrutiny as they arise in this particular expression of lament: My first concern lies in the proliferation of forms of proleptic elegy and other related forms of mourning of losses that are not losses. While on one hand, I want to affirm this new emphasis on the ritual arts relating to mass death, on the other hand, I want to also draw attention to the dynamics of privilege that are at play here and, by extension, the incidence of fetishization and appropriation of rituals of lament that have been fashioned by those who are not privileged and live at the more acute end of ecological impact. I think that we should definitely take note of the salience of the collective trauma endured by Black people, Indigenous people, and Persons of Color and its sharpening in the context of mass extinction, but white scholars (like me) should be careful not to seek to step into that experience without also interrogating the tacit modes of fragility and guilt that will arise alongside their affective response to extinction.

My second concern relates to the problems that lurk in our construction of the subject of lament, particularly in the latent assumption that the object of lament must be assimilated or destroyed. I think that mass extinction has generated a very real need to contend with ghosts, and the function of lament, as Nita suggests, is not merely therapeutic. While many scholars have

drawn attention to the spectral quality of extinction, I want to place particular emphasis on how this is not merely metaphorical. I want to argue for abjection and melancholia not in a way that centers the impacted human person but in one that centers the other-than-human victims of extinction. This is a situation where relationship, attention, and care can and should persist beyond the horizon of death, and I would argue that religion provides resources here that may require reintroduction. We experience and should seek continued communion with those things that are "gone" beyond the human.

Contrary to Freud's theory of grief, I want to argue that if we are able to provide space for those beings who have died, this will also open up our relations for those who continue to live, including those who arise unexpectedly and whose lively presence may initially seem unwelcome. Developing a holistic orientation toward novel life is equally crucial in this Anthropocene age of mass extinctions. And achieving this requires some careful critical thinking about our temporalities. Against certain forms of nostalgia that center the self and fixate on invented traditions and imagined histories, we may draw some benefit from the nonhistory of Glissant. So, in my suggestion that we pursue process-oriented philosophies, I do not propose that we abandon history, but rather that we take up practices of history that take seriously the limits of our horizons and leave open possibilities for the future.

In several decades, when I am able to return to my mountains and their lurking glaciers, when I can venture back into the North Cascades and sit at the mountain's edge where my glaciers once sat, I hope that I can sit with my two sons and that we can tune our attention to those massive beings that have departed and attend to how their spectral presence continues to press upon those mountains with their silence. I hope that we can inhabit all the feelings that arise from that continued communion, including rage at the indifference of generations that altered a global

climate system and destroyed them preternaturally. But I also hope that we can inhabit that new world together. Fundamentally, I hope that this inhabitation of a world scarred by mass extinction is one characterized by new forms of solidarity—a world where justice is sought while knowledge of the differential experiences of oppression and privilege is maintained, a world that stretches across the boundaries of life and death and where we are able to *feel* the full spectrum of loss together.

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NOTES

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7. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 16.

8. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 18.

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10. I provide further commentary on some of these configurations in "Mapping the Field of Religious Environmental Politics," *International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (March 2000), https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz255.

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22. Elissa Marder, "Mourning, Magic and Telepathy," *Oxford Literary Review* 30, no. 2 (December 2008): 185.

23. Marder, "Mourning," 185.

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26. Marder, "Mourning," 185.

27. Jacques Derrida, "Fors: Les Mots Anglés De Nicolas Abraham Et Maria Torok," in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xvi.

28. Derrida, "Fors," xvi–xvii.

29. Timothy Morton, "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 125, no. 2 (2010): 251. Thanks are due to David Farrier for pointing me toward Morton's work on elegy.

30. Morton, "Guest Column," 253.

31. Morton, "Guest Column," 255.

32. Courtney O'Dell-Chaib, "The Shape of This Wonder? Consecrated Science and New Cosmology Affects," *Zygon* 54, no. 2 (2019): 4.

33. O'Dell-Chaib, "The Shape of This Wonder?," 388.

34. O'Dell-Chaib, presentation at European Academy of Religion (2019), unpublished, 9.

35. O'Dell-Chaib, presentation at European Academy of Religion (2019), unpublished, 10.

36. I take the term *flight ways* from Thom van Dooren, who uses it to refer to a more expansive sense of "species" in light of relationships, novelty, and extinction, in his book *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2014).

37. On this, see R. J. Hobbs, Eric Higgs, and Carol M. Hall, eds., *Novel Ecosystems: Intervening in the New Ecological World Order* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

38. P. V. Wheatley et al., "Estimating Marine Resource Use by the American Crocodile *Crocodylus Acutus* in Southern Florida," *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 447 (2012): 211–229, https://doi.org/10.3354/meps09503.

39. Brian R. Silliman et al., "Are the Ghosts of Nature's Past Haunting Ecology Today?," *Current Biology* 28, no. 9 (2018): R533–534.

40. Silliman et al., "Are the Ghosts," R534.

41. Shahid Naeem, "Ecosystem Consequences of Biodiversity Loss: The Evolution Of A Paradigm," Ecology 83, no. 6 (2002).

42. Hobbs et al., *Novel Ecosystems*.

43. cf. Daniel M. Abrams and Haley A. Yaple, "Dynamics of Social Group Competition: Modeling the Decline of Religious Affiliation," *Physical Review Letters* 107 (2011).

44. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994).

45. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

46. Kidwell, "Re-Enchanting Political Theology," *Religions* 10, no. 10 (September 2019).

47. I am indebted to the work of Catherine Keller, Isabelle Stengers, and William E. Connolly, which has brought insights from the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, particularly around his later work *Process and Reality* (1929), back into the frame of scholarly discussion around ecotheology and environmental philosophy. Space in this chapter does not permit a proper summary of how process philosophy has reemerged in this particular scholarly context, but I hope to provide some preliminary suggestions here as to how we might understand religion not just as a form of social organization but as a more dynamic social *process* in this chapter.

48. Peter Osborn, *Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2011), 67.

49. Cited in Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 93.

50. See Skrimshire, chapter 5, this volume, for more on this point.

51. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), xxxii.

52. I provide further engagement with Glissant's work and Afro-Carribean philosophy of history in "Reconfiguring Deep Time," *Worldviews* 26, no. 3 (2022): 216–227.

53. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), xi.

54. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, xi.

55. For more on Eliade's account of temporality, see Simone Kotva, "Cosmopolitical Spiritualities of Deep Time: Reading J. G. Ballard's Mystical Impulse," *Worldviews* 26, no. 3 (2022): 228–241.

56. Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*, 76.

57. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

58. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.