

Insurgent Ecologies

Alexandra Campbell, Fred Carter

The last year has marked an atmospheric shift in critical discourses around climate crisis. The increasing intersection of ongoing uprisings and struggles has not only rendered increasingly legible the structural oppressions that manifest as a “total climate” (Sharpe 2017) of uneven and racialized environmental violence but has also drawn emergent tactics and strategies of collective resistance to the surface. While convergent forms of resistance to settler colonialism and fossil capital have articulated relations between insurgency and ecology in the climate movement, we have seen a correlative shift toward discussions of tactics and terrains of struggle in the environmental humanities (Malm 2021). Nevertheless, almost a decade after Rob Nixon’s decolonial reframing of ecocriticism toward an “environmentalism of the poor” (2013; Guha & Alier 1997), the political and theoretical topography of the field remains conspicuously unchanged. Against continuing critical preoccupations with new nature writing, we draw on environmental history, decolonial Marxism, and Black ecologies to establish alternative terrains of environmental resistance as grounds for reworking ecocritical study and practice. In this respect, “Insurgent Ecologies” seeks to examine historical instances of riot and resistance in and against their environments. From the 1992 LA uprising to the Standing Rock protests in 2016, the project frames insurrections as weather events or “microclimates” (Sharpe 2017) that capture the broader atmospheric dynamics of the racial capitalocene (Verges 2017). Reading insurgency, then, asks how thinking through environmentalism from below turns our attention to sites of struggle otherwise unrecognised in the environmental humanities.

This project is framed around two core research strands. First, we aim to examine what politics, potentialities, and ecologies emerge from insurrectionary action. Our research follows three material lines of inquiry by tracing atmospheric, water, and acoustic ecologies across multiple historical sites of revolt. To date, our work has examined how breath and breathability are positioned within the space of the riot as the locus of state violence, volumetric control, and ecological collapse. In doing so, we adopt Christina Sharpe’s heuristic of “antiblack weather” (2016) to interrogate the atmospheric conditions of what Franz Fanon termed “combat breathing” (1970). Working to displace the “aura of spectacle” (Tehrani 2017) and event-based logic by which policing frames insurrection as a singular crisis, we read teargas as a mode of atmospheric violence continuous with slower forms of toxic unbreathability and environmental racism. Extending this political ecology of the riot form, this project examines how environmental struggles over water supply and acoustic environments also situate elemental materialities as vectors of repression and resistance. Second, we aim to build on the material framework developed in order to establish a literary and environmental history of insurrection and counterinsurgency. Attending to the forms of sabotage, revolt, and refusal that Saidiya Hartman describes as “the social poesis of the dispossessed” (2019) alongside the environmental histories and socio-atmospherics of state control also uncovers an ecopoetic counter-canon in which poesis appears as an insurrectionary mode of worldmaking. While reading ecopoetics through militancy underscores “struggle as *poesis*” (Diamanti and Simpson 2018), by situating this project within an interdisciplinary research context, we also hope to develop this emerging critical standpoint toward a broader understanding of how “knowledges born in the struggle” (de Sousa Santos and Meneses 2019) might reframe study in the environmental humanities.