



Lecture Series: New Developments in Theory

PHOSPHATE FUTURES

TRACING ELEMENTAL FLOWS FROM THE WESTERN
SAHARA TO THE GREENLAND ICE SHEET

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We tend to term The Great Acceleration in the language of fossil fueled globalization. In that story, climate conflict resolution largely involves altering the energy sources responsible for the unintended consequences of modernity. But the hegemony of fossil fuels involves an entire world of materials drawn into our extractive epoch, and hence too the cultural geographies grounding its contestation. This talk pays attention to one that has largely gone unnoticed. The lion's share of internationally traded phosphorous comes from a small region of occupied territory in the Western Sahara. Without this mineral, industrial agriculture all over the world would slow to a halt. Unlike the extraction of fossil fuels, phosphate production has gone mostly unconsidered in relation to the metrics around which we have come to worry over planetary political ecologies. Surprising to me is that the unabated availability of phosphorous for international agribusiness depends on the continued suppression of an indigenous socialism vying for sovereignty in what is currently Moroccan territory. But also, that phosphorous is a key trigger for a range of harmful algae blooms across the hydrosphere. I ask: under what conditions does this banal material get dug up from the earth? Is Laâyoune, Western Sahara, an Anthropocene capital like Greenland and the Great Barrier Reef? And what else of the present becomes legible if we read the animated landscapes unearthed by petroculture through the elemental inscription of phosphorous?

JEFF DIAMANTI is Assistant Professor of Environmental Humanities (Cultural Analysis & Philosophy) at the University of Amsterdam. He is the author of *Climate and Capital in the Age of Petroleum: Locating Terminal Landscapes* (Bloomsbury 2021) and co-editor of *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader* (Bloomsbury 2014), *Materialism and the Critique of Energy* (MCM' Press 2018), *Energy Culture: Art and Theory on Oil and Beyond* (West Virginia University Press 2019), and *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx* (Bloomsbury 2018), as well as a special issue of *Reviews in Cultural Theory* on "Energy Humanities." He co-directs the ASCA Political Ecologies Seminar with Joost de Bloois, and with Amanda Boetzkes, he co-organizes "At the Moraine," an ongoing research project on the political ecology of glacial retreat in the Arctic. His new research, *Bloom Ecologies*, details the return to natural philosophy in the marine and atmospheric sciences studying the interactive dynamics of the cryosphere and hydrosphere in the North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean.