

SPECIAL SECTION ON REPRESENTATIONS OF HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL VULNERABILITY IN NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE

Guest editors:

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center somberly inaugurated the new millennium, critical discourses on trauma, grieving and vulnerability have gained relevance in the academic sphere. The global dimension of these events was however based on their mediatic repercussions worldwide, rather than on the actual physical impact that they had on the world population. Throughout the following two decades of the twenty-first century, intersecting environmental, economic and technological developments into globalization are revealing a heightened awareness of a similarly global vulnerability that visibilize embodied forms of ongoing trauma, public grieving and structural oppression of precarious life forms and environmental conditions. These stand against the backdrop of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4th IR), which is ambiguously put forward as either the origin or solution of this situation. The last two years of pandemic have intensified the interdependence of virtual connection and social alienation/exclusion relating techno-digital hyperconnectedness and embodied forms of existence, giving a new sense to the concept of “risk society” developed at the turn of the century (Beck 1992; Giddens 1998).

This special issue critically explores the forms of human and environmental vulnerabilities that are generated in the context of the 4th IR, including vulnerable forms of human and non-human intersubjectivity such as online embodied (onlife) interfaces or “inforgs” (Maynard 2015), precarious life and working conditions resulting from the global dimension of the 4th IR, environmental forms

of vulnerability in the 4th IR, the role of the pandemic in raising awareness about global vulnerability, or the hierarchical naturecultures (Haraway 2003) emerging from transhumanist ethics. It includes articles on literary discourses that represent human and environmental vulnerabilities as the object of aesthetic spectacularization (Garland Thomson 1997, 2017) in an information-saturated trade market, with special incidence on forms of human vulnerability based on economic and environmental precariousness (Butler 2004; 2009; Butler et al. 2016; Butler 2020) as well as disability. This issue also explores the instrumentalization as a narrative prosthesis (Mitchell and Snyder 2000) of human and ecological vulnerability as in the construction of the transhumanist ideologies underlying most of the 4th IR from a posthumanist critical perspective.

In this special issue, Rubén Peinado Abarrio presents a critical study of Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020) taking as a starting point the risk society and fragmentation in the digital area. Peinado Abarrio argues that Offill represents a critical posthumanist world which is in need of collective interdependence. Decolonial ecologies and the possibilities of resistance and hope in the context of the 4th IR are explored in Mónica Fernández Jiménez's article. She explores Edwidge Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013) in relation to the coloniality of climate and the blending of human and environmental narratives. Esperanza González Moreno combines Baudrillard's simulacra theory and Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis to support her main thesis of the effects of technology and the image in Ottessa Moshfegh's novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018). An interdisciplinary analysis is found in the article by Elena Anastasaki and Roula Kitsiou, who discuss the use of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) in Christina Dalcher's *Vox* in connection to women's vulnerability. Their examination of *Vox* works around the stances of silence and gender in a technologically-mediated world. Collective vulnerability and notions of mourning in a global pandemic context are discussed in Leonor Martínez Serrano's article on Goyette's *Solstice 2020: An Archive* (2021). She brings up concerns about

vulnerability in connection to the more-than-human world to emphasise Goyette's reflection on collectivity and vulnerability at complex and unprecedented times such as the COVID19 pandemics the world encountered in 2020.

All these contributions provide highly valuable insights into the contemporary debate of how the 4th IR is transforming the way humans and non-humans live and interact whilst also creating new forms of vulnerabilities. The analysis of North American literary and cultural texts presented in this section opens numerous opportunities to discover and expand the debate from a posthuman and transhuman perspective in our current society.