

## Introduction

This book brings together environmental cultural studies and postgrowth economics to examine counterhegemonic narratives and radical cultural shifts sparked by the global financial crisis of 2008. Furthermore, it presents a new cross-disciplinary framework for illuminating the rise of this counterhegemonic culture in Spain as well as its ecological, social, and political implications. The explanations of the crisis offered by mainstream media identify economic meltdown and lack of growth as the main causes and point to the recovery of growth as the desirable solution. Yet a number of critical voices worldwide have emphasized that in the context of a finite biosphere, constant economic growth is a biophysical impossibility and systemic social and ecological limits to growth can no longer be ignored. The problem is not a lack of growth but rather the globalization of an economic system addicted to constant growth, which destroys the ecological planetary systems that support life on Earth while failing to fulfill its social promises. According to these alternative accounts of the financial crisis, what we are really facing is a crisis of the legitimacy of the growth paradigm in general and its current neoliberal articulations in particular. The global economic crisis is thus better defined as an ongoing crisis of the growth imaginary.

Post-2008 Spain, where the crisis of growth seems to be the new normal, offers an ideal context to investigate these cultural processes, and this book demonstrates that a transition towards what I call ‘postgrowth imaginaries’—the counterhegemonic cultural sensibilities that are challenging the growth paradigm in manifold ways—is well underway in the Iberian Peninsula today. Specifically, this book explores how emerging cultural sensibilities in Spain—reflected in fiction and nonfiction writing and film, television programs, photographs and graphic novels, op-eds, web pages, political manifestos, and socioecological movements—are actively detaching themselves from the dominant imaginary of economic growth and, in some cases, even articulating counterhegemonic postgrowth

narratives. Additionally, my research interrogates and redefines the role of cultural studies in understanding this shift towards postgrowth imaginaries, positing that these fundamental cultural changes can be better detected and understood in the light of concepts stemming from the rapidly emerging intellectual framework provided by the environmental humanities. This emergent field recognizes, on the one hand, that the humanities provide a crucial yet underappreciated resource for dealing effectively with the human roots of the socioenvironmental crisis and, on the other, that humanist disciplines must be radically transformed if they are to effectively engage in interdisciplinary dialogue with the ecological and social sciences. By approaching the counterhegemonic cultures of the crisis through environmental criticism, this book uncovers a whole range of cultural nuances often ignored by Iberian cultural studies.

*Postgrowth Imaginaries* exposes the socially and ecologically harmful dominant cultural imaginary that celebrates economic growth as an object of social desire and explores how an ecologically oriented criticism could play a significant role in both understanding and promoting the ongoing emergence of more desirable economic cultures in the aftermath of the neoliberal crisis. Although it draws its examples from Iberian cultural responses to the crisis, *Postgrowth Imaginaries* inevitably grapples with pressing issues that are global in nature. Currently, humanity faces many social and ecological limits to growth. Both inequality and ecological degradation have increased rapidly in recent decades, paralleling the global spread of neoliberalism and consumerist culture. Global economic activity bears responsibility for the massive alterations of Earth's ecological systems and their disturbing consequences: environmental refugees, climate change, mass extinctions, disruption of the nutrient cycle, and so on.

To continue to maintain that the pursuit of economic growth is the main objective of societies is not only unethical, but suicidal. I claim throughout this book that in a global context where economic growth is ever more socially and ecologically costly to sustain, maintaining a dominant imaginary that is deeply ingrained in the logic of growth can be extremely counterproductive, because it funnels societies' energy and creativity towards an unachievable and destructive task. The 'cruel optimism' of sustaining our society's affective, material, and semiotic attachment to the growth paradigm is becoming increasingly unaffordable and nonviable in every way—socially, economically, and ecologically.<sup>1</sup> As an alternative, I argue that transitioning towards postgrowth cultural imaginaries could allow us to envision and create 'prosperity without growth' by building

1 See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

desirable societies unaddicted to growth that operate within the ecological limits of the Earth.<sup>2</sup>

The complex interrelations among Iberian cultural practices, economic paradigms, and ecological processes are vastly undertheorized. This book intends to fill this gap and to provide an innovative and functional theoretical apparatus, articulated around the notion of postgrowth imaginaries, able to illuminate these important connections. My hope is that this intervention will contribute to a more systemic, posthumanist, and ecological understanding of culture that helps Iberian cultural studies to effectively mobilize its emancipatory political potential. I believe that, beyond Iberian/Peninsular/Spanish cultural studies, the notion of ‘postgrowth imaginaries’ will also prove useful to the field of cultural studies in general and will provide a valuable contribution to the transnational debates within the environmental humanities.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I believe the radical cultural change which I identify in this book is by no means limited to Southern Europe but rather represents a global pattern expressed around the world in different cultural fashions based on distinct historical conjunctions. Therefore, dialogue between the cultural critique developed in *Postgrowth Imaginaries* and similar cultural processes in other regions could further illuminate the unfolding global challenge to the dominant growth paradigm and its diverse articulations of alternative economic cultures. The notion of postgrowth imaginaries could even function as a conceptual anchor for a global coalition of socioecological movements united by their radical critique of neoliberal reason, enabling them to effectively mobilize their efforts to envision and materialize desirable and sustainable economic cultures beyond growth.

In the introduction to *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis*, Manuel Castells, João Caraça, and Gustavo Cardoso compellingly point out that cultural dynamics and institutions shape and determine economic systems: ‘As the period of triumphant global informational capitalism was linked to the hegemony of a culture of unrestricted individualism, economic liberalism, and technological optimism, any substantial socio-economic

2 See Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

3 I am fully aware of the debates, nuances, and contestations underpinning the terms ‘Iberian’, ‘Spanish’, and ‘Peninsular studies’. Although such distinctions are not relevant for the purposes of my book, I tend to be sympathetic with most developments within Iberian studies. I believe that it has the potential to become more transformative than other more traditional approaches, but I am also concerned about some scholarship within it, which seems to oppose some oppressive ideologies only to embrace other, equally oppressive and exclusive, ones.

restructuring of global capitalism implies the formation of a new economic culture'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently:

when there is a systemic crisis, there is indication of a cultural crisis, of non-sustainability of certain values as the guiding principle of human behavior ... Thus, only when and if a fundamental cultural change takes place will new forms of economic organization and institutions emerge, ensuring the sustainability of the evolution of the economic system.<sup>5</sup>

According to Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso, 'we may well be in such a period of historical transition'.<sup>6</sup> In this context, it is important to assess

the social productivity of different cultures emerging in the aftermath of the crisis. Which cultures will ultimately come to dominate social practice may determine our collective fate: either to enter a process of social disintegration and violent conflicts, or else to witness the rise of new cultures based on the use value of life as a superior form of human organization.<sup>7</sup>

Nothing guarantees a desirable outcome for this transition (the transition to a less intense energy regime is biophysically inevitable, justice is not). I will argue throughout this book that our best chances lie in imagining, creating, and supporting postcapitalist and decolonial economic cultures in which social equality and ecological diversity are prioritized over any other cultural values. The debilitation of the hegemonic imaginary of economic growth is not easily visible, of course, neither when deploying the pervasive lens offered by mainstream cultural narratives and authorities—since they tend to reproduce it—nor when studying cultural production within a given academic disciplinary framework embedded in neoliberal institutions and impregnated by 'ideological forces of disconnection'.<sup>8</sup> Rather, *Postgrowth Imaginaries* constructs an interdisciplinary (or, even better, an interdisciplinary) framework that is able to perceive the rifts that emerge from the collapsing dominant imaginary as they are reflected in cultural manifestations that are critically responding to the ongoing crisis.

4 Manuel Castells, João Caraça, and Gustavo Cardoso, eds., *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

5 Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso, *Aftermath*, 13.

6 Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso, *Aftermath*, 13.

7 Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso, *Aftermath*, 13.

8 Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 142.

I have divided the remainder of this introduction, which outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform the book, into three sections. The first is a discussion of environmental humanities and the Anthropocene (or, better, the Capitalocene), which provides the global critical context in which my work is embedded. Secondly, after defining the term ‘imaginary’ as used in this book, I draw on up-to-date insights from social and ecological sciences to explain why the dominant imaginary of economic growth is currently socially undesirable and ecologically unsustainable. Finally, I argue for the urgency of articulating and embracing an environmentally oriented cultural studies able to overcome the current crisis of political imagination and promote effective counterhegemonic cultures.

### Environmental Humanities in the Anthropocene

The term ‘Anthropocene’ was coined in 2000 by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to mark a new epoch in which human activity has unleashed a global biogeochemical force that is rapidly transforming the planet in ways that could compromise human survival.<sup>9</sup> Crutzen and Stoermer believe we are leaving the previous geological epoch, the Holocene, in which ecological conditions that permitted human civilization and agriculture to flourish were generally the norm. The new epoch does not guarantee a functional biosphere (from a human perspective, of course) capable of providing for human biophysical needs, given the massive ongoing anthropogenic changes. As a result of these transformations, ‘about 60% of ecosystem services are already degraded and will continue to degrade further unless *significant societal changes in values and management occur*’.<sup>10</sup> The 2014 report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) suggests that, if the current trend continues, humanity may face imminent catastrophic consequences.<sup>11</sup>

In 2009, a team of 29 scientists coauthored a paper entitled ‘A Safe Operating Space for Humanity’ in which they defined:

[Nine] planetary boundaries within which we expect that humanity can operate safely. Transgressing one or more planetary boundaries

9 Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, ‘The “Anthropocene”’, *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (May 2000): 17–18.

10 Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, ‘The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?’, *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (2007): 620; my emphasis.

11 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report* (2014), <http://ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr>.

may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change ... We estimate that humanity has already transgressed three planetary boundaries: climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, and changes to the global nitrogen cycle.<sup>12</sup>

They caution that, in the absence of radical changes in the way humans relate to the planet, some of the six other boundaries are likely to be crossed very soon. To mention just two disturbing facts from a long list: the rate at which biodiversity is being lost today is hundreds of times higher than in preindustrial times, and during the second half of the twentieth century the Earth lost one-fourth of its fertile soil and one-third of its forested surface.<sup>13</sup> The ongoing mass extinction of species is so dire that a 2017 scientific study on vertebrate population losses and declines defines it as ‘biological annihilation’.<sup>14</sup> It seems undeniable that, given capitalism’s implication in the ongoing massive and rapid destruction of the life-support systems upon which human survival depends, the only rational plan of action ‘is a radical change of course’.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, what we are witnessing in mainstream responses to the urgencies of the Anthropocene is a plethora of denials, in all shapes and sizes, that attempt to solve these problems by merely targeting their symptoms.

The combination of the ongoing globalizing dominant cultural and economic imaginary (neoliberal reason) and its associated material transformations is unsustainable; it is a biophysical impossibility that has all kinds of devastating social consequences, and thus it is crucial to understand ‘how globalization and global warming are born of overlapping processes’.<sup>16</sup> The problem is that we in the humanities have been trained to think about humans and their cultures, economies, societies, sciences, and histories as disconnected or separate from nonhuman systems, sciences, histories, and temporal scales. But all these distinctions collapse if we accept

12 Johan Rockström et al., ‘Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity’, *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009): 1–33.

13 David Becerra Mayor, Raquel Arias Careaga, Julio Rodríguez Puértolas, and Marta Sanz Pastor, *Qué hacemos con la literatura* (Madrid: Akal, 2013), 9–10.

14 Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirzo, ‘Biological Annihilation Via the Ongoing Sixth Mass Extinction Signaled by Vertebrate Population Losses and Declines’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)* 114, no. 30 (2017): 6089–6096.

15 John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 426.

16 Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 200.

the implications of the Anthropocene. Considering humans as powerful geological agents is incompatible with maintaining the distinctions between natural and human histories.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, while it is widely recognized that collective human agency can radically transform the Earth, it is also possible that we may lack the political, legal, and cultural capacity to bring about that transformation in a desirable and democratic fashion, as legal scholar Jedediah Purdy has argued.<sup>18</sup> The fundamental question remains, 'What does it mean for the humanities to address the question of the Anthropocene?'<sup>19</sup> The responses are both highly contested and intellectually stimulating. Fortunately, a rapidly emerging interdisciplinary field, environmental humanities, is devoting its energy to answering this very question and exploring how to 'situate humans ecologically and nonhumans ethically'.<sup>20</sup>

The environmental humanities is a 'useful umbrella, bringing together many subfields that have emerged over the past few decades and facilitating new conversations between them'.<sup>21</sup> Some of these subfields include ecocriticism, environmental history and anthropology, critical geography, environmental journalism, and environmental philosophy. Until very recently, scholars in the humanities committed to coming to terms with the agency of the nonhuman in all human matters, as well as with the cultural dimensions of the ecological crisis, were often marginalized by the mainstream academic rigidity of their traditional departments. Many of them, for the sake of survival, were unable or unwilling to disrupt their departmental culture and therefore maintained many of the self-imposed epistemological limitations inherent in their humanistic fields. In the past few years, things have begun to change. Environmental humanities is creating an encouraging academic framework that is enabling these scholars to liberate themselves from the limits and isolation of their field and to connect with other disciplines, achieve professional legitimization (through new international journals, programs, grants, institutes, and research centers), and overcome many of the harmful mannerisms ingrained in their traditional disciplinary training. At the same time, many of the traditional disciplines are being transformed and enriched by participating in the

17 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 206.

18 See Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

19 Greg Garrard, Gary Handwerk, and Sabine Wilke, 'Imagining Anew: Challenges of Representing the Anthropocene', *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 149.

20 Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 239.

21 Deborah Bird Rose et al., 'Thinking through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities', *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2012): 5.

environmental humanities debate. More and more humanists are realizing that ‘any question of the Humanities is a question of its web of interdependencies: animals, technology, various environmental issues, etc.’<sup>22</sup>

Given that the concept of the Anthropocene and the notion of planetary boundaries emerged from ecological sciences, in particular earth system science, what kind of contribution can the humanities and social sciences make to these pressing issues? Assuredly an important one, as I hope to make clear in this book. Radical environmental social scientists offer valuable contributions in environmental sociology, urban and political ecology, ecolinguistics, and ecological economics, and this book will mobilize some concepts stemming from their work. The role of the humanities seems less obvious, but it should not be underestimated because, as Rob Nixon reminds us,

Stories matter—they matter immeasurably. Measurement, data, metrics, and modeling are the lucrative priorities of universities these days. In the face of this pressure to quantify, it is easy for humanities scholars to lose track of what they do best, such as explaining why telling a story one way as opposed to another can have profound imaginative, ethical, and political consequences.<sup>23</sup>

Nixon champions the idea of socioecological interdependency and explains the dangers of analyzing the Anthropocene story of anthropogenic ecological crisis from a merely quantitative perspective, without addressing the question of the unequal distribution of resources, responsibility, and vulnerability. He points out that:

the most influential Anthropocene intellectuals have sidestepped the question of unequal human agency, unequal human impacts, and unequal human vulnerabilities. If, by contrast, we take an environmental justice approach to Anthropocene storytelling, we can better acknowledge the way the geomorphic powers of human beings have involved unequal exposure to risk and unequal access to resources. In 2013, the world’s eighty-five richest people—a group small enough to fit into a double-decker bus, in the unlikely event that

22 Jussi Parikka and Annika Richterich, ‘A Geology of Media and a New Materialism’, *Digital Culture & Society* 1 (2015): 224.

23 Rob Nixon, ‘The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence: Vulnerability in the Anthropocene’, *Profession*, March 19, 2014, <https://profession.commons.mla.org/2014/03/19/the-great-acceleration-and-the-great-divergence-vulnerability-in-the-anthropocene/>.

they would be inclined to take a bus—had a net worth equal to that of fifty percent of the planet’s population, the 3.5 billion poorest people.<sup>24</sup>

When dealing with ‘the greatest crises of our time: the environmental crisis and the inequality crisis’, we cannot successfully target one without addressing the other:

The species-centered Anthropocene meme has arisen in the twenty-first century, a period in which most societies have experienced a deepening schism between the überraich and the ultrapoor. In terms of the history of ideas, what does it mean that the Anthropocene as a grand explanatory species story has taken hold during a plutocratic age? How can we counter the centripetal force of that dominant story with centrifugal stories that acknowledge immense disparities in human agency, impacts, and vulnerability?<sup>25</sup>

Here is where the humanities can play a unique role in critically understanding the discursive construction of the Anthropocene and pointing out its dangers and potentialities. Probably the best example of a critical corrective to the mainstream construction and co-option of the term can be found in the book *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* edited by Jason W. Moore.<sup>26</sup> Eileen Crist’s contribution provides a brilliant critique of the managerial and anthropocentric hegemonic worldviews that the term ‘Anthropocene’ entails.<sup>27</sup> The environmental humanities could pay close attention to (and enhance by dialoging with) the counter-narratives challenging hegemonic reason and exposing the fallacies of the dominant imaginary. Yet the role of environmental humanities and ecologically oriented cultural studies needs not be limited to criticism. Rather, it could become a creative force that contributes to the dissemination and promotion of postgrowth imaginaries that are socially desirable and ecologically sustainable.

In a recent essay, ‘Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities: Toward Critical Posthumanities for the Anthropocene’, Astrida Neimanis, Cecilia Åsberg, and Johan Hedrén elaborate on how environmental humanities is well suited to deal with ‘four problems that currently frame our relation to the environment, namely: alienation and intangibility;

<sup>24</sup> Nixon, ‘The Great Acceleration’.

<sup>25</sup> Nixon, ‘The Great Acceleration’.

<sup>26</sup> Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Eileen Crist, ‘On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature’, in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 14–33.

the post-political situation; negative framing of environmental change; and compartmentalization of “the environment” from other spheres of concern’.<sup>28</sup> All of these problems are central in articulating a transformative ecocritical approach to Iberian literary and cultural studies. In this light, the environmental humanities and posthumanism should be understood not merely as aiming a humanist lens at the ecological crisis, but as turning an ecological lens on the humanities as well, for the humanities have been part of the problem of theoretically separating humans from the nonhuman and culture from nature, focusing on the former at the expense of the latter. Of course, this has potentially enormous political, material, and cultural consequences, for the focus of attention influences perception and, more importantly, determines the blind spots in our observations. Thus, a transformative environmental (post)humanism entails advancing ‘a different mode of thought’, one that accounts for material and nonhuman agency in relation to human political and aesthetic limits and possibilities.<sup>29</sup> In short, ‘the decentering of the human by its imbrications in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore’, and thus ‘the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist’.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that Spanish cultural and literary studies are either actively avoiding this debate or, worse, unable to recognize the pervasive ‘hyperobjects’, such as global warming, that Timothy Morton describes as being ‘massively distributed in time and space relative to humans’.<sup>31</sup> In any case, I hope we start paying much greater attention to the cultural narratives that are connecting social and ecological issues. Otherwise, we will remain passive spectators in the events that will radically modify our cultural imagination in the future. Therefore, I encourage Iberian cultural scholars to participate now in the environmental humanities debate and not to shy away from breaking with rigid academic practices that prevent us from focusing on vital ecocritical issues by entwining us in often pointless and politically toothless intellectual games.

28 Astrida Neimanis, Cecilia Åsberg, and Johan Hedrén, ‘Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities: Toward Critical Posthumanities for the Anthropocene’, *Ethics & Environment* 20, no. 1 (2015): 69.

29 Hannes Bergthaller et al., ‘Mapping Common Ground: Ecocriticism, Environmental History, and the Environmental Humanities’, *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 265.

30 Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv–xvi.

31 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1.

## The Dominant Imaginary of Economic Growth and Its Social and Ecological Crises

The term ‘imaginary’, as I will use it throughout this book, was coined by Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis referring to what he calls ‘imaginary social significations’.<sup>32</sup> For Castoriadis, all social realities are constructed according to pervasive dominant conceptions and postulates about humans and their relations to each other and the world. These conceptions influence every aspect of society. Imaginary social significations re-create meaning (and thus reproduce themselves) without necessarily considering complex social and ecological processes and changes that might bring about clear dysfunctions in their meaning-making capabilities. For example, neoliberal imaginaries operate by reducing social reality to certain social aspects (competing individuals trying to maximize their economic gains in the context of a capitalist market economy) or by attributing rationality only to certain human actors making non-emotional economic decisions (ignoring the fact that studies in neuropsychology have suggested that human intelligence is always emotional). These imaginaries have widespread material and semiotic consequences.

The currently dominant capitalist imaginary equates progress with constant economic development and growth and assumes that ‘unlimited growth of production and of the productive forces is *in fact* the central objective of human existence’.<sup>33</sup> Castoriadis has identified what he considers to be the four most important postulates attached to this capitalist imaginary social signification: ‘1) the virtual “omnipotence” of technology; 2) the “asymptotic illusion” relating to scientific knowledge; 3) the “rationality” of economic mechanisms; and 4) various assumptions about humanity and society’.<sup>34</sup> To maintain itself, this imaginary social signification requires that no absolute limits to growth be recognized, no matter how counterintuitive that may be in the context of a finite and ecologically depleted biosphere. Nevertheless, social and ecological limitations obviously exist, and thus ‘where they present themselves, have a negative value and must be transcended’.<sup>35</sup> For Castoriadis, then, social reality constructs itself, materially and symbolically, in the image of the

32 See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

33 Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘Reflections on Rationality and Development’, *Thesis Eleven* 10–11 (1984–1985): 24.

34 Castoriadis, ‘Reflections on Rationality and Development’, 29.

35 Castoriadis, ‘Reflections on Rationality and Development’, 25.

dominant imaginary of the time, grossly ignoring, avoiding, dispossessing, disciplining, or even criminalizing whatever or whomever does not fit within its predetermined framework. But what happens when nonhuman agency becomes more difficult to ignore and challenges, contradicts, and ultimately makes impossible what the dominant imaginary considers to be the main goal of humanity, that is, economic growth? Or what happens, for that matter, when biophysical circumstances make global growth so socially and ecologically costly, devastating, and disrupting that its association with human progress can no longer be maintained? When that occurs—and I believe that the emerging narratives of the Anthropocene and the transgression of planetary boundaries suggest that it is already happening—it will only be a matter of time before those four postulates supporting the capitalist imaginary begin to collapse.

Complementary to Castoriadis's notion of the dominant imaginary are Antonio Gramsci's theorizations on capitalist power's dependence on 'hegemony—the engineering of consent according to the dictates of a particular group. A hegemonic project builds a “common sense” that installs the particular worldview of one group as the universal horizon of an entire society'.<sup>36</sup> Once this dominant rationality infiltrates societal institutions (educational, political, economic), cultural values, urban planning, and lifestyles, the hegemonic common sense reproduces itself as it defines the organization of society and normalizes (masks) its ideology as ahistorical and politically neutral. Challenging the hegemonic ideology becomes more difficult as it constrains thought and action outside its self-imposed limitations. A paradigmatic example is the difficulty of criticizing capitalism in academia: anti-capitalism is perceived as a radical intellectual position while supporting capitalism, an ideology that is changing the biophysical conditions that defined the Holocene and is threatening life on Earth, is considered a moderate decision! Currently, most thinkable social problems and solutions, as well as future horizons, only exist within the pre-established parameters of the hegemonic ideology, which demand that no matter the consequences, economic growth must go on. This limits the political imagination that allows societies to reinvent themselves, even in the face of imminent civilizational collapse. Prosperity without growth cannot be imagined when the hegemonic ideology is so invested in the 'grow or perish' paradigm. But what happens when the agency of the nonhuman clearly indicates that the new rules of the game in the Anthropocene are just the opposite: degrow or perish?

<sup>36</sup> Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (London: Verso, 2015), 132.

The degrowth movement, largely influenced by Castoriadis's insights, is currently doing an admirable job of both exposing the ecological devastation and social corrosion brought about by the hegemonic obsession with growth and proposing new imaginaries. Degrowth, as its provocative name indicates, dares to challenge the dominant imaginary on its own terms by showing the multifarious negative consequences of the growth paradigm. Degrowth theorists, putting together Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary and the 'anti-imperialist anthropologies in relation to mentalities', insist on the need for a 'decolonization of the imaginary'.<sup>37</sup> Serge Latouche, one of the main promoters of this movement, asks the key question: How do we exit the dominant imaginary?<sup>38</sup> Latouche elaborates on the ways in which capitalist hegemony has colonized our mentality and considers that what is needed is nothing less than a cultural revolution that includes, following Castoriadis's lead, profound changes in our psychosocial organization—a new, emancipatory, imaginary. In other words, we are dealing with an epistemological crisis in which our modes of knowing and thinking are not only failing to help us function in the world, but also reducing the conditions necessary for the possibility of achieving a good life for most, or even our chances for survival in the future. Translating our epistemological habits into economic, quantitative, and mechanical metrics and analytical mathematical abstractions prevents us from grasping (or considering in our calculations) the relational, systemic, qualitative, and bodily properties of the world, a failure that in turn produces and aggravates economic, ecological, social, and ethical crises.<sup>39</sup>

The dominant growth imaginary is so pervasive that most people believe, despite all evidence to the contrary, that economic growth is the solution for almost all of society's ills.<sup>40</sup> This 'neoliberal fantasy' is reflected and ingrained in the dominant cultural imaginary as it is re-created, reproduced, and perpetuated over and over in media representations, institutional discourses, and daily speeches. It is the job of the environmental humanities to highlight what causes this collective inability to imagine a sustainable

37 Serge Latouche, 'Decolonization of Imaginary', in *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, ed. Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis (New York: Routledge, 2015), 119.

38 Serge Latouche, *La apuesta por el decrecimiento. ¿Cómo salir del imaginario dominante?*, trans. Patricia Astorga (Barcelona: Icaria, 2006), 143.

39 See Jordi Pigem, *La nueva realidad. Del economicismo a la conciencia cuántica* (Barcelona: Kairós, 2013).

40 Some of the ideas elaborated in this section first appeared in, and are paraphrased from my article 'An Economy Focused Solely on Growth Is Environmentally and Socially Unsustainable' (*The Conversation*, April 7, 2015).

future without economic growth in the Anthropocene. As social ecologists have long insisted, the problem arises from a logic that legitimizes structural social injustice and exploits both humanity and the nonhuman as mere economic resources to fuel constant economic growth in the context of a limited biosphere. By isolating human labor and depleting ecosystems, this capitalist rationality tends to destroy the source of all wealth, as Karl Marx taught us, and as today's radical ecological post-Marxist theorists are reminding us in diverse fashions (ecosocialists, ecofeminists, political ecologists). Presently, the global socioeconomic metabolism cannot grow much more, given the current ecological and energy situation, but needs instead to decrease significantly in order to become minimally sustainable: 'humanity needs to radically transform the global economy, reducing its size by at least one third—based on the conservative ecological footprint indicator, which finds that humanity is currently using the ecological capacity of 1.5 Earths'.<sup>41</sup> It has been foreseen since the 1960s that the model of economic growth, which neoliberalism would later embrace and globalize as an unquestioned faith, was doomed to run up against the biophysical limitations of the Earth. Titles such as *Limits to Growth* in the early '70s and *The Growth Illusion: How Economic Growth Enriched the Few, Impoverished the Many, and Endangered the Planet* in the early '90s have been beating the drum for decades.<sup>42</sup> Actually, John Stuart Mill already claimed in 1848 that a future economic tendency towards a stationary state would be both inevitable and desirable.<sup>43</sup>

Today it should be clear that there are many links between our society's addiction to economic growth, the disturbing ecological crisis, the rapid rise of social inequality, and the current decline in the quality of democracy. Spain is a valuable paradigm for exploring these interwoven issues playing out after 2008. Too often these issues tend to be explored as disconnected topics and misinterpreted or manipulated to match ideological preconceptions and prejudices. The fact is that they are deeply interconnected processes. Studies in the social sciences consistently show that in rich countries, greater economic growth does very little or nothing at all to enhance social

41 Erik Assadourian, 'The Path to Degrowth in Overdeveloped Countries', in *Worldwatch Institute, State of the World 2012: Moving Toward Sustainable Prosperity*, ed. Linda Starke (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2012), 24.

42 Donella Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); Richard Douthwaite, *The Growth Illusion: How Economic Growth Enriched the Few, Impoverished the Many, and Endangered the Planet* (Bideford: Green Books; Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992).

43 John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg, 2009).

well-being. On the contrary, reducing income inequality is the most effective way to resolve social problems such as violence, criminality, incarceration rates, obesity, and mental illness, as well as improving children's educational performance, overall life expectancy, social trust, and social mobility.<sup>44</sup> Comparative studies in epidemiology have found that societies that are more equal do much better in all the aforementioned areas than ones that are more unequal, independent of their GDP.<sup>45</sup> The focus of a successful social policy, therefore, should be to reduce inequality, not to grow GDP for its own sake. French economist Thomas Piketty, in his recent book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, has assembled extensive data that show how unchecked capitalism historically tends to increase inequality and undermine democratic practices, especially when the economy is shrinking—and in a limited biosphere, the economy can never grow indefinitely.<sup>46</sup>

If we consider the findings from the social and ecological sciences as a whole, a consistent picture emerges: constant economic growth is a biophysical impossibility in a limited biosphere, and the faster the global economy grows, the faster the living systems of the planet collapse. In addition, under neoliberal rules, this growth increases inequality and undermines democracy, multiplying the number of social problems that erode human communities and their quality of life. In a nutshell, we have created a dysfunctional economic system that, when it works according to its self-imposed mandate of increasing the pace of production and consumption, destroys the ecological systems upon which it depends; on the other hand, when the economic system fails to maintain that pace, it becomes socially unsustainable. In a game with these rules, there is no way to win!

To break this spiral of socioecological disaster, as I will show in the following chapters focused on post-2008 Spain, a new common sense needs to emerge: a postgrowth, decolonial, ecofeminist, posthumanist, and postcapitalist imaginary. This task, while not easy, is one to which the environmental humanities is well prepared to contribute. The ecological sciences are already doing their part by recording the disturbing anthropogenic environmental transformations occurring on a global scale. Environmental social scientists are doing their part too, by pointing out that the disproportionate socioeconomic activity that is

44 Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 3–45.

45 Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, 46–169.

46 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014).

disrupting the biogeochemical flows and cycles of the Earth system is associated with the evolution of a historically specific system of social reproduction and colonization, namely, capitalism. Now it is time for the environmental humanities to do its part and bring culture and its colorful palette into the picture. This will require a revealing investigation of the stories, narratives, and practices that support the pervasive ‘neoliberal fantasies’ of the dominant cultural imaginary that prevents us from thinking beyond growth (and beyond capitalism). It will also require further investigation into the ways in which neoliberalism remodels subjectivity (*à la* Foucault) and impedes the countless victims of its logic (the so-called ‘99 percent’) from thinking and acting outside of that logic. Lauren Berlant eloquently explains that ‘cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object’ or ‘a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic’.<sup>47</sup> Environmental humanities can provide insights into how dominant post-2008 Spanish cultural narratives of the crisis harbor—and how counterhegemonic narratives and practices challenge—a cruel optimism that embraces, desires, and celebrates economic growth even though the neoliberal promises attached to such growth are never fulfilled and the side effects are more and more socially corrosive and ecologically damaging.

As an imaginative exercise in escaping the logic of the dominant ‘neoliberal fantasies’ and their cruel optimism, let us assume that we all agree on some basic facts: first, that the biosphere contains and supports the living systems of the planet; second, that humans are one of the many species embedded in the biosphere and dependent upon its proper functioning; and, third, that an economic system is (or should be) a tool that humans deploy to organize their societies in a functional way. Based on these facts, the economy is a subsystem of the ecology, not the other way around. Mainstream economic models become dysfunctional because they start from the premise that societies and ecosystems must adapt to the market economy. If we begin to organize our priorities according to biophysical realities rather than market-oriented mandates, it quickly becomes clear that our dominant economic system is absurd and functionally obsolete, for it destroys the very ecosystems that are the source of its wealth. Our liberation lies in rejecting the cruel optimism promoted by neoliberal fictions and relinquishing the pursuit of economic growth. The goal of a desirable economic culture is to serve the well-being of

47 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

communities and ecosystems, not to accumulate capital. Of course, in order to be effective in influencing and modifying the dominant imaginaries we must trigger a collective and massive mobilization, and it must occur at a transnational scale, given that neoliberal fantasies and their cruel optimism are the current globalizing hegemonic ideology.

Once we acknowledge the biophysical and social limits of growth, the next step is to embrace ecological economics (as opposed to neoclassical and neoliberal economics) as the appropriate tool for achieving our new goals. We do not need to start from scratch, for there is already a substantial literature on the topic, and numerous activists, social movements, and researchers are advancing theories and embracing practices on degrowth, postdevelopment, postextractivism, postgrowth, prosperity without growth, steady-state economics, new economics, feminist economics, economics for the common good, and so on. These scholars and activists explore and analyze diverse policies and practices which aim to reduce superfluous consumption of energy and materials while creating more just, livable, and sustainable communities for everyone.

Unfortunately, these narratives and practices are far from being widely circulated in our daily conversations and media outlets. ‘The stories we live by’ are very different from the postgrowth narratives and, for the most part, are based on ideologies, metaphors, and frames that promote progress narrowly defined as economic growth and capitalist development. These stories entail ‘cognitive structures which influence how people think, talk and act’ and ‘they are implicated in injustice and environmental destruction’.<sup>48</sup> Arran Stibbe argues that:

underneath common ways of writing and speaking in industrial societies are stories about unlimited economic growth as being not just possible but the goal of society, of the accumulation of unnecessary goods as a path towards self-improvement, of progress and success defined narrowly in terms of technological innovation and profit, and of nature as something separate from humans, a mere stock of resources to be exploited.<sup>49</sup>

These narratives are blind to the biophysical realities of a finite biosphere and oblivious to the inextricable human dependence on ecological systems. Addressing these blind spots entails envisioning radically different cultural narratives and embracing different practices embedded in new imaginaries

<sup>48</sup> Arran Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 10, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics*, 3.

more appropriate and functional in the current social and ecological context.

Given that global ecological and social problems are increasingly difficult to ignore, many mainstream sectors are now ready to recognize them, but in order to solve them,

turn to technological fixes or market mechanisms of one sort or another. In this respect, there is a certain continuity of thought between those who deny the climate change problem altogether, and those who, while acknowledging the severity of the problem at one level, nevertheless deny that it requires a revolution in our social system.<sup>50</sup>

This new kind of denial insists on claiming that the solution to sustainability problems caused by excessive growth and superfluous consumerism can be solved by adopting a different pattern of growth. According to this argument, the solution to the unsustainability of growth lies in embracing green growth (again and again we see the inability to abandon the growth paradigm and imagine a desirable future beyond growth). The green growth paradigm claims that the economy can be dematerialized by decoupling economic growth from ecological degradation and teaching the markets to internalize environmental and social externalities. However, reality indicates that this is nothing but wishful thinking because capitalism never proceeds in this fashion; instead it constantly externalizes new costs to increase profit margins.

Under a growth-oriented regime, technology is not going to compensate for the market's environmental miscalculations. On the contrary, the use of new technology to promote growth is making the present situation much worse by increasing the speed of resource extraction and ecological depletion. Technology can only be socially and environmentally benign if it is embedded in a system that prioritizes social and ecological well-being over capital accumulation and is therefore motivated to generate what Ivan Illich calls 'convivial tools', as opposed to centralized, complex technologies for spurring growth.<sup>51</sup> Technology, as science and technology studies demonstrate, is not something neutral that emerges in a vacuum but a tool influencing and being influenced by the dominant economic culture in which it emerges. More sophisticated technology, under the current socioeconomic system, provides more capable and efficient means for exploiting and destroying our already overstressed planet. Under a market economy

50 Foster, Clark, and York, *The Ecological Rift*, 427.

51 Ivan Illich, *Tools of Conviviality* (Glasgow: Collins, 1975).

devoted to growth, the gains in efficiency facilitated by new technology are historically reinvested to spur more growth and therefore end up promoting an overall increase in resource consumption rather than reducing it (a process known as the Jevons paradox or rebound effect). Samuel Alexander compellingly explains how the frequent techno-optimism displayed by the supporters of green capitalism, sustainable development, green growth, and ecological modernization is based not on empirical evidence but their own inability to '[confront] cultural and economic fundamentals' associated with economic growth, neoliberal rationality, and consumerist lifestyles. Such techno-optimism is 'a wholly inadequate response to the crises facing humanity'.<sup>52</sup>

The Paris Agreement on climate change signed in December 2015 likewise subscribes to the narrative of green growth, market faith, and techno-optimism. Its celebrated ability to achieve a global consensus only underlines the fact that it is based on the hegemonic ideology. The main problem with the Paris Agreement is not that it is vastly insufficient—which it is—to turn the tide of dramatic climate change, but that it is unwilling to target the root causes of the problem. The agreement assumes, and hopes, that growth and neoliberal globalization will continue, and relies on the development of technologies that are nonexistent today. It does not question, but rather embraces, the globalization of consumerism, the continuation of massive long-distance trade, and the systemic addiction to growth. In this regard, the Paris Agreement is supported by the kind of denial mentioned above. Once more, the incapacity to imagine a future with no growth is evident.

Even if a miraculous eco-efficient version of capitalist development could be universalized (which cannot happen today, because the ecological services of several planets would be required if all regions of the planet were to develop), it would most likely not be socially desirable, for so-called sustainable development has often 'failed to identify the historical and structural roots of poverty, hunger, unsustainability and inequity. These include: centralization of state power, capitalist monopolies, colonialism, racism and patriarchy. Without diagnosing who or what is responsible, it is inevitable that any proposed solutions will not be transformative enough'.<sup>53</sup> Put otherwise, sustainable development can never be sustained because

52 Samuel Alexander, 'A Critique to Techno-Optimism: Efficiency without Sufficiency Is Lost' (Postcarbon Pathways Working Paper Series, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, Melbourne, 2014), 13–14.

53 Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, and Alberto Acosta, 'Sustainable Development Is Failing But There Are Alternatives to Capitalism', *The Guardian*, July 21, 2015.

of its insistence on defining development in terms of constant economic growth and capital accumulation.

In fact, the mainstream celebration of sustainable development in recent decades coincides with a rise in neoliberal rationality, a massive increase in social inequality, and an unprecedented acceleration of ecological destruction on a global scale. The discourse of sustainable development, suspiciously, matches very well the apolitical and technocratic sensibilities brought about by the neoliberal project and 'is a manifestation of a broader process of depoliticization of public debate in liberal democracies, whereby politics have been reduced to the search for technocratic solutions to pre-framed problems instead of a genuinely antagonistic struggle between alternative visions'.<sup>54</sup> In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015), Wendy Brown argues that in a process that began three decades ago, 'neoliberalism, a peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms, is quietly undoing basic elements of democracy. These elements include vocabularies, principles of justice, political cultures, habits of citizenship, practices of rule, and above all, *democratic imaginaries*'.<sup>55</sup> Thus, economic growth is not the panacea for all social problems. Rather, the addiction to economic growth under the dictates of neoliberal globalization may be at the root of most social and environmental problems, including, as pointed out by Brown, the erosion of democratic practices and imaginaries. Indeed, the very model of neoliberal globalization is deleterious in a double sense, semiotically and biophysically, for it is destroying both our democratic imaginaries and the possibility of our biological survival. I believe that our best chance of maintaining an inhabitable planet where we can collectively envision a good life (and democratically decide what that entails) lies in conceiving of and enacting radically different postgrowth cultural imaginaries able to open the floor to new political possibilities. This will require overcoming the cruel optimism inherent in the current crisis of political imagination fostered by our toxic epistemological, material, and affective attachment to economic growth.

54 Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis, eds., *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9.

55 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 17; my emphasis.

## Environmental Cultural Studies: Challenging Neoliberal Fantasies to Overcome the Crisis of Political Imagination

We could interpret the ongoing global imposition of neoliberal rationality (and its crises) as the historical moment in which the dominant imaginary of economic growth has completed a planetary ‘colonization of everyday life’, to use Henri Lefebvre’s words.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that neoliberalism presents itself in different ways and intersects with diverse cultures, discourses, and political traditions. However, the pervasive epistemological colonization of neoliberalism is overarching and all-encompassing as it ‘transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic’.<sup>57</sup> Wendy Brown, building on Foucault’s *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, compellingly explains how neoliberalism remakes humans as ‘self-investing human capital’ and repurposes nation states as corporation-like facilitators of economic growth and global competitiveness. This gross reduction of human existence and political governance to economic metrics entails ‘enormous consequences for democratic institutions, cultures, and imaginaries’, including the disappearance of politics beyond neoliberal economic policy and therefore of any meaningful democratic practice.<sup>58</sup>

The most notorious neoliberal paradox is the repurposing of the state as a growth factory in order to ‘serve and facilitate an economy it is not supposed to touch’.<sup>59</sup> In other words, while neoliberal thinkers claim that they demand a non-interferential state to let the supposed rational mechanisms of the market work undisturbed, in practice neoliberalism ‘requires a very large state to support and protect its preconditions of being’.<sup>60</sup> Neoliberal policies do not shrink the state but repurpose its functions and goals in very disturbing ways; instead of protecting its citizens, the state becomes a facilitator of economic growth and market competition that disregards the associated socioecological costs generated by such economic competition. Hobbes’s legitimization of the political authority of a sovereign government was intended to avoid the war of all against all that he associated with the state of nature, in which the reckless competition of self-interested individuals would make human life ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and

<sup>56</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 3: *From Modernity to Modernism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.

short'. Discounting Hobbes's essentialist and pessimistic conception of human nature, he would probably be horrified to witness the way in which neoliberal states have become the preferred place for the fearsome, nasty, and brutish competition of all solitary individuals for survival in the now-naturalized market environment. In fact, as Mick Smith compellingly argues, the very notion of sovereign political power itself is indebted to a metaphysical division between society and nature as well as the assumption of human exceptionalism and its sovereign dominion over the natural world. Smith urges us to challenge all the current proliferations of ecological sovereignty ingrained in mainstream environmentalism because 'what we need are plural ways to imagine a world without sovereign power, without human dominion'.<sup>61</sup>

It is important to resist neoliberal sovereign power and its perverse biopolitics. Under such rules, the fruits of the community are privatized while the responsibility for the social or ecological mess generated by neoliberal bottom-up wealth redistribution is not recognized by the state and therefore is transferred to dispossessed individuals. William Connolly has highlighted the intensified fragility of the current order brought about by the expansion of neoliberal capitalism and its acceleration of culture-nature imbrications. This fragility is marked by the 'growing gaps and dislocations between the demands neoliberalism makes upon several human activities and nonhuman fields and the capacities of both to meet them'.<sup>62</sup> There are many 'neoliberal fantasies' ingrained in a discourse that promises prosperity and freedom while implementing policies that undermine the social and ecological conditions necessary for such possibilities. But the most limiting fantasy of all may be the one that has to do with innovation and creativity.<sup>63</sup>

Neoliberalism continually celebrates innovation, creativity, imagination, flexibility, and spontaneity while restricting the uses to which they may be put to the sole purpose of economic growth and financial engineering. As such, neoliberal ideology '*inflates the self-organizing power of markets by implicitly deflating the self-organizing powers and creativity of all other systems*'.<sup>64</sup> Human and nonhuman systems, whose creative powers are deflated and constrained, become subordinated to what is touted as the creativity of the markets. Under this perverse logic, any creative energy that cannot be harnessed

61 Mick Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty: Ethics, Biopolitics, and Saving the Natural World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 220.

62 Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*, 10.

63 See Luis I. Prádanos, 'Teaching Limits to Enhance Creativity: The Pedagogy of Degrowth', *Academe Blog*, August 10, 2017.

64 Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*, 31; emphasis original.

by the markets becomes irrelevant at best and is liable to be entirely deactivated. As a consequence, most of the creative energy in our society is channeled into the creation of different ways of stimulating economic growth (rather than, say, building healthier, happier, and more sustainable communities). All human ingenuity, creativity, and innovation is employed to feed the growing machine that, as it grows bigger, prevents creativity from flourishing and thriving outside its own economic domain. In other words, real creativity that dares to think outside of the growth paradigm is not perceived as such (unless it can be appropriated by capitalist enterprises), but rather infantilized, delegitimized, disqualified, and disciplined for being unrealistic, naive, populist, utopic, backwards, unsafe, exotic, improperly academic, and so on. The dominant cultural imaginary of economic growth and its neoliberal reason reserves for itself the role of the sole source of all cultural authority and knowledge production (a reality that has been very well studied by Luis Moreno-Caballud in relation to contemporary Spanish culture).<sup>65</sup>

As neoliberal logic colonizes social institutions, infiltrates the habits of everyday life, and even infects vocabularies, it becomes more and more difficult to think outside of its self-imposed epistemological limitations. The Foucauldian usage of the word *dispositif* for ‘apparatus’, as brilliantly elaborated by Giorgio Agamben, gets to the heart of the matter. An apparatus is ‘a machine that produces subjectifications, and only as such is it also a machine of governance’.<sup>66</sup> Agamben observes that the neoliberal phase of capitalism is defined by ‘a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses ... Today there is not even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modeled, contaminated, or controlled by some apparatus’.<sup>67</sup> Once these apparatuses impose the rules and norms of the neoliberal project, these norms—and the fantasies they entail—become internalized by individuals and ingrained in their reasoning and construction of meaning, determining their habits, emotions, feelings, identities, beliefs, and expectations, and framing their worldviews. This normativity is eventually perceived as existing outside of any historical context, and therefore questioning it becomes not only a political impossibility but an immoral act. This order of things tends to ‘reduce the freedoms associated with ethics as such to compliance with moral norms, to following rules, and ... to an internalized

65 Luis Moreno-Caballud, *Cultures of Anyone: Studies on Cultural Democratization in the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis*, trans. Linda Grabner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

66 Giorgio Agamben, ‘What Is an Apparatus?’ and *Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 20.

67 Agamben, ‘What is an Apparatus?’, 15.

relation of dependence that confines moral feeling to a self-monitoring compliance of each individual with those ideals espoused by the ruling powers'.<sup>68</sup> As a result, little room is left for the emergence of proper politics and ethics beyond the sphere of the hegemonic ideology and its dominant growth imaginary.

The inadequate responses to the Anthropocene mentioned previously show how deniers—not just the climate change deniers, but the deniers of the possibility of prosperity without growth—are prevented from thinking outside of neoclassical and neoliberal economic paradigms even when human biophysical survival is at stake. Neoliberal reason restricts creativity to innovations within the competitive, individualistic, consumerist, economistic logic, and it does a good job of finding clever new ways to foster capital accumulation by deploying creativity to navigate and surpass social and ecological impediments to growth. These impediments are more visible in the commodity frontiers and are expected to proliferate as hegemonic inertia blindly tries to push forward the remaining social and ecological limits to growth: 'The social and environmental impacts of extracting resources are increasing as the quality and availability of resources decreases'.<sup>69</sup>

This intensification of social and ecological problems under economic globalization and its potential, unpredictable, massive consequences, as well as the governmental uncertainties involved, is what Ulrich Beck identifies as the 'risk society'.<sup>70</sup> When the massively and asymmetrically distributed consequences of these manufactured risks are globally visible and therefore impossible to ignore, even for the elites, the approved remedies are invariably limited to treating their symptoms, given that neoliberal experts and technocrats are trained *not* to recognize the real problem, that is, the social and ecological limits to growth. The proposed solution, for instance, to the unsustainability of universalizing individual vehicles—and their associated inefficient infrastructures and aberrant urban models—is, not surprisingly, more efficient cars and bigger highways. A different urban model that redefines mobility by focusing on human needs and ecological mandates (not on private cars and their privatization of space) is out of the question, if not unimaginable. Another example is heavily investing in pharmaceutical research instead of regulating the chemical industries

68 Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, 57.

69 Marta Conde and Mariana Walter, 'Commodity Frontiers', in *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, ed. Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis (New York: Routledge, 2015), 73.

70 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).

(of which pharmaceutical industries are a part) in order to combat the proliferation of cancer. Once again, the remedy makes things worse, because giving massive amounts of public funds to polluting corporations has the perverse effect of inspiring them to lobby harder and to more effectively prevent regulatory laws from passing (regulations that could, among other things, take some carcinogens out of circulation).

The growth-oriented ideology reproduces and self-amplifies itself over and over, limiting collective imaginative processes to the task of depicting different images of itself and creating innovative ways to refashion itself. William Connolly elaborates on how, once these amplification processes 'become consolidated, it becomes a more difficult system to oppose politically. Its self-organizing and reflexive tendencies now form self-amplifying loops'.<sup>71</sup> That is why it seems that there is no alternative to an ideology that is destroying the life-supporting systems of the Earth. Within this epistemological framework, 'the environmental crisis involves a crisis of imagination', for it becomes almost impossible to imagine a postcarbon, postgrowth, post-capitalist, post-neoliberal, post-patriarchal, decolonial society that is desirable and viable.<sup>72</sup>

In order to begin the transition to a postgrowth society it is crucial to challenge the cultural authority that perpetuates the dominant imaginary responsible for disconnecting economic activity from its ecological, social, political, and cultural interdependencies. The roots of the pervasive neoliberal mindset are nourished by previously drawn hierarchical distinctions (human and nonhuman, culture and nature), or what Giorgio Agamben calls the 'anthropological machine'. Agamben identifies the sociohistorically diverse ways in which metaphysical distinctions are established between humans and the nonhuman.<sup>73</sup> Humanity is defined and redefined again and again in opposition to the animal other, and it is the self-proclaimed 'proper humans' who reserve for themselves the right to determine what is considered fully human and what is not. That which does not fit into the 'properly human' category constructed by the 'anthropological machine' at a given historical moment is deemed inferior and may be exploited without ethical concern or legal consequence. If, under neoliberalism, humans are reduced to 'self-investing capital' and the main goal of societies is contributing to economic growth, then individuals

71 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 95.

72 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 2.

73 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

who are unable to make a profit on their human capital, or communities not feeding the economic machine, can lose their status as properly human and pass into the category of the less than human. Globally, there are a growing number of surplus populations comprised of people who have lost their traditional livelihoods due to capitalist dispossession and are not formally employed by the capitalist economy.<sup>74</sup> Under the dominant imaginary, these populations can be identified as less than human and easily criminalized, disciplined, and sacrificed without remorse in the name of saving world markets.

The global expansion of markets and commodity frontiers often occurs under the guise of helping underdeveloped countries to develop. To be underdeveloped means, for the United Nations, not to live poorly, but to live outside the market economy. The UN's policies for achieving development are therefore not focused on promoting socioecological well-being in their target regions, but on incorporating—that is to say, forcing—non-market-oriented communities into the market economy.<sup>75</sup> As long as the anthropological machine is not challenged, it will continue to construct human exceptionalism and justify the exploitation and abuse of the non-properly humans excluded by that definition of humanity: those perceived as savage, primitive, uncivilized, underdeveloped, unappealing for the markets, disinvested—or 'subprime', as Germán Labrador Méndez called them in the case of Spanish cultural narratives of the crisis.<sup>76</sup> This process will continue to create and exacerbate social and environmental injustices if not consistently confronted. It is essential to expose the fallacies of human exceptionalism and the human/nonhuman hierarchical divides that neoliberal reason perpetuates across the globe. In order to overcome the perverse consequences of these divides, it may be helpful to think in terms of social and ecological interdependency and relational ontology and pay full attention to the agency of the nonhuman in all human matters. This will entail embracing new imaginaries based on 'a posthuman environmental ethics in which the flows, interchanges, and interrelations between human corporeality and the more-than-human world resist the ideological forces of disconnection'.<sup>77</sup> Paradoxically, 'It was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the Earth's

74 Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, 92–98.

75 Gustavo Esteva, Salvatore Babones, and Philipp Babcicky, *The Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2013).

76 Germán Labrador Méndez, 'Las vidas *subprime*: la circulación de historias de vida como tecnología de imaginación política en la crisis española (2007–2012)', *Hispanic Review* 80, no. 4 (2012): 557–581.

77 Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 142.

atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human', as Amitav Ghosh notes.<sup>78</sup>

In this context 'a major challenge is representational', that is, how to create narratives and stories that make visible the structural 'slow violence' perpetuated by the hegemonic powers.<sup>79</sup> How can we craft counterhegemonic stories in a way that effectively exposes not just the fantasies of unlimited growth ingrained in our dominant imaginary but also other narratives that can be easily co-opted by neoliberal reason to continue promoting its agenda? What kind of narratives and practices can promote an ethics and aesthetics of social and ecological interrelatedness and demonstrate human and nonhuman mutual interdependency, fragility, responsibility, and connectivity? As Bruno Latour puts it, 'The problem of all of us in philosophy, science, or literature becomes: how do we tell such a story?'<sup>80</sup> In the Anthropocene age of unacceptable social inequality and rapid ecological collapse we cannot afford not to embrace 'the challenges of *representing* a concept at once wholly abstract and alarmingly material in aesthetically, rhetorically, and ultimately politically efficacious ways'.<sup>81</sup> We need new stories to counteract the pervasive fantasies of neoliberalism and to expose its social and ecological downsides. It is urgent 'to undiscipline ourselves, free ourselves from our training, and find new narratives to tell about life, literature, and learning, narratives more attuned to the harsh realities of human frailty and less calibrated to the rhythms of late capitalism'.<sup>82</sup> How can we revisit stories about ourselves, our communities, and our relationship to the planet in order to collectively create alternative postgrowth stories we can live by? An environmentally oriented cultural studies has the potential to contribute significantly to this pressing task, but for cultural studies to be able to challenge the ideology of disconnection in a meaningful way, it is paramount, on the one hand, to embrace the environmental humanities and, on the other, to dissect the formation of the dominant cultural authority in order to counteract it.

Given the current dimensions of the ecological crisis, it is disturbing to witness the lack of critical engagement in peninsular cultural studies with environmental issues and with the undeniable feedback loops between

78 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 66.

79 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.

80 Bruno Latour, 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 3.

81 Garrard, Handwerk, and Wilke, 'Imagining Anew', 149.

82 Jack Halberstam, 'Unlearning', *Profession* (2012): 12.

cultural modes and socioecological processes. Environmental sociologists John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York would explain this lack of engagement by pointing out that ‘the social sciences and the humanities ... are all characterized to varying degrees by their radical separation from nature’.<sup>83</sup> The humanities have always played a crucial role in the articulation of the anthropological machine and the legitimization and perpetuation of the radical distinction between the human and nonhuman that justifies the dominant economic culture. The advent of the environmental humanities is only now opening the door to let a breath of fresh air into academic contexts (activist and indigenous sciences never closed that door). Cultural studies was born precisely to challenge and revisit ingrained ideological distinctions (within the humanities) about which cultural expressions deserved study and which were to be left out of the curriculum. Since its inception, the field has understood very well that everything that is left out tends to disappear from institutionalized theoretical radars and becomes aesthetically and politically irrelevant in what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’.<sup>84</sup> For that reason, cultural studies is well equipped (in contrast to more traditional academic disciplines within the humanities) to challenge the dominant and alienating ideologies of disconnection by resisting the radical separation of humans and the nonhuman in cultural configurations.

I concur with Neil Badmington that we should acknowledge the ‘dramatic difference that cultural studies has made to the humanities ... [but, and this is important,] a problem remains ... Although it has sought to break down a series of oppressive barriers, cultural studies has systematically reaffirmed the hierarchical border between the human and the inhuman’.<sup>85</sup> To correct this ingrained deficiency, Badmington goes on to suggest that cultural studies would benefit from embracing posthumanism. This suggestion is not unproblematic, because ‘a genuinely *critical* posthumanism ... should resist the seductions of the humanities. If “the human” is no longer a credible category, how can the humanities remain something in which to have faith?’<sup>86</sup> I do not claim to possess the answer to that thought-provoking question, but I am convinced it is worthy of exploration.<sup>87</sup>

83 Foster, Clark, and York, *The Ecological Rift*, 31–32.

84 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2012).

85 Neil Badmington, ‘Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities’, in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 261–262.

86 Badmington, ‘Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities’, 264.

87 For an emerging discussion of these issues in the context of contemporary

Along these same lines, Levi Bryant points out that ‘ecology is the study of relations and interaction between entities ... Societies are themselves ecologies that are embedded in the broader ecologies of the natural world’.<sup>88</sup> The distinction between nature and society is misleading, since societies are by no means outside of nature: ‘Social relations are a type of ecological relations ... Societies are embedded in natural ecologies ... and humans are animals among animals’.<sup>89</sup> According to Bryant, the ‘dimension of material flow through social systems is too often ignored by cultural studies ... We entirely ignore the ecology of human societies’.<sup>90</sup> I believe this might be remedied by an ecocritical cultural studies that incorporates ecological economics. I insist that cultural studies—as long as it does not forget its radical origins (think of Raymond Williams’s cultural materialism as articulated in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*), and as long as it remains attuned to the current ‘material turn’ taking place in ecocriticism—is in fine shape to embrace critical posthumanism and be significantly enhanced and transformed by it.<sup>91</sup> For Iberian cultural studies in particular, I believe the current moment is propitious to embrace an ecologically oriented approach, given that an increasing, but still insufficient, number of Iberian cultural scholars began moving along these lines in the last couple of years.<sup>92</sup> Significantly, Jo Labanyi, coauthor of the seminal book that established the field of Spanish cultural studies in 1995, has recently encouraged Spanish cultural scholars to ‘study materiality, with reference not just to bodily processes, but also to the material world outside’, and to engage with the agency of things in all cultural practices.<sup>93</sup> Labanyi’s essay ‘Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality’ implies a call to overcome the ideologies of disconnection that so often infiltrate cultural studies.

Iberian culture see *A Polemical Companion to ‘Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates’, Hispanic Issues On Line 7* (University of Minnesota, 2016). The co-op conclusion is especially relevant.

88 Levi Bryant, ‘Black’, in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 294.

89 Bryant, ‘Black’, 294.

90 Bryant, ‘Black’, 299.

91 Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980).

92 See Katarzyna Beilin and William Viestenz, eds., *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), and Luis I. Prádanos, ‘Ecocrítica en los estudios literarios y culturales españoles contemporáneos: una tendencia emergente desesperadamente necesaria’, *Nuevas tendencias literarias: el autor y su crítica* (2000–2015), *La nueva literatura hispánica* 20 (2016): 281–298.

93 Jo Labanyi, ‘Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 11, nos. 3–4 (2010): 223–224, 227–228.

New materialisms and material ecocriticism teach us that the flow of material and energy is as important as the circulation of narratives in understanding reality, and that both signs and matter should be considered together. ‘All matter, in other words, is “storied matter”’.<sup>94</sup> From a biosemiotic viewpoint, meaning and matter emerge together in all living organisms, and humans are no exception. Ecological economics does an admirable job of focusing on ‘social metabolism’, that is, ‘the entire flow of materials and energy that are required to sustain all human economic activities’,<sup>95</sup> and cultural studies is well suited to track the processes of meaning-making involved in the coevolution of material cultures and social imaginaries. This book will converge the two. The concept of social metabolism will be a key analytical tool throughout the book that expresses dimensions of socio-natural inextricable interdependency and allow us to understand economic growth not as an abstract measure of an economy, but as an increase in its material intensification. In other words, the size of the social metabolism indicates the magnitude of the material usage and depletion of a given economic/material culture. The bigger the social metabolism, the more unsustainable it is. An economic culture addicted to growth entails the reproduction of highly entropic and unsustainable social relations and material realities. I believe that material ecocriticism in particular, and the environmental humanities in general, provide an optimal framework for understanding and challenging the dominant imaginary and contributing to the creation of new and liberating postgrowth imaginaries. The study of post-2008 Spanish counterhegemonic cultures from this perspective is one of the main tasks of *Postgrowth Imaginaries*.

I have divided the remainder of this book into three sections followed by a concluding chapter. The first two sections, ‘Spanish Culture and Postgrowth Economics’ and ‘Urban Ecologies’, correspond to chapters 1 and 2. The third section, ‘Waste, Disaster, Refugees, and Nonhuman Agency’, includes chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 1, ‘Towards an Ecocritical Approach to the Spanish Neoliberal Crisis’, introduces the main tenets of ecological economics and the degrowth movement, in order to familiarize the reader with these notions. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of the cultural and ecological situation in twenty-first-century Spain, focusing on recent cultural critical responses to the Spanish neoliberal crisis and showing how such critical interventions

94 Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.

95 Helmut Haberl et al., ‘A Socio-Metabolic Transition towards Sustainability? Challenges for Another Great Transformation’, *Sustainable Development* 19 (2011): 3.

might be significantly enriched by paying attention to the ongoing ecocritical transnational debate. The next section studies a number of recent Iberian socioecological essays that have adopted a cross-disciplinary perspective to critique the unsustainable social and environmental degradation caused by global capitalism and its addiction to growth. The last part of the chapter makes the case for the value of advancing a degrowth-inspired ecocriticism within a Euro-Mediterranean context. Degrowth provides an alternative to mainstream Euro-American reform environmentalism. The latter is infused with a neoliberal rhetoric, rationality, and sensibility that promote technical fixes to avoid engagement in the social and political changes needed to avert ecological collapse. While degrowthers advocate radical cultural change to achieve environmental justice, reform environmentalism only supports minor modifications to the existing order, such as sustainable development, green growth, and ecological modernization.

Chapter 2, 'Urban Ecocriticism and Spanish Cultural Studies', argues that Spanish urban cultural studies would benefit from incorporating the ecological aspects of cities into its theoretical frameworks and thereby better attune itself to the cultural changes underway in the current context of socially and ecologically unsustainable urban growth machines. I integrate the study of these cultural manifestations into four distinct but non-exclusive categories, according to the way in which the socioecological metabolism of the city is conceived and depicted in relation to both the dominant imaginary of economic growth and its unsustainable energy regime. The suggested interpretative typology and the examples I provide can be enumerated and summarized as follows: (1) The Crisis of the Urban Growth Machine (the documentaries *Sobre ruedas: el sueño del automóvil* by Óscar Clemente and *Mercado de futuros* by Mercedes Álvarez, and the experimental movie *Gente en sitios* by Juan Cavestany); (2) Urban Collapse and Post-Petroleum Futures (*El peso del corazón* by Rosa Montero and *Por si se va la luz* by Lara Moreno); (3) Non-Urban Spaces and Neo-Ruralization: Escaping the Urban Growth Machine? (*Palabras mayores: un viaje por la memoria rural* by Emilio Gancedo and the web series *Libres* by Alex Rodrigo); and (4) Postgrowth Urban Imaginaries: Imagining and Performing Ecopolis (the graphic novel *Memorias de la tierra* by Miguel Brieva, several urban projects and collectives, and short narratives generated by the Transition Town movement).

Chapter 3, 'Non-Human Agency and the Political Ecology of Waste', investigates the recent proliferation of Spanish cultural manifestations that focus on discarded materials and degraded spaces. Objects and processes that the dominant imaginary strives to keep out of sight become the main center of attention. This recentering of focus has a number of aesthetic, semiotic, and political consequences that could be better tracked from a

material ecocritical perspective. A material ecocritical reading helps to illuminate what I call ‘the political ecology of waste’ in these cultural expressions (including *Nunca fue tan hermosa la basura* by philosopher José Luis Pardo, a street mural by Boamistura in Madrid, an installation by Basurama, a song by Sr. Chinarro, a cartoon by Miguel Brieva, and the website *consumehastamorir.com*). I claim that by foregrounding the agency of the massive waste generated by our linear social metabolism, these cultural manifestations expose neoliberal fantasies and seriously compromise the dominant teleological narratives of progress as unlimited economic growth. This chapter also suggests that an economic system that massively wastes and pillages resources for the sake of constant growth ultimately generates vast surplus populations (disposable humans). Thus, I analyze a prizewinning photograph taken in 2014 by José Palazón featuring African immigrants trapped while scaling the fence that separates Morocco from the Spanish city of Melilla. I argue that the image brilliantly links the fluxes of material and energy, the flow of corporate media discourses, and the human bodies mobilized by economic globalization. Through this imagery, the connection between surplus populations and a wasteful economy becomes clear (other examples include a cartoon by Manel Fontdevila, the film *La jaula de oro* written and directed by Diego Quemada-Díez, and *Interferències*, an interesting and well-researched low-budget audiovisual experiment in Spanish and Catalan).

Chapter 4, ‘Disaster Fiction, the Pedagogy of Catastrophe, and the Dominant Imaginary’, focuses on catastrophe fiction that explores the disturbing ecological consequences of sudden disruptions caused by extreme environmental events set in motion or exacerbated by growth-oriented activity. In this scenario, rapid anthropogenic changes in the Earth’s ecological systems unleash a massive catastrophe at a regional or global level. This kind of fiction has commonly been assumed to have pedagogical implications because it highlights the destructive practices that humanity should abandon and promotes an activist lifestyle. By studying some of the most popular contemporary catastrophe audiovisual narratives in Spain (TV show *El Barco* and Juan Antonio Bayona’s movie *The Impossible*), I demonstrate that the pedagogical interpretation of catastrophe should be revisited for several reasons. First, many studies in psychology indicate that creating fear is not effective in mobilizing activism. Second, apocalyptic fiction tends to focus on sensationalist and spectacular effects and the heroic individuals who deal with them, while grossly ignoring the root causes of anthropogenic climate change and environmental injustice. Thus, I claim that catastrophe fiction does not necessarily constitute a good pedagogical tool for shaping an effective political ecology because it perpetuates

the current post-political dominant culture rather than contesting the growth logic that exacerbates global—but asymmetrically distributed—environmental risks. Catastrophe-oriented fiction also tends to ignore or, in the worse cases, conceal the pervasive structural violence against humans and the nonhuman resulting from global neoliberal policies and growth economic dynamics (what Rob Nixon calls ‘slow violence’).<sup>96</sup> In order to encourage an effective political ecology, I argue that other kinds of counterhegemonic narrative are much more effective and resistant to co-optation by the dominant imaginary: stories and projects that envision and perform *desirable* postgrowth imaginaries.

The conclusion, ‘The Global Rise of Postgrowth Imaginaries’, summarizes the main findings of the book, providing a reflection on the best and worst cultural strategies for challenging the dominant imaginary and creating counterhegemonic practices and narratives. It closes with a call for greater experimentation with cultural practices that move beyond the growth paradigm, as well as a plea to cultural critics to embrace environmental humanities frameworks in order to envision the massive implications of an emerging postgrowth economic culture. *Postgrowth Imaginaries* suggests that the only desirable way to overcome the existential crisis brought on by subscribing to the growth paradigm is to conceive of a socially just and sustainable postgrowth imaginary and to create the conditions necessary for such a society to emerge. *Postgrowth Imaginaries* shows that such a transition is currently well under way in the Iberian Peninsula and, I believe, is also part of an emerging global trend that is crossing all borders. It is my hope that this book will provide useful critical tools to assist in the understanding and promotion of this global cultural transformation.

96 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 3.

