ARTICLE

HOW LONG IS ENOUGH
PHOTOGRAPHY BEYOND PERMANENCE. CAN ART BE VALUABLE EVEN IF IT DISSAPEARS?

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ABSTRACT

This essay critically examines the concept of sustainable photography as a means of understanding how we value art in a broader sense in an era where material sustainability and ethical production are essential. Reconsidering artistic and archival practice prompts a paradigm shift, challenging long-held preservation assumptions. Prioritizing sustainability, accepting decay and lifecycles of photographic art archives and collections can disrupt conventional ideas of market value and permanence. By accepting that photographic materials naturally change and decay, this essay proposes a more realistic, flexible artistic ecosystem. The goal is to understand and appreciate non-permanent art, researching where its true values lie and where longevity truly stems from.

Ultimately, this releases artworks from outdated concepts of performance, suggesting more flexible approaches for archives and collections, reversing their inherent need for constant growth.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable photography, Archive, Decay, Material ethics, Process-based.

INTRODUCTION

Every act of creation begins with the impulse to preserve—a quiet wish to hold onto that which already disappears. From our first breath to our last, we move within a rhythm of emergence and disappearance, each gesture shaped by time's slow unravelling. Art mirrors this condition: it seeks to make something persist, even as it acknowledges that nothing truly does. But in our age of endless circulation, the impact of an artwork is shifting.

What once anchored us in wonder—the feeling that arises "when the imagination is strained to its limit in an effort to comprehend an object"[1]—now drifts through the economies of attention and exchange. The critical potential of art is thus undermined by its own absorption into utility, into its becoming a mere cultural commodity. As Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer observed: "The work of art still has something in common with enchantment: it posits its own, self-enclosed area, which is withdrawn from the context of profane existence... In adapting itself entirely to need, the work of art defrauds human beings in advance of the liberation from the principle of utility which it is supposed to bring about."[2] Under such conditions, the sublime, a space of encounter, becomes a product to be consumed. Notions of permanence no longer have as their point of reference the unknowable or the divine—the point of reference has now become marketable longevity. Art, burdened by its own commodification, ceases to mirror the fragility of life, revealing instead the machinery that seeks to outlast it. While this major cultural shift has been extensively researched and documented on a broader scale across various fields, it has yet to be examined more thoroughly through a lens of material interdependence within (sustainable) photography. The argument outlined in this essay in the emerging field of sustainable photography is developed through its proximity to the well-established fields of alternative (and, more specifically, ephemeral) photography. The conceptual openness of this comparison is intentional, as the material implications in relationship to these practices are largely congruent. This proximity therefore provides a productive and relevant framework for analysis. In addition, Kate Palmer Albers's *The Night Albums: Visibility and the Ephemeral Photograph* (2021) and Michael Findlay's *The Value of Art: Money, Power, Beauty* (2012)— as well as interviews with experts—serve as the principal sources informing the exploration delineated here of a relationship between ephemerality, photography, and the archive in the context of the Anthropocene.

As a collective term, "sustainable photography" encompasses a range of process-based, environmentally conscious, and impact-aware practices. These approaches are currently expanding the conceptual and material boundaries of photography with procedures that are non-toxic, circular, and regenerative.[3] In their ephemeral qualities, these sustainable photographic processes are, in essence, more closely linked to performance art than to photography. They are constantly evolving, reacting and interacting with their surroundings. Kate Palmer Albers describes the nature of analog photography as one that "…performs itself,"

explaining, "It is a simple truth that photographs do exist in a durational range. It is just our understanding that is limited."[4]

At the core of this inquiry lies a crucial implication: can an art form that is critical of the capitalist structures of image production (at least in its theoretical and ethical dimension) exist independently of the art market? Or must it operate within these very boundaries as a form of antithesis? Regardless, artists must still be able to sustain themselves through their critical and creative practices—raising the question of how this might be achieved without compromising integrity or intent. This is the juncture where ethics and economics both converge and repel each other.

THE ILLUSION OF PERMANENCE
FOUNDATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

As soon as one begins to question the concept of duration, the investigation goes to the very foundations of photography. The pursuit of permanence reveals how much the medium (since its invention) has been instrumentalized for industrial, commercial, and political purposes.[5] The obsession with durability is not just technical, but also ideological. It is driven by a search for perfectionism and a need for authority that shapes how institutional structures including archives, collections, and museums function.

But before we unpack these connections further, it is necessary to pause and ask what the term "sustainable photography" mentioned earlier actually means—and to consider why it's very definition unsettles the structures of institutional and market-influenced art. The term does not simply denote a set of environmentally friendly practices; rather, it points to a key epistemic shift. This epistemic shift reimagines photography away from an understanding that treats it as a tool of material extraction, situating it toward a conception of the image where it exists in ecological relationship—an approach that Peter Szendy has termed "image ecology" to describe the complex interconnections of images, perception, and environment.[6]

Defining "sustainable photography" means, therefore, confronting the paradoxes that arise when an art form striving for regeneration and constraint must nevertheless exist within systems based on accumulation, visibility, and (the illusion of) permanence. It is here, in this tension between care and commerce, material fragility and institutional permanence, that the dilemma of this new photographic ethic reveals itself.

Drawing on an interview with Hannah Fletcher, founder of The Sustainable Darkroom, sustainable photography can be understood as a practice grounded in natural and nature-derived materials—one that resists dependency on fossil fuels and embraces cycles of renewal rather than striving for mere preservation.[7] At its core lies the principle of material circularity, in which creation and decay are not opposing forces but integral stages of the same continuum.

Transformation—fading, decomposing, returning to the earth—is not treated as failure but foregrounded as an ethical and aesthetic imperative. In allowing for impermanence, these works mirror ecological rhythms, offering a temporality that is both steady and, in the deepest sense, sublime.

The material decisions made in sustainable photography practices are deliberate constraints that, over the course of the process, become expressive gestures pointing toward constructive futures. These constraints reveal an ethics articulated through aesthetic choice rather than declaration, emphasizing relational engagement with matter itself. This perspective points to the political ecology of things, photography included: that matter is dynamic and relational, shaping boundaries, properties, and meanings through its interactions.[8]

Sustainable photography demands a preconception of value—one not based on duration or ownership, but on attention, responsiveness, and relationship. By embracing impermanence and relationality, these works embody an ethics of interconnectedness, one that highlights the interconnectedness of humans, materials, and ecosystems. As Robin Wall Kimmerer observes, "Art, in a broad sense, simply is ecology, and to make art is to participate, whether one likes it or not, in the mesh of interconnected beings."[9] This ethical stance is further reinforced by Timothy Morton in *All Art is Ecological*, where he asserts, "You don't have to be ecological. Because you are ecological," emphasizing that the very act of creating and interacting with materiality situates the artist within ecological networks.[10]

PERMANENCE AS A PROXY FOR CAPITAL: AN IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT

Such a stance positions sustainable photography in direct opposition to the art world's entrenched pursuit of permanence, a dynamic explored by Siobhan Angus in her book *Camera Geologica*, which examines the tension between material endurance and cultural meaning.[11] The drive for longevity in art has long been a marker not only of aesthetic significance but, more importantly, economic value. Within market-driven systems, durability and preservation are closely associated with legitimacy and investment, so that what persists materially functions as both symbolic and financial capital.[12] As Adorno and Horkheimer observe, "The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry."[13] Sustainable photography imagines alternative practices: forms of photography that resist destructive consumption and remain independent of prevailing market logics.[14] As Michael Findlay notes, treating artworks purely as financial instruments diminishes their capacity to gain social and commercial traction through exposure and discussion, which in turn limits the mechanisms that increase their value.[15] Artworks that embrace decay or dissolution thus challenge assumptions about permanence, undermining the idea that art must endure to maintain legitimacy and value.

In emphasizing permanence, the art world frequently overlooks the ecological consequences of this pursuit. As Angus argues, the assumption that accumulation can continue without an environmental cost relies on a deeply ingrained fantasy that has favored photography by obscuring the material realities of extraction and exploitation.[16] The drive for permanence has thus often functioned less as an aesthetic ideal and more as a proxy for investment strategies. Photographs and artworks that embrace decay or impermanence challenge these entrenched value structures, destabilizing the assumption that art must endure beyond its creation. As Pierre Bourdieu observes, "The field of cultural production… is a space of struggle where the work's cultural value, its place in the literary or artistic canon, is in part determined by its lack of overt commercial success."[17]

From all this, a question arises: Why then has permanence become so deeply entwined with value? And how did the notion of endurance—once tied to cultural memory and archival preservation—transform into a metric of profit and prestige within the art world?

Palmer Albers traces this connection back to early photography, noting that as early as 1856, concerns about protecting photographs from atmospheric damage were directly linked to their production cost and market price.[18] Expensive photographs were to be preserved not for their cultural or aesthetic significance, but for their economic value, establishing a precedent in which durability and investment were inherently connected. The tension between sustainable photography and the traditional art world thus reveals itself as fundamentally economic and ideological. Durability is not an aesthetic necessity, but a capitalist construct that shapes creation, dissemination, and perception of artworks. Michael Findlay emphasizes this point, observing that "Art is not intended to make its owner rich. The ability of a work to hold, lose, or increase its commercial value has nothing to do with its inherent meaning. […] An art object exists independently of its material value."[19] Similarly, Michael J. Sandel provides an ethical foundation, noting that when society allows goods to be bought and sold, it implicitly deems them appropriate for treatment as commodities, yet "not all goods are properly valued in this way."[20]

Thus the value of an artwork is not a law of nature, but a cultural fiction—a story we tell ourselves to transform uncertainty into possession. The pursuit of duration becomes an attempt to fix the flow of time. Museums, archives, and collectors act in the name of preservation, but what they are also securing is stability within the system. Concern for the work is therefore also a concern for capital invested. The commodification of art begins, as Findlay reminds us through Marx, precisely in this moment when "a commercial value is assigned to a thing that is not usually viewed under economic aspects."[21] In this light, decay appears subversive. Because the work that perishes cannot be insured, banked, or resold. Its value manifests in experience rather than possession. An important distinction, because this diverts value from its seeming durability towards its ability

to activate presence. The "image's temporality is a kind of material storytelling that runs parallel to the image's representational content."[22] Sustainable photography thus also subverts the fundamental logic of preservation that underpins much of art's institutional history. In allowing for disappearance, it transforms devaluation into reclamation—of meaning, of attention, of proximity. Another term for this is "care"—an integral value, immensely important to a society in transition. Care is the indispensable element of inclusion—an essential pillar of a truly just society.[23]

THE MARKET PARADOX AND NEW AUTHENTICITY

This critical stance, however, immediately runs into a central paradox of the market. In an economy based on scarcity, it is precisely ephemerality that proves to be a luxury. As communications director at Max Hetzler Galleries and an expert in publishing sustainable art editions through HSD Honor Westmacott observed in an interview for this essay: "Just look at flowers—they often reach peak beauty right at the tipping point of decay. In photography, the point of visual perfection often comes just before the image starts to dissolve. Letting something decay is almost a luxury. Like buying cut flowers—you know they're already dying, but you still bring them home."[24] Rarity and ephemerality—whether real or imagined—fuels the market, transforming impermanence into a commodity that paradoxically also signifies value within the current system.

Sustainable photography, therefore, inadvertently succumbs to the very logic it seeks to subvert: the uniqueness of its processes and the unrepeatability of its chemical or organic traces render these works valued objects also within an economy of scarcity. We see this with rising stars of the photo scene such as Julian Charrière, Lucas Leffler, Anaïs Tondeur, Susanne Kriemann, Daisuke Yakota, and Matthew Brandt, whose works are currently valued highly in an economic sense. Yet, as The Sustainable Darkroom suggests, the true potential for change lies in a conscious break from this cycle:

> Alternative photography has the potential to radically reshape the photographic landscape into the future. It is within the alternative that transformative ideas emerge like weeds from the cracked pavement. It is in this space, apart from the mainstream, and its relentless focus on capital accumulation - that we can imagine new worlds, and photography apart from devastating consumption. A photography that is a true alternative, not simply another niche in our failing system.[25]

This assertion highlights the inherent challenge within the practice of sustainable photography: to create works that refuse to be commodified into yet another luxury item, moving beyond scarcity to build a truly alternative visual culture.

FRAGILITY AS ORIGIN: PHOTOGRAPHY'S INHERENT UNCERTAINTY

Echoing what Walter Benjamin famously called its "aura,"[26] Adorno and Horkheimer describe the pursuit of permanence and perfect replication in

industrial and digital technologies as an attack on the historical uniqueness of the artwork. Photography's material history has always been bound to fragility, to light-sensitive compounds that stained, tarnished, revealed, and disappeared in equal measure. Permanence in photography remains an illusion, as much in the analogue history of the medium as it is in its digital future.[27]

To grasp this fully, we must return to photography's beginnings. Paris, 1827 to 1855: a period of radical experimentation. Nicéphore Niépce coaxed images from bitumen-coated plates; Louis Daguerre perfected silvered surfaces; meanwhile, in London, William Henry Fox Talbot developed his "photogenic drawings"—delicate impressions on sensitized salted paper. Fixing was the major challenge. No one knew whether these shadows would last. They couldn't test longevity, because longevity itself wasn't yet available.

In *Burning with Desire*, Geoffrey Batchen describes how these pioneers "worked with materials whose future was unknown."[28] Each image heralded both its discovery and disappearance—a captured shadow whose survival was never guaranteed. In her study of ephemeral photography, Kate Palmer Albers quotes a written report on Thomas Wedgwood's early photogram experiments with silver nitrate around 1800—images that could not be fixed and left no lasting trace. Herschel's introduction of sodium thiosulfate ("hypo") in 1839 offered some stabilization—yet permanence remained elusive. Even Daguerre's celebrated photographs were criticized for their fragility. In 1842, Alphonse-Eugène Hubert famously mocked them by claiming that Daguerre would have had "to make a night-album, enclosing his results between black-paper and only showing them by moonlight."[29] So that the sun would not extinguish them.

Westmacott describes this historical loss as tragic: "…without a visible image, those moments have little value. Had there been even a faint trace," she remarked, "the history—and its value—would be completely different."[30] Palmer Albers underscores this irony by recounting her own attempt to view the first fixed photograph, only to find that it too no longer exists—and only the metal plate of *View from the Window at Le Gras* remains.[31]

Palmer Albers further argues that such fragility was not a marginal flaw but central to photography's origins—a medium born, as she writes, from "a shared culture of uncertainty." She mentions the "Fading Committee" of 1855, supported by Prince Albert, which famously attempted to combat this instability, but its legacy contradicts its mission: not permanence, but the recognition that conservation is an ongoing process and that fragility is ultimately inherent to the medium's meanings.[32] This aesthetic of disappearance is echoed in the critique of Paul Virilio: "The Aesthetics of Disappearance explores how the modern preoccupation with speed and acceleration leads to a loss of depth, duration, and meaningful perception."[33] In photography, amidst all the uncertainty, there is one certainty: light brings, and light takes what it brings forth.

VULNERABILITY AS MEANING

In traditional aesthetics, duration was considered the epitome of the sublime, the everlasting, immortality—that which resists decay. Out of reach, because it was only available to the gods. But in sustainable photography, this relationship is reversed: The sublime lies no longer in enduring, but in perishing. The image that passes, that fades within itself, opens a space for contemplation in which transience becomes the site of meaning. This realization points to an ethic of vulnerability—a vulnerability that is neither sentimental nor heroic, but epistemological. The work that confronts its fragility bears witness to a different form of knowledge: the knowledge that every image—just like everybody—is part of a larger cycle. In her book-qua-eulogy *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman writes that archives "are made of dust—and that this dust is the material of history itself."[34] This sentence could just as well be said about photography. Because it, too, consists of dust, of particles, of the remnants of the light that once was. Sustainable photography takes this dust seriously. It turns to the remnants—not to cleanse them, but to inhabit them. Its goal is not purity, but resonance. The image becomes a form of care, accompanying what dissolves, remembering by holding nothing fast. It opens a space for what Susan Sontag might call "pity for time."[35] Perhaps this is the true task of photography in the Anthropocene: no longer to document the world, but to grieve for it without abandoning it. Sustainable photography does not claim to be eternal, rather it teaches us to linger in the moment of disappearance—that brief span between light and dark in which meaning arises.

Building on these conceptual foundations, contemporary artists are beginning to translate these ideas into practice. They show how impermanence, material circularity, and sustainability can become effective not only as theoretical frameworks but as lived, tactile experiences within photography. Pauline Hafsia M'barek impressively illustrates this in her work *Entropic Records*, created for the Museum Ludwig as part of the Artist meets Archive program. In it, she turns items from the Agfa Advertising Archive—originally meant to demonstrate how to avoid imperfections—into objects of artistic investigation. Dust, wear and tear, insects, and fingerprints are elevated from waste to a poetic documentation of the passage of time. The camera conserves by immobilizing; it holds fast by interrupting. In *Index* (2024), M'barek transforms museum dust—fibers, hair, soot, skin flakes—into sheets of paper, showing that what institutions typically seek to dispose of can remain as an organic testimony of human presence and activity. Similarly, in *Minutien* (2021), fingerprints—traditionally considered a blemish—become unintentional conservators who stabilize oxidation and thus extend the lifespan of gelatin silver prints. Here, touch itself becomes an act of care, making clear that transience is not opposed to conservation, but forms its innermost principle. And perhaps a new ethic of the image lies precisely in this: no longer preservation at all costs, but allowing change, an attitude that perceives vulnerability not as weakness but as a form of knowledge.

TIME, ECOLOGY, AND THE PRACTICE OF CARE

Every form of sustainable practice demands that we rethink the concept of time. For what is time other than the fabric in which all things dissolve and transform? In the logic of the market, time is linear—it leads from production to consumption, from creation to decay, from novelty to obsolescence.

Sustainable photography, on the other hand, conceives of time as cyclical, recurring. Its pulse resembles the rhythms of the living: regeneration, growth, dying, returning. In its processes—the evaporation of water, the drying up of plants, the darkening of the emulsion—a different order is revealed: a time that is not counted but experienced. This time is not a measure, but a relationship. It connects the work with the world that produced it. For Lucia Halder, photographic sustainability is a practice rather than a tool: "The non-monetary value generated by the Fotoszene Festival—which is non-curated, so everyone participates—was profoundly felt this year: Network and Community. The incredibly strong networking of the photography scene in Cologne and the emergence of a genuine community feeling is a value that cannot be monetized. It's reflected in collaborations and shared projects."[36] It becomes a practice of care—for the material, for the process, for that which passes. This form of temporality demands attention, slowness, and a lingering in transition. To leave the pursuit of control behind and hold space for change becomes the aesthetic principle here. Capitalist modernity—one could say with Hartmut Rosa—is a culture of acceleration, in which everything is in motion only so that nothing truly changes.[37] Rosa calls this the "dynamic stabilization" of the system.[38] In the face of this, the practice of sustainable photography is inherently an act of resistance. For sustainable photography decelerates—not from a place of nostalgia, but from a place of responsibility: it responds to what passes by adapting to it, thus attempting to counteract the "shrinking of the present" created by the constant pursuit of acceleration.[39]

CONCLUSION: CARE AS AESTHETICS AND PRACTICE

Within sustainable photography, a true practice of care does not preserve artworks indiscriminately but rather commits us to exploring and living with these works only for their natural duration. It recognizes that every material possesses its own temporality—a time one cannot prolong indefinitely but merely accompany. This form of attention—an ethic of patience—transforms the artistic endeavor into a genuinely nurturing relationship. Effective stewardship requires a speculative commitment and a willingness to be attentive to the hidden, invisible labor and marginalized voices (both human and non-human) that sustain life.[40] Here, care is not sentimental nurturing, but an epistemological act: a different knowledge of the world based on resonance rather than on domination. It brings forth that stance described by María Puig de la Bellacasa as "matters of care"—a way of thinking that understands itself as a speculative ethic in more-than-human worlds and

is committed to vulnerability.[41] Sustainable photography embodies this position materially. The work makes decay visible without dramatizing it; it allows change without romanticizing it. Here, the image becomes the process, the artwork the ally, the earth the co-author. So that the photographer is both creator and witness.

As we enter a new climate-induced reality, we are experiencing tremendous loss, absence, and grief. Care is one way of holding the responsibility that comes from recognizing how our past and present actions are entangled in the cascading effects of the Anthropocene. As participants in this chain of cause and effect, we face a process of acknowledgment and repair—directed, both, inward and outward. We are still at an early stage of this process: recognizing what has been lost and looking for ways to address what we are responsible for. Before remorse can be felt, there is often a period of helplessness, a numbness that is itself part of realizing the loss. As Andreas Reckwitz observes, "Losses lead to increased fear of loss, which manifests in political polarization, nostalgia, and a search for simpler answers."[42] This points to the need to let go of what has been accumulated and catalogued so that social connections can be reimagined toward a more just and inclusive way of being. Understood this way, the archive is not only a record of what has been preserved, but also a space where this kind of transformation can take place.

Unlike entropy, which unravels and disperses, this is a constructive, constitutive force—a knowing drawn from the future that informs the present. It is an act of assembling, of weaving, of nurturing unity within diversity. This generative counterforce—always present in the universe—is syntropy.[43] As such this principle is perfectly realized when an artist meets the archive, a confrontation that becomes a relational platform. It gives artists the resources and setting to remix and re-interpret archival materials through research and public performance.

The archive and other memory institutions are at a moment of spatial and operational exhaustion. They are now moving toward radically different collection strategies—such as de-accessioning (de-collecting)—that stand as an anti-thesis to their original mission. Lucia Halder once more: "This radical revisiting of foundational concepts, however, is perfectly characteristic of a transformational society: it proves that our essential concepts must be continually readjusted, forever balancing on the fine line between past intent and future necessity."[44]

Thus, the relationship between artist, work, and world shifts: from an act of possession and control to one of relinquishment and shared temporality. It introduces an ecological handprint into art, emphasizing proactive, positive environmental contributions over simply doing less harm. This shifts our focus from indefinite fossil-based preservation to responsible stewardship throughout an artwork's lifecycle. By accepting that photographic materials naturally change and decay, a new aesthetic playground forms outside a commodities-driven context. Sustainable photography does not offer a solution to the question of "How long is long enough?" but rather transforms the question into a lifelong challenge: care is long enough.

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1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

2 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

3 The phrase "sustainable photography" (as a process rooted in regenerative circularity) is a contemporary and academic synthesis that applies the macro-economic and ecological principles of the circular economy and regeneration to the micro-practice of photography (the "green darkroom movement"). It's a phrase of definition used by artists and researchers associated with groups such as The Sustainable Darkroom, which began as a research group under the London Alternative Photography Collective in 2019 as a means of articulating a photographic practice that goes beyond merely "being less bad" (in terms of sustainability) toward one that is actively restorative and systemic (in terms of regenerative circularity). While Hannah Fletcher and The Sustainable Darkroom collective are central to the practice of this concept, the movement is essentially non-hierarchical and open source. A commons structure.
The expression comes from an earlier interview (2020) for *The Lissome Magazine*, "Still Not a Solution" (published in 2021, Issue 2), which I conducted with Hannah Fletcher shortly before the Sustainable Darkroom was formed. (Transcript available.)

4 Kate Palmer Albers, *The Night Albums: Visibility and the Ephemeral Photograph* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 17.

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19 Michael Findlay, *The Value of Art*, 12.
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34 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 7.

35 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

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37 Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 28.

38 Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 28.

39 Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 172.

40 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More-Than-Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

41 Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 35.

42 Andreas Reckwitz, *Verlust* [Loss] (Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2024).

43 Definition of syntropy: The term syntropy (from Greek syn- = together, trope = tendency or turning) was first introduced by mathematician Luigi Fantappiè in the 1940s as the complement to entropy. On Syntropy: While entropy describes processes moving forward in time (toward disorder, dispersion, and equilibrium), syntropy describes processes that appear to move backward in time, toward order, coherence, and life. In this sense, syntropy can be thought of as a pull from the future, a convergent attractor rather than a divergent decay. Fantappiè associated it with phenomena of life, consciousness, and creativity—all forces that seem to organize matter against the entropic drift toward randomness.

44 Lucia Halder, interview with the author, 2025. (Transcript available.)