

## The fertility of death

*From compost we come, and in compost we shall turn*

Gustavo Duch

We call it planet Earth, but it should be called planet Life. This is the thesis of Catalan ecologist Jordi Miralles Ferrer because "the real peculiarity of our planet is not the land, nor the oceans, but this thin layer that covers everything called the biosphere". It is unique in that, so far, no life has been found to exist anywhere else in the universe. Thin because, although we can find a few birds flying ten kilometres above sea level or deep-sea fish at a depth of eight kilometres, the space where life takes place is equivalent, if the planet were the size of an apple, to the skin that covers it.

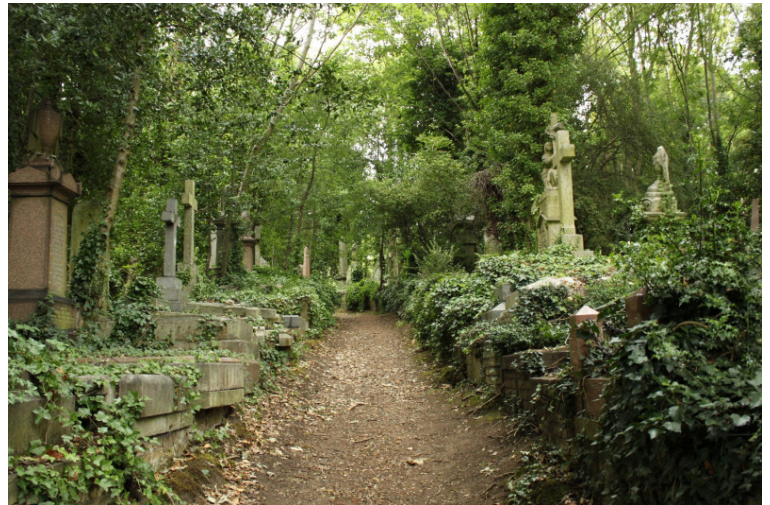


Image of Highgate Cemetery, London / Panyd

What if we were to call it planet Death? Again, it would describe a peculiarity of the planet because, until proven otherwise, there is no death anywhere else in the universe. Indeed, without life, there is no death, and vice versa. We call it the biosphere, but we might as well call that thin layer where organic matter dances a dance without choreography the thanatosphere.

In any case, the heartbeats that agitate this bio-thanato-sphere are catapulted by life-feeding death and death bringing life to life. A stubborn systole, life; a stubborn diastole, death; of a single heart, a single vital organ that, as Deborah Bird Rose expresses in her approach to the Australian Aboriginal cosmovision in the book *The Dream of the Wild Dog*, "for some four billion years, life and death have gone hand in hand, have each found its own respectful level in relation to the other and, together, have sustained a family of life on Earth".

*The culture of modernity no longer worships life and death as it deserves.*

But the culture of modernity no longer worships life and death as it deserves. On the contrary, by imposing rational thinking, it ends up forgetting the mystery of this infinite cycle. In industrial agriculture, we have plenty of evidence of how, blinded by productivity, chemical fertilisers and pesticides destroy the small and microscopic life present in

*When I die, I would like my body to be buried directly, without clothes or coffin, in my vegetable garden... May my "composted" flesh give back to the biosphere the life it "lent" me while avoiding conventional formulas that I suspect are highly polluting.*

the soil, its digestive biome, which is responsible for taking, processing and delivering nutrients from dead beings to living plants to maintain the trophic cycle. Is it (only) ignorance or rather a reflection of the imposition of a culture that refuses to be dependent on the rest of human and non-human living beings? If we jump into the realm of the death of human beings, and specifically in

the ceremony or funeral of our bodies once we are dead, we will find some clues.

I, and I am sure some of you too, have long declared that when I die, I would like my body to be buried directly, without clothes or coffin, in my vegetable garden and grazed by detritivores and all kinds of decomposers, they will allow my carbon molecules and other elements, on the backs of mycorrhizae, to resurface as part of a branch, a stem, a leaf... May my "composted" flesh give back to the biosphere the life it "lent" me while avoiding conventional formulas that I suspect are highly polluting.

The website [Funeral Natural](#), edited by Jordi Miralles, offers excellent information on the subject. For example, it warns that burying in the ground in a private place, however beautiful it may be, is not allowed. Or to corroborate that, certainly, this forbidden natural practice, rigorously managed, not only restores fertility to the land but also has the most negligible ecological impact, as can be extracted from the reading of an exhaustive 2017 study carried out by the [Fondation Services Funéraires de Paris](#).

In any case, it is clear that we die as we live or vice versa, that the same ways of inhabiting the world are found in

*We come from compost and we will turn into compost.*

the ways of abandoning it. While urban macro-cemeteries and their skyscrapers of niches are a clear expression of how most lives materialise on the margins of nature, chain cremation in mortuaries is a faithful reflection of the level of industrialisation and urbanisation we have reached.

[As is already happening in other places](#), and looking for inspiration in past cultures or cultures different from the capitalist Western one, hopefully, we can free ourselves from fears and prejudices to review not only how we face death but also because it has a lot to do with it, how we face life, to propose and demand alternatives of natural funerals such as green cemeteries or humusation to facilitate our metamorphosis. We come from compost and we will turn into compost.

### Related links:

- The Jus Semper Global Alliance
- Alejandro Pedregal and Juan Bordera: [Toward an Ecosocialist Degrowth](#)
- Jason Hickel: [Degrowth is About Global Justice](#)
- Joel Millward-Hopkins et al: [Providing Decent Living With Minimum Energy: A Global Scenario](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [The Unbearable Unawareness of our Ecological Existential Crisis](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [Transitioning to Geocratia the People and Planet and Not the Market Paradigm — First Steps](#)
- Gustavo Duch: [Times of Insurrection?](#)
- Gustavo Duch: [Vegan capitalism: food multinationals and BlackRock](#)



❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

❖ **About the author: Gustavo Duch** has a degree in veterinary medicine. Coordinator of 'Food sovereignty, biodiversity and cultures'. He collaborates with peasant movements.



❖ **About this Brief:** The fertility of death was originally published in Spanish by [CTXT](#) in February 2024. This paper has been published under Creative Commons, CC-BY-NC 4.0. You are welcome to reproduce the material for non-commercial use, crediting the author and the original publisher.

❖ **Quote this paper as:** Gustavo Duch: The fertility of death — The Jus Semper Global Alliance, September 2024.

❖ **Tags:** capitalism, democracy, trophic cycle, biosphere, ecology, compost, pollution, sustainability.

❖ The responsibility for opinions expressed in this work rests only with the author(s), and its publication does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by The Jus Semper Global Alliance.



Under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

© 2024. The Jus Semper Global Alliance  
Portal on the net: <https://www.jussemper.org/>  
e-mail: [informa@jussemper.org](mailto:informa@jussemper.org)