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*Commentary*

# Temporalities of worldly receding

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**Abstract**

This commentary responds to the framing of a negative ontology of space that Özge Can Doğmuş develops in relation to the worldly receding of watery spaces. Building on the concept of finitude in this article, I offer reflections on how conceptualisations of the negative can engage more deeply with geographies of time. I extend Doğmuş' call for a more temporal geography of negativity that engages with the intensities of time that are felt and embodied. In proposing a more reflexive approach towards the nature of negative existence, I conclude by advocating for a deeper account of emotional geographies within theorisations of the negative.

**Keywords**

Emotions, finitude, temporality, negativty, water

## The force of absence

Rather than treating absence as loss or mere decline, Özge Can Doğmuş' article opens up space to think about the more-than-human worldly experiences and the intensities that compound through absence, which become central to the question of human existence. Through the notion of a negative ontology of space, Doğmuş builds on existing arguments that the central crisis of water scarcity is not a simple question of resource allocation that can be reduced and conflated towards the politics of management. Whilst scholars offer other frames for unpacking watery relations, this paper invites us to think about how finitude is experienced through a deeper embodied sense of self, and the power relations that permeate in *letting* something, in this case, water, become lost. The more-than-human relations with (the loss of) water are further pulled out by how such landscapes 'act' through transformations of earthly states, and where such an ontology is foregrounded by the presence of absence, remembering what was. This paper as such asks us to think about plural relationalities with the materiality of the earth in the context by which 'some things are permitted to vanish whilst others are preserved'.

The notion of a negative ontological existence in this article asks us to consider the phenomenological ways we come to not just sense, but embody absence. Indeed, a central question of absence is why does it *matter*? As Maddrell (2013: 504) argues in the context of (human) death and dying, 'an absent presence reflects the apparently contradictory

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binding together of things absent with the present'. But how does this intensify through and with time? Absence is not an existing thing in itself, but as something that is made to exist through relations that give and *make it* matter (Meyer, 2012) including time. DeSilvey and Edensor (2013) explore this through material geographies of ruination, expressing that absence is an ever-active process of continual ontological transformation, where ruins are never a mute form of materiality, but evolve and transform across time, much similar to the central concern of this article, the retreat of water. But what is worth further drawing out is how such ontological transformations are bodily felt.

Such matters of absence that Doğmuş thinks with, demand a closer examination of time, not just as an object of study, but how time acts and takes hold within spaces at various scales, including the body. A focus on the geographies of time and temporality towards embodied perceptions of absence engages the nature of 'time consciousness' (Glennie and Thrift, 1996: 280) where a sense of time comes into being and moves forward by coming to frame our understanding of the world and how we exist in it. There is often a dualistic understanding of time in relation to environmental change ('normal times', 'exceptional times'), and a linear outlook of how we *use* time. It is often presented as a solution, or something that is quantified as needing more of, or lacking in. Forms of life are resultantly framed through resilience, and how we seemingly deal or cope with time. But by attuning more closely to what 'can be made and unmade', ontologies of finitude reveal how our bodies experience and encounter time beyond such linear binaries.

Geographies of time speak closely to Doğmuş' framing of geographies of the negative, and negative existence, in terms of thinking more closely about our relationalities with different *expressions* of time. We should be careful, though, as geographers when discussing the nature of finitude of exactly *what* is ending. As Doğmuş reveals through different scales within the specific case study examples of vanishing bodies of water, finitude is not a universal concept, and we risk promoting a mere 'metaphor' that takes on a set of imagined geographies. A popular imaginary within western ascriptions of climate change is the notion that 'time is running out', for example. Though for many Indigenous people across the world, their worlds have indeed *literally* been ended by dispossession and death (Zaragocin, 2019) and are conditioned through unequal exposures of geotrauma through *sedimented* colonial relations (Yusoff, 2018).

Questions of time structure our emotions and emotional responses to change and crisis that should alert us to not just multiple temporalities, but the fluctuating progression of time. The negation of water is not spatially experienced homogeneously, intensifying across lifetimes through ecological imperialisms, which further alters the body's 'rhythmic response to dramatic changes in situated environments' (Edensor et al. 2019: 255). The past and the future is also brought into the present, as the loss of *knowing* the environment brings our existence into the situated framings of *deep time* that reveal 'the fractured timespace of our present planetary moment' as we are literally 'confronted with stretched-out temporal horizons…and temporal dislocations' (Ginn et al. 2018: 214). The loss of water in such instances is to witness the losses of deep time. Deep time further shapes life itself, as we start to connect moments of apparent crisis in relation to wider planetary and infrastructural histories.

However, we should also be careful, in relation to time, with how crisis itself is characterised. As Fredriksen (2025: 490) asks, 'what emerges in ordinary encounters with/in the Anthropocene… in ways that can change what emerges from the flow of individual and collective experiences without registering as rupture?' We might therefore think and reframe earthly disappearance as threaded through generational relations, where the violences of deep time come to haunt the earth's *present* materiality. Indeed, these are not moments of rupture within timescales, but processes that reframe our emotional responses to time itself. These relational intensities matter because they expose how worldly vulnerabilities can disorientate our understanding of space and time. Doğmuş pulls us back from the promises of often mere hopeful affirmations of imaging/making better or sustainable futures, by exclaiming that the future is very much unfolding across people's lives *in the present* through loss and disappearance.

What, then, are the ethics of justice and care for the future unfolding in the present? Marine geographers, for one, have argued and pushed for a more concerted focus on doing water governance research that is framed centrally around human rights, and that can support self-autonomy and determination (Satizábal et al., 2025) documented in specific examples including working with legal practitioners to identify constitutional injunctions to practices of dispossession in fishing waters, and tracing the temporal configurations of state power to show how people are excluded from decisions that affect their very existence (Figueroa et al., 2024). Work across this area has actively concerned itself with helping communities understand how the past and present are mutually entangled, in order to situate how and where particular power structures permeate people's lives. As Doğmuş reflects, framing justice means attending to the 'infrastructures…and uneven capacities' that allow people in the first place to confront modes of crisis.

## Emotional existences

In reflecting on Doğmuş' piece then, time in relation to finitude can therefore be thought not as a beginning and end point, but a field of intensities, shifting our perception of what can be made familiar and known (May and Thrift, 2003). A wider temporal lens for negative ontology can further assert how negativity becomes something that is lived and embodied rather than merely anticipated or speculated. This temporal receding strips back layers of time, whilst also revealing the nature of time in the present. For example, Cai et al. (2025) draw attention to the negative geographies of crafting in rural China, highlighting how embodied exhaustion, social oppression, and various forms of exclusion embeds itself in the everyday lives of craft-makers over time. These social and embodied dynamics reveal how power structures become entrenched through the way bodies become immersed 'in *both* relational and non-relational negatives' (Cai et al., 2025: 4).

World-making geographies similarly engage temporality in many ways 'through its futuring' (Dekeyser, 2024: 341), often ascribing the future that holds or contains *something* to be hopeful towards. This further invites us to think beyond the dualisms that the negative invites, as loss is not for Doğmuş a 'remedial deficit'. Absence is 'materially consequential' which invites a deeper reflection on the emotional geographies of the negative. Negative geographies as such can engage and think more reflexively towards the subject and *concern* (Levi and Peters, 2025: 66, original emphasis) for emotions. Negative geographies have engaged with the *affective* intensities of bad feelings, disdain, and boredom (Dekeyser et al., 2024) for example, but as recent work has questioned through situated relationalities (Cai et al., 2025) we see deeper *emotional* negative existences that themselves reveal forms of geographical knowledge. As Davidson and Milligan (2004: 524) tell us, emotions are a 'form of connective tissue that links experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with(in) broader geographies of place' that are both intimate but also collective. If we in fact live in negative times, it begs the question of how such times are shaped by emotions, not just what emotions people have towards negative times.


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