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"Carbon Vitalism: Life and the Body in Climate Denial"

Pasek, Anne

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This article names and examines carbon vitalism, a strain of climate denial centered on the moral recuperation of carbon dioxide—and thus fossil fuels. Drawing on interconnections between CO2, plant life, and human breath, carbon vitalists argue that carbon dioxide is not pollution but the stuff of life itself and thus possesses ethical and ecological standing. This philosophy contains a poetics of denial that is too often overlooked by studies of climate skepticism focusing narrowly on industry funding. Accordingly, this article develops a reparative theory of climate denial, asking what values and relations are gathered together within carbon vitalist speech and how speakers work to sustain these connections. Through close readings of carbon vitalist media and interviews with key figures in its network, the article demonstrates how the body is central to carbon vitalism's rhetorical and emotional framing of ecological interdependence and epistemological populism. As such, carbon vitalism in effect reenacts long-established feminist appeals to the body (though to decidedly different political purposes). The article concludes by evaluating how the climate movement could both challenge and remobilize these logics, exploring what this corporeal turn in climate denial means for feminist and antiracist theories of environmental justice and the body. (Abstract)

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