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Preface

Our primary task for this project this year was to read and explicate Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* as translated into English by Steven Corcoran (Duke University Press, 2019). We grappled with the "modalities of repopulating the planet" in our age (11), the "ongoing redefinition of the human in the framework of a general ecology" (13), the "generalized introduction of tools and calculating or computational machines" (14), the power of capital, the compression of time, and the "nocturnality" of democracy. We confronted the possibility that "civil peace in the West ... depends in large part on inflicting violence far away" (19). We wondered what it means that we "consume the divine" in the present as our "paranoid dispositions crystallize around the grand narratives of the (re)commencement and of the end" (27). And we asked how all these issues relate to the idea of necropolitics.

If the essays in the present volume do not necessarily reflect the content of Mbembe's work, they perhaps respond to his provocations and stimulations and to the discussions they catalyzed. These discussions were greatly enriched by the contributions of younger scholars and graduate students, whose proactive, insightful participation deserves commendation. And particular recognition and gratitude go to Liying Wang, the assistant for this project, who arranged all the gatherings and readings and put together this volume with extraordinary competence and dedication.