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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image is of The East Bank of the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota and the Mississippi River from the Washington Avenue Bridge. Image courtesy of Patrick Nunnally.

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IN REVIEW

REVIEW OF *ARTS OF LIVING ON A DAMAGED PLANET: GHOSTS AND MONSTERS OF THE ANTHROPOCENE*

By Karen Bauer

We are in the Anthropocene

There is something quite embarrassing about reading a book in public that appears to be upside down. The collaborative piece of work known as *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* is separated into two parts: “Monsters and the Art of Living” and “Ghosts on a Damaged Planet.” The reader must physically turn the book upside down to get from one part to the other. On each cover’s bottom right corner, a hint of the other side’s cover is present, helping the reader realize that the two parts are closely connected. After completing this book, however, the feeling of embarrassment seems to make sense. Each

part is composed of essays from scholars in an array of different fields, such as anthropology, ecology, art, and literature. While each scholar comes from a different discipline, they are all dealing with the same issue in these books: human damage. Humans are what have made and what continue to make the planet damaged. Living in the Anthropocene epoch, the editors begin both parts of the book illustrating some of the reverberating consequences that our actions have on the world and those who inhabit it. Industrial pollution, for example, has had negative impacts on the Earth’s geology and ecosystems, pushing



*Detail from Scyphozoan or Lion’s mane jellyfish, Cyanea capillata.
Image courtesy of Alexander Semenov.*

us further and further into the belly of the beast: climate change.

Humans should feel embarrassed when reading this book and must confront the damages that we have made to the planet before it is too late. Both the “Monsters” and “Ghosts” sections of this book confront the issue of human-induced damage. In “Monsters,” the authors show just how interconnected our lives are with nonhuman species and the problematic ways that our actions disrupt

their lives. With “Ghosts,” the authors illustrate the effects that the humans of today have on the humans and species of the past, the ghosts being forever present in our landscapes as a form of remembrance. Although separated into two parts, every author is ultimately wrestling with similar issues pertaining to the question of life.

How are human and nonhuman species to live on, protect, *and* create life on a damaged planet?



Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene.
Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Editors.
2017 University of Minnesota Press.

Monsters: We have never been individuals

The greatest lesson that “Monsters” teaches us is about our entanglements with other species.

With modernity, humans are taught the importance of individualism. Instead of working as a collective to move forward, the individual works alone for progress. With this mindset, the connections that humans have with nonhuman species are often ignored and forgotten.

“Our society’s ecological amnesia is profound, and it limits us from understanding our current and past impacts on the species and ecosystems around us.” (Ingrid Parker, “Monsters,” p. 161)

The authors in this book all work to debunk the myth of individualism. Instead, they illustrate both the nonhuman multispecies assemblages that have been around since the beginning of time, and the problems that can arise from not recognizing or ignoring the importance of these entanglements.

Take jellyfish, for example. They may seem innocent, but many have the ability to be monstrous. Not only can their stings send beachgoers to the hospital, but the comb jellyfish of the Black Sea consume large amounts of small fish, emptying the sea of other species. Jellyfish were not born monstrous, though. Due to human overfishing, shipping, pollution, and global warming, jellyfish



Scyphozoan or Lion’s mane jellyfish, Cyanea capillata. Image courtesy of Alexander Semenov.

have been forced to defend their life against humans and other species any way possible.

Humans have created a monster out of jellyfish, entangled in their lives whether they like it or not.

Ghosts: Enmeshment in Landscape

The authors of “Ghosts” illustrate the multiple spatial and temporal layers that both the living and dead possess, and the influence that these layers have in shaping our landscapes.

Ghosts, like monsters, create entanglements. They inhabit the same spaces as the living. Their presence can be felt and seen indirectly, haunting humans and nonhumans in order for them to begin to understand the effects they cause on the present and the future.

**“...‘we’ is not homogenous: some have been considered more disposable than others.”
(Anna Tsing et al. “Ghosts,” p. 4)**

One of the most important features of ghosts is their ability to demonstrate the unequal relations among species that continue to occur and cause negative effects.

Ingrid M. Parker’s piece entitled “Remembering in our Amnesia, Seeing in our Blindness,” discusses the Great Meadow on the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). While this natural landscape is well-protected from campus development and is praised for its biodiversity, it has a surprising history that many people do not know about. The Great Meadow as it stands today is a landscape haunted by the ghosts of human and nonhuman species of the past. Only 16 percent of the species found in the meadow are “native plants.” The rest of the plants were brought by Spanish colonists in the eighteenth century. Ecologists and historians say that the original California “grasslands” were

actually fields of wildflowers. The history of these wildflowers in the Great Meadow, along with that of the Amah Mutsun tribe who were the first human inhabitants of the meadow, are often not mentioned.

“The idea that disaster will come is not new to indigenous peoples; genocidal disaster has already come, decades and centuries ago, and has not stopped, and the people have not ceased ongoing worlding either.” (Ursula K. Le Guin, “Monsters,” p. 44)

While there is such a long and active history of erasure on the part of humans, especially when it comes to humans inflicting violence on others, ghosts do not let this happen. They serve as reminders of what lives were destroyed in the path towards so-called “progress.”

They also remind us that it is still possible to live through the damage. Despite the removal of many of their native plants and people, the Amah Mutsun in Santa Cruz, for example, continue to prosper in this world. Having nearly 600 enrolled members, this tribal band works hard to make room for themselves in the present and future, while simultaneously remembering the past. Their Relearning Program for example, aims for members to relearn traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) as a way to more effectively help with contemporary environmental issues. Thus, the ghosts of the Great Meadow remain crucial in the fight to restore the damaged planet.



*An explosion of rare California poppies in the Great Meadow on the UC Santa Cruz campus.
Photographer Gregory Gilbert.*

“We should worry but not despair.” (Dorion Sagan, “Monsters,” p. 174)

There is no denying that nonhuman and human species are bound up with one another. This entanglement is what allows life to continue. Not recognizing or ignoring this entanglement, however, is what destroys life and what damages the planet.

As an anthropologist trained in considering different ontologies, reading this book made me realize that I had no idea about the full extent that I had with other species and their worlds. While it is very easy and okay to feel overwhelmed after reading this book, it only begins to become a problem if the reader does not do something to change this feeling.

Each author of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* shows the fragile state that our planet is currently in due to human-induced environmental changes. While this book serves as a warning, it also inspires a call to action with some authors offering solutions to begin fixing the problem.

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About the Author

Karen Bauer is a second year Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Generally, Karen is interested in the effects of copper-deposit mining in the communities that make up the Intag Region of northern Ecuador. Her current research specifically seeks to understand how local conflicts over land, water, and identity articulate with global and planetary agencies, through examining the effects of transnational mining companies, international environmental organizations, and the indigenous Earth Mother, *Pachamama*, in the village of Junín, Ecuador.

Perhaps the most common strategy provided is the expansion of knowledge practices and conversations. I strongly believe getting others to recognize these extensive entanglements is the first step in producing change, especially those whose ancestors have a very explicit history of destruction. Reading this book has inspired me to engage in more critical conversations regarding climate change with other academics and non-academics. These conversations will begin by foregrounding humans’ past actions as a result of current problems, inevitably bringing about the ghosts of the past while doing this. They will also pull from different branches of knowledge, not relying on a specific one to discuss such an expansive issue. Moreover, it is imperative that more interdisciplinary dialogue, work, and action take place for creative solutions to arise.

We cannot fix the planet by ourselves, though. We must rely on the help of the living, the dead, human, and nonhuman entities to bring about change.