



Kyle Bladow, Jennifer Ladino, eds. *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Illustrations. 360 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4962-0679-4.



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Resting on the argument that affect theory has much to offer environmental humanities scholars, *Toward an Affective Ecocriticism: Placing Feeling in the Anthropocene* is animated by several key questions: What emotions circulate around environmental issues? How do they move? What role do environments play in shaping affect? What new affects are emerging in the Anthropocene? Editors Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino position this collection as a contribution both to affect theory, in that the essays illuminate the always-already-present role of the environment in creating affect, and to environmental studies, in that affect theory offers useful tools and perspectives for scholars looking for common ground across multiple boundaries of which species is only one. The collection makes four specific contributions aligning with the volume's four sections. First, several essays explore the connection between affect and the environment in new genres and/or temporalities. Second, other essays turn to "extratextual affects" outside of literary or textual emotions that are most often studied (p. 10). Third, the collection

offers a wide range of methodologies of affect theory, eschewing a definitive declaration of affect in favor of a critically diverse set of approaches. Fourth, many of the authors represented here define and describe new—often negative—affects of the Anthropocene. The result of this set of essays is a generically and theoretically rich assemblage of inquiry. If, as the editors argue, "affects are at the center of contemporary biopolitics," then the essays collected here provide some pathways to understanding what those affects are, how they are animated in the world, and how they contribute to a more socially and environmentally just future (p. 1).

The three essays of part 1 offer a set of theoretical explorations of affect theory. Nicole M. Merola attends to what she calls the "form/affect/Anthropocene seam" to uncover the new affects and forms that the Anthropocene generates (p. 31). She shows how poet Juliana Spahr's formal experimentation evokes "Anthropocene anxiety," which Merola positions as a dominant affect of our time (p. 33). Beyond just representing such affects, Mer-

ola demonstrates how we must instead embody them to enact “critical coping mechanisms” for the Anthropocene (p. 43). Alexa Weik von Mossner takes a different tack: a cognitive approach to Anthropocene affect. Analyzing the short story collection *Love in the Anthropocene*, Weik von Mossner argues that the text serves as an instruction manual guiding readers to an experience of solastalgia—a feeling of loss and longing for a place that has been environmentally destroyed. Neil Campbell offers fictocriticism as a “toolkit for new ecological writing” (p. 79). He points to the fictocritical work of Kathleen Stewart as a model for how a focus on the local, similar to Campbell’s own concept of “affective critical regionality,” produces new attunements (p. 72).

The authors of the chapters in part 2, “Affective Attachments: Land, Bodies, Justice,” apply affect theory to new, extratextual objects to further illuminate the affective experience of the Anthropocene. Jobb Arnold outlines his concept of land affect: “nontechnologically mediated experiences of affective energy that cause people to *feel with the land*” (p. 97). Arnold argues that land affect is ever-present, though essentially ignored by most people until an intense experience occurs that overwhelms bodily senses. His selected example, a severe forest fire that decimated Canada’s Tar Sands in 2016, shows how land affect offers insights into human experiences of environment. William Major addresses the oft-examined tension between the local and the global by reframing the work of environmental activist Wendell Berry through affective empathy. Major contends that creating “small but necessary affective ties” can resist the alienation of capital (p. 125). Tom Hertweck turns affective ecocriticism to food studies, a field he describes as understudied despite its clear connections to environmental humanities. Hertweck deftly shows how food operates both materially and semiotically, offering “a theory of affective eating that understands food as *embodied ideology*” (p. 133). Hertweck’s attention to the myriad ways food affect can illuminate ecocritical

analyses of late capitalism sketches many critical possibilities for this subfield. Similarly, Ryan Hediger examines another little-studied area: the environments and ecologies of war. Via an analysis of the 2014 short story collection *Redeployment*, Hediger asserts that the unfamiliar and estranging nature of affects of war can be potentially useful for ecocritical projects striving for new ways of seeing.

Part 3, “Animality: Feeling Species and Boundaries,” (re)examines and critiques some central tenets of humanism, namely, desire, evolution, tragedy, animality, and anthropocentrism. Robert Azzarello offers a reading of the work of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud. Azzarello convincingly argues that, in the influential writings of both thinkers, desire “is figured as a species-specific capacity,” thus becoming central to ethical orientation (p. 178). As ecocriticism is an ethical project, then, Azzarello urges ecocritics to attend to the ways desire unfolds across cultural production. In contrast, Brian Deyo approaches Anthropocenic ethical orientations through the common affect of ecophobia: the sense of fear or dread at recognizing one’s own animality. Deyo maintains that tragedy provides the opportunity to dismantle the cultural effects of anthropocentrism, as tragedy’s attendant affects unsettle illusions of human mastery. Allyse Knox-Russell similarly points to art as a model, but for the kind of grief that begins “a process of detachment from current ideas of futurity and the human-centric ‘good life’” (p. 215). Knox-Russell turns to the 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* to outline the concept of “futurity without optimism,” a way forward in the Anthropocene (p. 213). Significantly, she reminds us that, like many portrayals of “resilience,” *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is not decolonial and still relies on the violence of Black suffering. Thus, while narratives have the potential to cultivate grief that paves the way for new ways of living, there is still work to be done to ensure that these futures will be equitable.

The book's final section, "Environmentalism Killjoys: Politics and Pedagogy," offers several perspectives on "bad" affects, those often overlooked in ecocriticism. Nicole Seymour demonstrates the critical value of the interactions of affect theory, ecocriticism, and queer theory. She proposes several definitions of queer environmental affect, demonstrating that queer theory is valuable for affective ecocriticism in its focus on bad affects, as in negative, and bad affects, as in inappropriate. Seymour considers the film *Silent Running* (1972) and video art by Kim Anno to show how queer perspectives help make room for the "diversity of feelings" found in the Anthropocene (p. 251). Lisa Ottum shows the potential of disappointment, focusing on its representation in several authors: Wordsworth (1805), William Gilpin (1792), and Geoff Dyer (2016). Ottum asks, "can being let down by nature serve environmentalist ends?" (p. 260). Because disappointment plays a role in climate change denial, she argues, understanding and embracing it as an affect is important for ecocritics. Graig Uhlin similarly approaches the negative emotions of the Anthropocene, specifically a sense of depletion or hopelessness. Uhlin outlines atmospheres of these affects in several films, positioning affect as a possible diagnostic of our situation. Finally, Sarah Jaquette Ray chronicles her experiences teaching undergraduate environmental studies and sciences, asking how teachers can best serve their students who express experiencing negative affects relating to course materials. She shows how negative affects remain important in environmental studies, especially for decolonization, but also to begin broadening definitions of social change.

Affect theory is critically capacious, and the essays collected here take advantage of the multiplicity of perspectives, concepts, and ideas found in the field. Rather than hewing to a single definition of affect, the collection presents the field as critically vibrant, drawing from a long list of scholars of affect and emotion: Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Patricia Clough, Ann Cvetkovich, Antonio

Damasio, Melissa Gregg, Brian Massumi, Sianne Ngai, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gregory Seigworth, and Silvan Tomkins. After all, "affect is ecological 'by nature'" (p. 8). Thus these essays, diverse in method, topic, and style, show that an affective ecocriticism offers numerous tools for understanding our present moment and imagining new futures.

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