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***Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene***

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*Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet (Arts)* is a practical response to the destructive relationship between human beings and the natural world, rooted in multispecies ecological awareness. The book is divided into two sections that offer different points of departure: *ghosts* and *monsters* work as adjacent, interweaving metaphorical schema that help us to expose pervasive assumptions and unhelpful narratives about how ecological systems work. The aim of this collection is to engage a broad span of readers – scholars, researchers, writers, artists and scientists – to stimulate and sustain conversations, and to offer tools and resources to those who hope to mitigate further damage and help clear a path forward. The Anthropocene, the context for this collection, is the geological epoch in which humans can literally move mountains and create volcanoes, to the extent that ‘indelible strata’ will continue to shape the face of the earth long after humans have gone. The Anthropocene is characterised by extreme and irreversible changes to the environment, resulting in an exponential scarcity of living beings and threats to most life systems on earth. In response to this precarity, the editors and contributors to *Arts* suggest that we must collectively observe and study the world around us to attune our co-existence more authentically to these ecologies, through increased knowledge about both the impacts of past actions and our embeddedness in multispecies webs.

Readers are encouraged to notice the monstrous swarm of human and non-human entanglements, and also to read landscapes for ghostly vestiges of past destruction in today’s debris. This collection foregrounds women as contributors and provides a space for feminist philosophy, queer readings, and a set of transhuman tools and perspectives that facilitate an interrogation of an uncertain and perilous climate. *Arts* advocates transdisciplinary collaboration, and is thus accessible to a non-academic audience. The authors do not assume comprehensive prior knowledge or expertise. They bring a wide range of backgrounds from across the environmental humanities and sciences including philosophy, anthropology, poetry, multispecies storytelling, feminist science studies, taxonomy, microbiology, nuclear physics, evolutionary biology and ecology. This ‘nature writing’ is ecologically informed and does not linger on a simplistic or nostalgic imagery of wilderness, a limitation of much environmental writing since the 1960s. Instead it tells of complex contemporary ecosystems that persist (and disappear) in the face of pollution, acidification, human industry and mass transport. Lesley Stern swoops from a birds-eye view of canyons, mesas and bulldozers down to microlandscapes of tomato plants growing through the cracks of concrete, into the bed of toxic tyres and fed on a diet of sewage. The message here is that wisdom and beauty can be found in such damaged places.

Content as well as form are used to achieve the *Arts* project aims. The photography and illustrations throughout the book evoke a sense of wonder and delight amid dark and troubling reflections, while the prominence of the fine arts (as well as the academic arts) is an impressive testament to its overt interdisciplinarity. Aleksandr Kupny’s photographs of an abandoned Chernobyl reactor conjure associations with deep sea landscapes or outer space; decaying photons of radiation are literal ghosts, only visible on film, remnants of events long passed that cling to the landscape and haunt visitors through their spectral toxicity. The illustrations connecting different essays emphasise movement, with undulating tentacles and twisting vines. The branches and tentacles are framed from different angles to intimate the scattered viewpoints of diverse people and places, connected through

a single study of an inky world. Equally, the format of an edited collection of essays is embraced and reimagined to structurally embed concepts of interrelationality. Through the interlocking of different concepts, stories and obscurities, thus meaning, imagery and theory are refracted between chapters to enrich them. This exemplifies the horizontal genetic evolution that Margaret McFall-Ngai first discovered through her research on bob-tailed squid, which is increasingly recognised as characterising other animal-microbe relationships, revolutionising evolutionary biology. Demonstrating this intra-action of chapters in *Monsters*, McFall-Ngai's chapter links horizontally with Scott F. Gilbert's de-secularisation of DNA, and these both form an intersection with Donna Haraway's social justice theorisation of evolutionary biology philosophy. A shared celebration of Lynn Margulis' radical evolutionary biology connects these scholars, but they overhaul conventional vertical referential ties to symbiotically co-create revolutionary theory and praxis in the scientific world.

Like Carla Freccero's historical literary analysis of human-wolf relationships, this book has a dual task: to denormalise and decentre the human while simultaneously troubling the tyranny of individuality. In *Ghosts*, Andreas Hejnal shows how certain metaphors can dominate scientific enquiry to the extent that they influence observations. But when does a metaphor-bias become oppressive and exclusionary? This book does not reject metaphors but instead attempts – and succeeds – to embody and extend the potential reach of new, more appropriate words, grammars and stories for the Anthropocene, responsibly and in the spirit of interspecies communality. In her Coda for *Ghosts*, Mary Louise Pratt presents one limitation of the book: that it is written by and for Westerners in the Global North. Other parts of the world are referenced and described, and there is certainly an intention to draw inspiration and hope from other cultures, like Deborah Bird Rose's chapter on Australian Aboriginal *shimmer*. However, the inclusion of non-Western scholars could have enriched the collection. As it stands, the authors could be seen as a collection of cultural magpies, appropriating from the communities they work with. However, the collection operates at a specific intersection of Western environmental art/science collaboration and therefore is not necessarily intended to represent the experiences and lifeworlds of people living in the Global South.

The strength of this book lies in the way it tackles the phantasmal twin Western myths of human progress and individuality at the confluences of these monstrous concepts. A parallel project might engage with contributors from other parts of the world to evaluate the monsters and ghosts that stalk different cultures.

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