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Anthropocene Feminism by Richard Grusin

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**Review of *Anthropocene Feminism* by
Richard Grusin**

***Anthropocene Feminism* by RICHARD
GRUSIN**

University of Minnesota Press, 2017
\$28.00USD

Reviewed by **STEPHANIE ECCLES**

Anthropocene Feminism is a home for the conversations that took place at the 2014 Annual Spring Conference at the Centre for the 21st Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The collection is composed of nine chapters from feminist thinkers and an introduction that provides the theoretical bedrock for this book. This text's task is to think explicitly about the anthropocene and feminism side-by-side. To do this, the contributors approach two questions with an experimental spirit: "what does feminism have to say to the anthropocene" and "how does the concept of the anthropocene impact feminism" (x-xi)? Underlining both provocations is the question of where and when the anthropocene begins, and to trouble this, an additional question of whether the anthropocene is a concept that will work for our feminist projects.

Tending to the anthropocene requires an unavoidable engagement with the debate of where the golden spike rests. Currently, it is restlessly lingering between the Industrial Revolution and the first testing of nuclear bombs, according to Eugene F. Stoermer and Paul Crutzen, the two scientists who coined and popularized the concept of the anthropocene. However, as the contributors in *Anthropocene Feminism* maintain, particularly in Jill S. Schneiderman's chapter, debating where and when the anthropocene begins is

inextricably entangled with social issues that matter in this naming and, consequently, dating debate. When the anthropocene concept emerged, it did not connect itself explicitly to longstanding feminist projects, particularly to those of eco-feminists and materialists who have been engaged with what it means to be a part of this world in ruins. In fact, feminist scholarship has tackled two concerns that come with the anthropocene: the question of *anthro* and of biopolitics. Rosi Braidotti reminds us that "feminism is resolutely anti-humanist to the extent that it rejects Eurocentric humanism" (25). The universal human is a central figure to the anthropocene narrative, which is dangerous. Lynne Huffer declares that what is at stake is "life itself," which speaks to Elizabeth A. Povinelli's chapter and proposal for geontological power, to move beyond biopolitics, in which she feels we are stuck. Proposing geontological power un-sticks us and moves us into thinking about how states "make live, let die," and "kill" (54).

Each chapter loosely agrees to participate in the anthropocene, which, as Stacy Alaimo succinctly describes,

results from [...] innumerable human activities, activities that humans have engaged in as ordinary embodied creatures and as rapacious capitalists and colonialists. (102)

What resonates between each chapter is what will be lost, or rather erased, if we universally purchase into the anthropocene and its packaged solutions. Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr accept the term, however, with the condition that it cannot "lead us away from the Capitalocene" (161).

In their collaborative chapter, they firmly state that

there is no exit from the anthropocene via technological change. If there is an exit, it will be via an exit from the social relations that define capital. (162)

Claire Colebrook persists with this former thought by noting that the “question of how gendered sexual being emerges from a history is ecologically bound up with violence and depletion,” which reads as a call to decolonize the social relations that are understood as normative expressions of gender identity and sexuality (19).

A reading of *Anthropocene Feminism* suggests feminists have an obligation to be present for conversations surrounding the anthropocene, as the concept is core to generations of feminist thinking. We need to be there to counter scientific knowledge that presents itself as if nature is “communicating directly,” as Schneiderman playfully states (174).

Arguably, the strongest contribution to the text is Myra J. Hird and Alexander Zahara’s chapter on “The Article Wastes” that offers the reader a situated example of the golden spike and raises concerns with the prefix *anthro*, as not all humans are responsible for nor experience the anthropocene the same way. For example, Grusin’s introductory comment about how some geoengineers tout the “good anthropocene” and Alaimo’s concern for “species pride” offer insight into how there are differing responses to this concept.

Hird and Zahara investigate landfills and waste in Iqaluit. Taking waste as a material-semiotic concept, wastes appear as both a colonial “reminder” as well as “colonial in and of themselves,” which

allows for the authors to write a localized story of the anthropocene. The story they weave presents the strongest case in the text for a situated and historical analysis of how the anthropocene is experienced by a particular community. The authors argue that “the anthropocene, as discourse, is a universal decolonizing project that challenges humanity’s separation from, and superiority over, nature,” yet erases indigenous ways of knowing and favours colonial and techno-phallic solutions found in disciplines such as geoengineering that only perpetuate the logic that resulted in abandoned military landfills in the first place (137). As Hird and Zahara’s chapter demonstrates, it is possible to name institutions, such as the Canadian military, accountable for the effects and affects on the Iqalumiut community.

A shortcoming of the text is the relative absence of nonhuman animals. Readers get a glimpse of nonhuman animals in the form of sea creatures, but really it is their dissolving shell that becomes the focal point, as this process communicates ocean acidification. The closest we get to nonhuman animals is Enrique Peñalosa, the fish that protested his digging performance after he was enrolled in an art project discussed in Natalie Jeremikenko and Dehlia Hannah’s conversation that closes the book. Both of these stories fail to convey nonhuman animal life in meaningful ways. We could ask: what does it mean for a sea creature to lose a home that is simultaneously an extension of its corporeal body? Or, what is the place of nonhuman animals in experimental art projects? Or, better yet, we could go so far as to ask, where is the golden spike fixed for nonhuman animals? To do justice to thinking with the anthropocene, while subscribing to the project of questioning

the anthropocentric machine, nonhuman animals must be acknowledged and enlisted as active agents co-producing the earth with us, while being allowed to tell their own historicized, situated, and meaningful stories.

As feminist scholarship takes up the concept of the anthropocene, the narrative of it will continue to be interrogated and open for a pluriversity of understandings as more voices come to the table. This move is away from the single-narrative script that masculinist human-centric researchers have proposed for the anthropocene.

Anthropocene Feminism is a provoking text that firmly states that the defining of the anthropocene is an ongoing effort enabling it to become a conceptual framework or discursive tool to launch discussions of environmental racism, colonialism, capitalism and geocapitalism, and gender orthodoxy.

The contributors in this book intend to build bridges across disciplines and provide one rule for followers of the anthropocene: that it is contextual, historicized, situated, and different depending on who you are. Supporting this unrestricted defining allows us to redefine the anthropocene while keeping the concept, with the option of substituting it with another concept that speaks more to experience, such as the plastocene, chthulucene, or ecotone war. As *Anthropocene Feminism* illuminates, the anthropocene as a concept brought into contact with feminism becomes more powerful in its availability to be wielded by a multispecies world that can tell their own stories of struggle and survival and thus life and death.

STEPHANIE ECCLES is a feminist critical animal geographer at Concordia University. Her graduate research looks at contested companionship between pitbull-type dogs and humans. Every day she works toward the feminist project of building a better world for our multispecies communities.