Acceleration. Address. **Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon.** Anticipation. Apocalypse. Appreciation. Bloom. Business. Carbon. Care. Cloud. Conditions. Cosmos. Death. Dispossession. Distribution. Dog. Dream. Dredge. Drone. Earths. Ecopolitics. **Edited by Cymene Howe & Anand Pandian.** Ends. Environing. Eschaton. Expenditure. Exposure. Extinction. Fiction. Fire. Flatulence. Flock. Generation. Gluten. Gratitude. Heat. Hyposubjects. Industrialism. Installation. Interstellar. Leviathans. Melt. Miracles. Models. Monoculture. Mood. Narcissus. Nature. Nemesis. Ocean. Petroleum. Photosynthesis. Plastic. Plenitude. Power. Predation. Preparedness. Price. Probiotic. Quotidian. Recalcitrance. Relationships. Riddle. Rivers. Ruin. Seeds. Shit. Slavery. Smugglers. Species. Stability. Steps. Suburbs. Surprise! Surreal. Sustainability. Terrain. Thermodynamics. Thresholds. Timely. Trump. Turtle. Unknowns. Unseens. Vulnerability. Wildness. Zoonosis.

Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon

Edited by Cymene Howe
& Anand Pandian


WHAT'S UP AND DOWN
IN YOUR CHAIN?

5

Appreciation

Matthew Archer

One of the Anthropocene's distinguishing characteristics, as compared to the Holocene or Pleistocene, is the multiplicity and immediacy of appreciations that are layered upon it. We appreciate the Anthropocene. We recognize its significance, evinced by the volume of research devoted to comprehending it, even if we sometimes fail to understand it clearly or to grasp its subtleties. We have increased its value by elevating it from a marginal debate among stratigraphers (see Waters et al. 2016) to a central category in contemporary social theory. It is precisely these appreciations of the Anthropocene that have provoked subsequent theories of the Capitalocene, the Plantationocene, and the Chthulucene (Haraway 2015), among others. These derivations hype up their referent and cause its conceptual value to appreciate. As scholars and activists, we converge on distant cities to convene colloquia about our place in the world and the world's place in us. With each mile flown or driven, an infinitesimal layer of carbon is deposited in the earth's Anthropocenic stratigraph, tracing our paths from campus to conference and back again. Along the way, we continue to appreciate the Anthropocene — an infrastructure of appreciations that infrastructures our environments (cf. Blok, Nakazora, and Winthereik 2016).

An International Monetary Fund working paper, nearly two decades old, argues that "the appreciation of the resource wealth

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in effect acts as a cushion and substitutes for the reforms necessary to achieve a sustainable fiscal position" (Chalk 1998, 15). What the author means is that the increased value of a country's resource wealth can be understood as commensurable with social and political reforms that promote sustainable development, reducing sustainability to a process of measurement and accounting. He might have just as compellingly argued that the simple act of being grateful for resource wealth is a substitute for reform, or that a more nuanced understanding of our impacts and dependencies on resource wealth could substitute for policies explicitly designed to make extraction more sustainable. As it turns out, appreciations can be substitutable too.

In 2015 and 2016, I conducted fieldwork in Geneva, Switzerland, where I worked as an unpaid consultant at a number of organizations (or departments within larger organizations) devoted to corporate sustainability and sustainable finance. My informants included corporate sustainability managers, impact investors, management consultants, social-impact analysts, and other relatively elite workers who I collectively refer to as sustainability professionals. In addition to participant observation, I also conducted more than one hundred interviews with sustainability professionals in Geneva, Zurich, Paris, Luxembourg, Brussels, Accra, London, New York, and New Haven.

During a coffee break at a meeting on sustainable development at the World Trade Organization, I talked to a member of the corporation Monsanto's public relations team. According to her, Monsanto has one goal: "to feed the world" — to provide sustenance or, literally, to *sustain* humanity. What could be more sustainable? Massive agro-industrial companies like Monsanto have a bad reputation, but for this professional, that's simply because they're so important. Most people — "especially activists," she grumbled (as if saying the word activist made her physically uncomfortable) — don't appreciate the immense pressure that companies like Monsanto face to be both profitable and sustainable. I was going to ask if profitability and sustainability were mutually exclusive, but she anticipated my question by bringing up the so-called business case for sustainability. She suggested, quite matter-of-factly, that unsustainable companies are never as profitable as those heavily invested in reducing their social and environmental impacts.

At a conference on sustainable finance, I overheard a corporate sustainability manager tell a consultant the he "appreciate[s] all the hard work you've done" to develop a framework for aligning the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with the financial interests of business. During an interview, the head of impact investing at a mutual fund told me: "Of course we appreciate the impacts of these [corporate sustainability] initiatives, but right now we just don't have the tools to [financially] value them." A Nestlé sustainability manager told me he "appreciates" the severity of water scarcity, even as one of the company's division chiefs suggested that humans do not have an inherent right to clean water. Governments, the latter argues, must appreciate Nestlé's so-called property rights. The company's stock appreciates. Investors appreciate the sustainability manager's charm offensive, but they appreciate the CEO's ruthlessness even more.

Much of the work of sustainability professionals centers on the appreciation of sustainability. Companies ostensibly respond to the value consumers place on sustainability, as reflected in their willingness to pay more for tea or chocolate that's certifiably more sustainable. The premium those consumers are willing to pay and the extent to which that willingness translates to higher stock prices are difficult and expensive to measure. In response, consulting firms like Sustainalytics and Inrate develop tools to measure and correlate sustainability and financial performance with what they describe as objectivity, producing indicators that banks and investors subsequently integrate into their valuation models. Here, sustainability is recognized as valuable, it is made valuable, and it becomes more and more valuable. Put differently, sustainability is appreciated, appreciated, and appreciated. Attending to the multiplicity of these appreciations helps us understand the growing power of corporate finance in the Anthropocene.

Appreciation is also imbued with agency. It is no coincidence that Paul Polman, the Unilever CEO who seems to be universally adored by sustainability professionals, presides over a company whose financial value has increased nearly 160 percent under his tenure — from a share price of $21.97 on January 1, 2009, when he was appointed CEO, to $56.91 in July 2017. Environmentalists appreciate Polman's efforts to save the planet. Consumers appreciate the increased sustainability of Unilever's products, because it makes ethical consumption an easy choice (see De Neve et al. 2008). According to one of Polman's admirers, a sustainable development consultant whom I met at a business and human rights forum, critics fail to appreciate the difficulty of negotiating competing stakeholders' concerns. Whatever Polman is doing, though, the market clearly appreciates it, as the company's stock continues to appreciate, reflecting a business acumen that Unilever's investors surely appreciate. Each of these is connected. They form a "strange loop" (cf. Hofstadter 2007) of appreciations, one in which appreciation is sensed and instigated (see Kockelman 2017) by both humans (investors, activists, and consultants) and nonhumans (valuation models, the stock market, and the planet). Within this agential assemblage (Bennett 2010) of appreciations, one starts to wonder whether we, too, are appreciated in and by the Anthropocene.

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