
Book Review

Glenn A. Albrecht, *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 256pp., \$19.95 (pbk), ISBN: 9781501715242.

'I appeal to my fellow humans to see their connection to the Earth as a loving relationship' (p. 194). Such is Glenn Albrecht's direct petition and overarching argument in *Earth Emotions*. Writing from a profound distress about the global conditions, policies, assumptions, and practices that continue to maim and destroy the earth's habitats—an attitude Albrecht terms 'terraphthoric' and I denominate simply as global capitalism—Albrecht sets as his task the production of a kind of primer, in the literary sense of an introductory text that teaches basic vocabulary and in the biochemical sense of material that initiates a polymerization process. Albrecht's book provides conceptual material ('new words') that will anchor our emotions and channel our practices toward a 'new world', a world of the *Symbiocene* that is built on the values of *symbiophilia* ('the love of living together') and governed as a *symbiocracy* that mandates 'mutually beneficial or benign relationships...at all scales' of earthly life (pp. 200–201). Each of these 'sym' or 'sum' terms foregrounds the value of integrated and gentle togetherness.

Albrecht is well known for his term, *solastalgia*. His second chapter charts the rise and diffusion of this term through environmental theory, activism, and art. Defined as the 'pain or distress caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory' (p. 200), *solastalgia* gives needed weight to a widely shared experience. Albrecht seems to intuit that new words can make tangible a collective experience typically felt to be individual. 'Our Earth emotions sit within a much larger narrative about nature and life' (p. 24), he writes, and he offers Earth emotional vocabulary to 'explain and describe our psychoterratic feelings' (p. 61), that is, 'emotions related to positively and negatively perceived and felt states of the Earth' (p. 200). He claims that 'We require new concepts to help us have emotional contact with the whole of life, not only that which is big, spectacular, and directly present to our senses' (p. 150). Albrecht's focus on terminology seems right and important, though I found myself wanting more robust theorization of how *words* can be a lightning rod to affectively polymerize individual actions, and why he considers a set of neologisms more effective than the slow rearrangement of affects that occurs with the time-laden diffusion of concept, theory, concern, and practice that he charts with *solastalgia*.

Albrecht begins his book in the familiar tradition of environmental literature that tells the story of an author's knowledge of and love for a specific terrain. His first chapter beautifully charts his childhood in a suburb south of Perth in South West Western Australia. His third and fourth chapters delineate negative and positive Earth emotions, respectively, and his fifth and sixth chapters raise the spiritual and then political needs and values of his desired *Symbiocene*.

In 'Gaia and the Ghedeist', Albrecht makes the case for a secular spirituality, drawing from ancient terms meaning "'together", "to gather", and "good"' (p. 150). His example in this chapter is James Cameron's 2009 film, *Avatar* (discussed on 135ff). It is an odd example since the powerful symbiosis he valorizes in the film pertains to a humanoid community that is ethnically and ideologically homogeneous, quite *unlike* Earth, and the capitalist terror unleashed on the planet Pandora is halted only by an all-out war led by a problematic white male savior figure. The audience's feelings of solastalgia that are raised supportively by Albrecht are ones I wish he had used his earth emotions to critique.

Throughout the book Albrecht refers to his lifelong engagement with G.W.F. Hegel, the philosopher whose dialectical method expresses 'the vitality of life' (p. 134), and yet the heart of Hegel's dialectic, the so-called 'labor of the negative', is strangely absent from this text. One example: Albrecht refuses kinship with non-mutual parasites (p. 150). Parasites are part of the vitality of life, however, and it seems a missed opportunity not to theorize how humans in the Symbiocene might value even *these* non-mutual lifeforms. Albrecht asks, 'Can we love the Earth and, in doing so, form bonds so tight and strong that the achievement of the Symbiocene will be a walk in the park?' (p. 133). I find the question compelling and even necessary, but I worry that it goads Albrecht toward a tribalism that he himself recognizes as troubling. He suggests tribalism 'with considerable trepidation' (p. 175), though he does not elaborate on *this* emotion (or relieve this reader of it).

After Hegel, Marx, and Freud's foci on negativity, power, ego and the death drive, Albrecht's attention to love as *only* positive and as *the* solution to the ongoing destructions wrought by global capitalism reads as incomplete and insufficient. My former student, Courtney O'Dell Chaib, wrote a brilliant dissertation critiquing the obsession with love in religion and ecology. She argues that, 'cultivating affinity and attachment within ecological destruction requires thinking through how so-called "negative" affects like disgust, revulsion, melancholy, shame, and despair are important parts of ecological theory and activism' (unpublished communication). Albrecht might use his Hegelian training to drill down into the labor of the negative and by its power reconsider what love *is* in this dispossessed and extracted world.

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