
Book Review

Jack Hunter (ed.), *Greening the Paranormal: Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience* (United Kingdom: White Crow Books, 2019), vii + 311 pp., \$19.99 (pbk), ISBN: 9781786771094.

Greening the Paranormal: Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience presents a multi-faceted argument for looking towards the extraordinary in order to face our modern ecological crisis. Jack Hunter is editor and author of several anthologies on paranormal topics,¹ carving a niche in the social sciences for the academic study of the paranormal (called 'paranthropology'). In *Greening the Paranormal*, the concept of the paranormal include a broad range of anomalous experiences and events: the supernatural, psi studies, mystical and religious experiences, and the most bizarre experiences (referred to as 'High Strangeness'). While previous studies have explored these topics individually, this is the first anthology to bring them together under an ecological umbrella.

Fundamentally, this book is about ecology and anomalistics, which is the study of unusual phenomena using the scientific method. Both studies reveal a web of relationships, interconnectedness, and interactions. Because of this connection, Hunter argues that in order to address our global ecological predicament, we must increase our ecological awareness by transforming our sociocultural views and behaviors towards the local landscape. The proposed solution is a modern animist model to fundamentally change our relationship with nature. Indigenous and ancient worldviews saw land, animals, and plants as animated, spiritual beings. Humans can reconnect and communicate with these beings through sacred sites, altered states of consciousness, and paranormal experiences.

In Chapters 2 through 5, the authors look to ancient and indigenous worldviews for inspiration for a new animist model of nature. Prior to the development of agrarian society, Meyocks states that egalitarian hunter-gatherers were in direct—perhaps even telepathic—communication with one another and nature. Amba Sepie's chapter describes how the Kogi Mamas reach out to share their urgent message of acceptance of anomalistic experiences as interactions with a sentient, interconnected, and sacred Earth. Next, Nancy Wissers explores the idea that some people are recruited by the Earth, through a spiritual, joyful connection they experienced in nature, reflecting the transformative qualities of the Native American Lenape vision quest tradition. Lance Foster's chapter explains how a shift to an animist model changes our perception of what the paranormal *is*. Paranormal entities would likely be framed in a natural context, as part of what Foster called 'the invisible ecosystem,' rather than as supernatural phenomena.

1. Full list of publications at <https://jack-hunter.webstarts.com/books.html>.

Chapters 6 through 8 explore the role of liminality in sacred spaces. Jacob Glazier advocates for the inclusion of the trickster archetype in psi studies and parapsychology to more comprehensively address the role of liminality and sacred spaces. Christine Simmonds-Moore's chapter emphasizes a 'participatory eco-consciousness' approach to understanding exceptional experiences as a liminal mind-place conversation. Lastly, Mark Schroll diagnoses the eco-crisis as stemming from the growing problem of 'human centeredness', prescribing a cure of human consciousness transformation. Experiences that could trigger such a transformation are termed 'transpersonal ecosophy', and include rituals and shamanic journeys in sacred spaces.

In Chapters 9 through 14, the authors discuss ways humanity can reconnect and communicate with nature and animist spirits. Viktória Duda calls for a new paradigm to understand our world's invisible networks, including the ancient, psychic energies connecting humans which are now externalized and replaced by technological adaptations. These networks could be tapped into through deep, conscious listening, to regain what Maya Ward calls 'ecological knowing'. Simon Wilson's chapter reviews Paul Devereux's work, *Earth Lights*. Wilson argues that UFO sightings and other anomalous experiences can be explained as participative, multidimensional interactions between the landscape and human psyche. David Luke reviews the current literature on psychedelics and reveals his own experiences during a psychedelic state, demonstrating the connection between altered states of consciousness and an increase in ecologically oriented beliefs and behaviors. Brian Taylor, for whom the book is dedicated to in memoriam, discusses 'soul-birds', butterflies, and other forms of after-death communication. Animal spirits are further explored in Silvia Mutterle's chapter on Wild Earth Animal Essences—therapeutic, bottled essences created through ceremonial ritual which reflect the shaman's relationship with animal spirits.

Chapters 15 through 17 conclude with an investigation of paranormal experiences, re-interpreted in an ecological context. Susan Marsh discovers a compelling, yet contradictory, trend in cryptozoology. With shrinking habitats due to urbanization, sightings of cryptids fuel a debate on their nature—whether they are animals or supernatural phenomena. Whichever their nature, cryptids may provide a means for a disappearing culture to express their identity and connections to the local environment. In his examination of Whitley Strieber's writings, Timothy Grieve-Carlson interprets the stories of alien abductions as encounters with the sacred and sublime, a predator-prey relation steeped in ecological esotericism. In the final chapter, Elorah Fangrad, Rick Fehr, and Christopher Laursen present an interesting methodological model ('psychic naturalism') which is holistic, interdisciplinary, and more comprehensively studies elusive paranormal phenomena in its natural, ecological context.

The value in adapting indigenous worldviews for animist beliefs is undeniable—attributing agency and spirit to the land, animals, and planet would certainly affect how we behave towards those entities. Reminiscent of Aldo Leopold's concept of land ethics (1949), these authors are re-interpreting our biotic community as not only living things, but as animated beings with spirits and intelligence. However, a few authors tread close to romanticizing native and ancient cultures. Another concern is that while the stated problem is ecological crisis, the scope of the book is limited to individual

spirituality. This focus was intentional,² but it would be compelling to explore how companies could adopt an animist ethical code to shape their production of goods and services. Lastly, it seems like the next step after this book is planning how this animist model could be shared widely in a pragmatic way. Hunter provides a few specific examples (such as Sasquatch research groups planting trees), but he regarded these as simply a starting point. On the contrary, implementing such programs with an enthusiastic audience could be the launch pad for triggering the cultural shift towards animism. Framing the paranormal as a potential solution for our current ecological situation offers a glimpse into a new realm of eco-paranormal activism.

References

Leopold, Aldo. 1949. *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press).

*Stephanie Juengling
Department of Anthropology
University of Florida
stephjuengling@gmail.com*

2. 'Ecological Awareness and the Paranormal with Jack Hunter', at https://youtu.be/BrbBm8_f1oY.