An Anthropology of Disturbed Landscapes

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Natural environments are changing at an unprecedented scale and intensity. Anthropogenic climate change, extractive industries, and habitat destruction pose challenges to societies around the globe, altering the meanings and experiences of landscapes. These changes are forcing human beings to reflect on and adjust their taken-for-granted values and everyday practices. What is the role of anthropology in this era of major planetary transformations? How can we study environmental changes from an anthropological perspective? The book *Dwelling in Political Landscapes: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives* edited by anthropologists Anu Lounela, Eeva Berglund, and Timo Kallinen tackles these questions.

In recent years, several anthropologists have challenged the Western capitalist dichotomies of culture/nature and subject/object. They have proposed that human and nonhuman lives are intimately and irreducibly entangled. The fourteen articles of the book engage with this literature and focus on the reformulation of the notion of landscape to account for processes that are neither strictly natural nor merely social, but socio-natural. The authors urge anthropologists to move beyond the notion of landscape as a neutral natural space onto which a symbolic layer called "culture" is projected. They draw particularly on Ingold's phenomenological dwelling perspective, which emphasizes the mutual becoming of humans and their environments through acts of dwelling.

In their introduction, Berglund, Lounela, and Kallinen expand Ingold's dwelling perspective to include not just the immediate lived experiences of human beings, but also the political processes that affect the formation of landscapes. They see the Ingoldian approach with its focus on the sensory as suffering from the risk of appearing apolitical. The editors conclude that both phenomenological and political approaches are necessary to make sense of current large-scale transformations and disturbances in landscapes: "Since landscapes are not what they used to be, neither can anthropology be" (28).

Twelve ethnographic and one theoretical article follow the introduction. The articles are based on keynote lectures and papers presented at the Biennial

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Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society 2015. The authors, most of which are anthropologists, show how landscapes are produced through complex entanglements of experiences, identities, materialities, politics, and economic activities. The articles cover themes such as natural resource extraction, indigenous ontologies, the Anthropocene, memory, materiality, ecotourism, and grassroots urban activism, while sharing a focus on landscape transformations.

Several contributors deconstruct Euro-American conventions of representing and managing landscapes and seascapes. They demonstrate how developments such as nature conservation parks in Madagascar (Mölkänen), wind farming in Oaxaca (Zanotelli & Tallè), fishing regulations in Estonia (Plaan), climate change mitigation projects in Central Kalimantan (Lounela), and hydrocarbon exploration in the Canadian North (Moffitt) overlook the ways in which people remember, perceive, move, and dwell in landscapes. The authors show with ethnographic examples how people adopt, negotiate, and transform Euro-American and capitalist understandings for their specific purposes. Indeed, an ethnographic commitment to marginalized groups' nuanced feelings, experiences, and meaning-making practices runs throughout the chapters laudably, avoiding the passive victimization of these groups.

Anna Tsing's keynote lecture on Danish deer hunting is a particularly evocative example of how landscapes are continuously becoming through multispecies connectivity. Her essay entices the reader to follow her into a dream-like setting of a former brown-coal mining site taken over by red deer and their hunters. Tsing calls them auto-rewilders; "disturbance-loving and disturbance-making [...] survivors in non-rationalized edge spaces" (40). Here, a hunter peers over a grassy meadow, waiting for his prey – the stag. Tsing argues that human-disturbed landscapes such as the abandoned Danish mine are characteristic of the Anthropocene. The task of anthropologists, then, is to attend to human and nonhuman "weedy invaders" that together form disturbed landscapes and block out futures for other species. Tsing argues that "each declines or flourishes in the effects of the world-making projects initiated and maintained by the others" (38). In order to survive the Anthropocene, she concludes, we need to be sensitive to more-than-human social worlds. After all, nonhumans enable our very existence: the hunter depends on the stag.

While for Tsing landscapes are weedy gatherings in the making, Tiina Järvi examines the deliberate institutional destruction of landscapes for the purposes of colonial nation-building. Järvi builds her work on Mitch Rose's idea of marking and claiming. She shows how the Israeli settler nation has eradicated signs of Palestinian presence while marking the landscape to conform to the Zionist modernist vision utilizing flags, renaming, narratives, afforestation, and archeology. In line with the larger theme of the book, Järvi emphasizes

that "landscapes are not always an 'innocent' record of dwelling, rather they can be an outcome of violence, dispossession and destruction" (149). Nevertheless, she reminds that although Palestinian dwellings are lost, the destroyed landscapes can still be enacted by other means. These include commemoration, narratives, and, interestingly, mobile technology.

Katja Uusihakala continues the theme of temporality in her article on white ex-Rhodesians' nostalgic recollections of an idealized "homeland." Introducing the idea of "empty land" mobilized by her interlocutors now residing in South Africa, Uusihakala states that moral commentary on the "emptiness" of the landscape is an integral part of former Rhodesians' postcolonial nostalgia and identity formation. Here nostalgia manifests itself as selective narratives of the past—a past purified of political struggles. Nevertheless, her interviewees' narratives are not devoid of social and cultural multiplicity, as exemplified by references to the meanings of landscapes in indigenous belief systems. According to Uusihakala, then, postcolonial memory work does not easily conform to the classic European settler conceptualization of landscape as merely a space of appropriation and exploitation. Rather, "empty land" is ultimately a selectively constructed "spiritual home and an intrinsic place of belonging" (231). Uusihakala's article hauntingly demonstrates how homeland landscapes are equally places of redemption and oblivion.

Jasmin Immonen adopts a material perspective on landscape. Her article evokes a comparison between the condition of precarious work and what she calls "ephemeral landscapes" in low-income settlements in Pachacutec, Peru. These are landscapes characterized by land speculation, infrastructural problems, and the ever-present sand. All of these factors undermine residents' attempts to perform citizenship and "get ahead" with their lives amidst the pressures of "advancement." The article shows how the dispossessing effects of global capitalism are concretely experienced through the material environment, at the mercy of the accumulating sand. Based on her analysis, Immonen emphasizes the value of an "activist-academic stance" (193) in critically dissecting the global narrative of advancement and conceptualizing its material effects on landscapes.

Philippe Descola's article is based on his Edward Westermarck memorial lecture and revolves around the concept of transfiguration. This notion describes the process by which portions of the environment are deliberately turned into landscapes that highlight certain visual features and become to stand for something else. Analyzing interpretations of forests and gardens in four Amazonian societies, Descola shows how the forest/garden relation is not experienced in terms of a Western nature/culture opposition. Instead, "the garden is always a transfiguration: whether of the forest, of the body of the demiurge or of a mi-

crocosmic house conceived as an organism" (244). This a world of subtle metamorphoses rather than fixed oppositions. Descola suggests that treating landscape as a transfiguration enables anthropologists to move beyond Eurocentric thinking and to treat different points of view on an equal footing.

Tuomas Tammisto and James M. Brown both engage with Descola's seminal work. Tammisto develops the notion transfiguration in his article on the Mengen people's politics of placemaking in Papua New Guinea, reminding that landscapes are not only experienced by sight. He demonstrates that the Mengen experience and enact places more holistically, and points towards the need for multisensory ethnography. "Other sensory experiences, such as the smell of a domestic tree, can and do function as indexical signs of people and social relations" (261). Brown, for his part, argues that anthropologists have often misread indigenous ontologies, making sense of them in terms of their own (Western) understandings. Much like Descola, Brown calls for the need to bridge and translate different ontologies of the worlds. He draws on Actor-Network Theory, phenomenology of landscape, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and Eduardo Kohn's semiotics, among other strands of literature, concluding that "the best way towards creating this world of many worlds, is for the West to embrace the reality that there is only one" (281).

Overall, *Dwelling in Political Landscapes* is an important contribution to the emerging anthropology of more-than-human worlds in times of ecological crises. It is attentive to people's everyday experiences and perceptions of their environments, and, to quote Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995, 410), "politically and morally engaged" in a refreshing way. Several articles remind us that the future is embedded in the present, and the role of anthropology is not merely to document, but to participate in the shaping of our future by creating politically alert and theoretically sensitive ethnographic analyses of more-than-human worlds. In the manner of urban activists in Helsinki, examined by Berglund, anthropologists and ethnologists need to work with "limits and interdependency very much in mind" (209).

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References

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