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Book Review

Armiero, Marco, (2021). *Wasteocene. Stories from the Global Dump*. Cambridge Elements. Elements in Environmental Humanities, Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-108-82674-7.

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In order to understand the narratives of the Anthropocene, it is more beneficial to consider its downsides rather than its affordances. During the last decade, the proliferation of its alternatives – such as Plantationocene proposed by Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing, Capitalocene proposed by Jason Moore, or Technocene proposed by Alf Hornberg, to name just a few – has triggered vivid and fruitful debates in academia and the arts. These critical discussions have not only addressed the blind spots of the Anthropocene as a concept by confronting its inability to recognise socio-political complexities as well as the “multispecies everything” (to use Donna Haraway's term (Haraway, 2016)), but also they have provided tools for constructive criticism that have brought us to relating differently to the environment.

Marco Armiero's book *Wasteocene. Stories from the Global Dump* – published as part of the Cambridge Elements series in 2021 – is a good example of such Anthropocene criticism. The book is published within the Elements of Environmental Humanities series, which focuses on transdisciplinary approaches to the understanding of the environmental change that involves re-examining our species' history in light of the growing awareness of drastic climate change and ongoing mass extinction. His book functions as a segment of a wider ecopolitical discourse. Moreover, its format combines scholarship and journalism by seeking to open up a new debate on *Wasteocene*.

The origins of this concept can be found in a paper that Marco Armiero and Massimo Angelis wrote back in 2017. Acknowledging this previous research, Armiero develops the concept further by establishing connections between waste, justice, and our present world. Given that every Anthropocene story involves waste, Armiero sees waste as an interpretative tool that allows one to deeply understand contemporary socio-ecological relationships, resulting profoundly in wasted people and wasted places. When the author discusses unjust socio-ecological relationships, he clarifies that, “the Wasteocene is about cleanliness and aseptic environments as much as it is about griminess and contamination, because in its very essence, wasting implies sorting out what has value and what does not”. (p.10) This concept, moreover, not only brings a fresh perspective to scholarly discussion on narratives challenging that regards the Anthropocene, but it also reveals something that is obvious and yet, unnoticed at the same time. The novelty of Armiero's understanding of waste lies in the fact that he sees it as a relationship rather than as an object. This is visible, for instance, in the concept of

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'othering' that is based on a subject-object relation whilst being enforced by multiple levels of violence. To recognise such relational practice of the Wasteocene is important because it is inherent to colonialism and because waste production implies producing the other. As Armiero puts it: "Othering means to change 'the nature' of other while simultaneously using it to preserve a privilege" (p.10).

The book unfolds the concept of Wasteocene through several facets. The first is built around a critical analysis of the Anthropocene narrative. The author criticises this concept for its "alleged neutrality, depoliticising effect, blindness toward social, historical, gender, and racial differences" (p. 6). By introducing Wasteocene as a critical alternative, the author exposes the unjust socio-ecological relationships that are in opposition to the neutrality of the 'we' of the Anthropocene narrative. It does not differentiate the 'we' and holds everyone equally responsible. Armiero considers "Anthropocene as a global narrative about the current ecological crisis, rather than as geological conundrum to be solved by scientists" (p. 8) and by doing so, he shifts its perception of a science-only problem into the sphere of the political. By addressing the Wasteocene as a political concept, Armiero acknowledges the relevance of embracing the space of politics. This is very important as without understanding the specific political context that encourages the Wasteocene logic, we would still be talking about waste as an object rather than a relationship. As Armiero argues wasting is a social relation that reproduces power inequalities, thus being inherently a political fact. By entering the bodies and the ecologies of humans and nonhumans, wasting, according to Armiero, politicises bodies and ecologies. As he states: "The disposable body becomes a political body and its struggle to survive an insurrection or, more mimetically, a sabotage of the social relationships which enforce the bodily boundaries of the Wasteocene" (p. 12).

Thus, Armiero places the Wasteocene concept within the wider one of Capitalocene, which he sees as "building an alternative storytelling that begs for the politicisation of the current socio-ecological crisis" (p. 9). With these words, Armiero is in line with thinkers, such as T. J. Demos, who have opted for Capitalocene as the name of the geological age of capitalism, being one way to "call violence by its name" (Demos, 2017). Apart from Demos' focus on visual culture and environmental contemporary art practices, there is a common ground between the two authors - from their shared critical analysis of Anthropocene in their interest in Capitalocene and their understanding of the crucial political potential of resisting communities.

It is precisely this political potential proper of resisting communities that storytelling addresses: this consideration lies at the heart of the book. Such storytelling exposes the Wasteocene logic by addressing injustices and preserving the memory of wasted places and wasted people whilst also uncovering how capitalism affects life. Resembling vignettes, the stories in this book have diverse origins, spanning personal anecdotes, childhood memories, stories of particular wasted people and stories of communities: all this is wrapped in their immediate socio-political context, often supplemented with concrete data, numbers and statistics. The reviewer sees this storytelling strategy as a crucial part of the Wasteocene argument. It allows us to grasp the micro and macro consequences of the Wasteocene logic that makes wasted places and wasted people. By exposing these stories and detailing people's names and situations, the author aligns with Rebeca Solnit's understanding that we should not only change the way we produce and consume energy, but environmental problems should also be addressed through the way we produce stories. Storytelling is employed to expose the



invisibility of violence, the normalisation of injustice, and the erasure of any alternative narrative, thus fighting against, as the author puts it, the pillars of the Wasteocene narratives.

While building the main storytelling narrative around case studies of Agbogbloshie, the world's largest e-waste dump, the Neapolitan waste emergency and workers' struggles in Tuzla, the author is arguing that Wasteocene normalises the state of affairs through a toxic narrative, blaming the victims and naturalising the socio-ecological relationships that produce wasted people and places. He understands that the main problem is that the waste emergencies are never solved through a meaningful structural change but rather with quick fixes which, in the end, re-enforce the status quo. In Armiero's words, "an emergency regime serves to restore the othering order of the Wasteocene, not to dismantle it" (p. 39).

Thus, the main challenge remains, where can the response to structural conditions of capitalist development that makes Wasteocene possibly come from, if not from those in power? The author seeks the answer in commoning practices that have the potential to resist the Wasteocene logic as they "aim to reproduce resources and communities and in doing so, they dismantle, the othering project, create communities, and have the potential to undermine the Wasteocene regime" (p.47). However, whilst this may sound promising in theory, in reality, there are numerous obstacles that make all such efforts very fragile. Although this reviewer agrees with the author that the commoning practices are important, they are and still relevant to occupy institutions. Thus, the book's strongest aspect remains the understanding of a Wasteocene as a political concept, for this opens a possibility for a change of unjust socio-ecological relations. Armiero's book contributes to the understanding of the processes, protagonists, economic and social transformations as well as the exploitative forces behind Wasteocene logic. By placing the Wasteocene concept alongside and in relation to all other critical alternatives to the Anthropocene, the author deliberately conditions the concept of Wasteocene by other narratives, research, and debates and exposes awareness about the importance of a collective effort. The author touches upon a highly relevant and urgent issue that too often remains overlooked, and for that reason the reviewer looks forward to the potential debate and the further research that this book may provoke.

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