

Revisiting the Anthropocene

Back in 2021, the review of **Against the Anthropocene** appeared on *Climate Emergency Manchester's* website (<https://climateemergencymanchester.net>). It appears again here with a review of the **Anthropocene Unconscious** and a poster for a 2009 film.

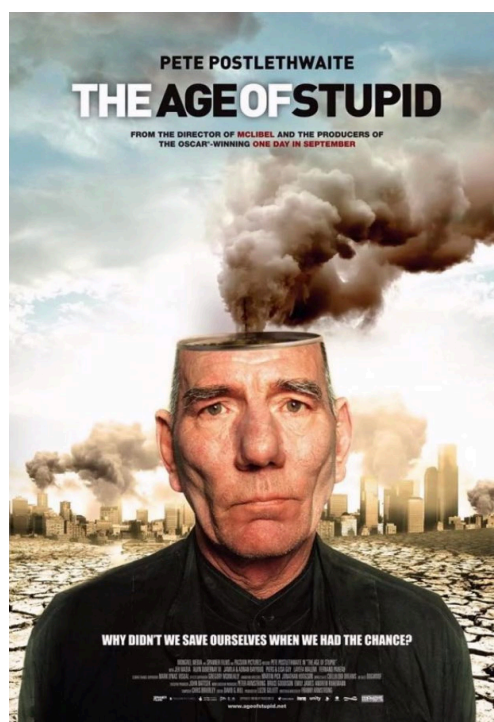
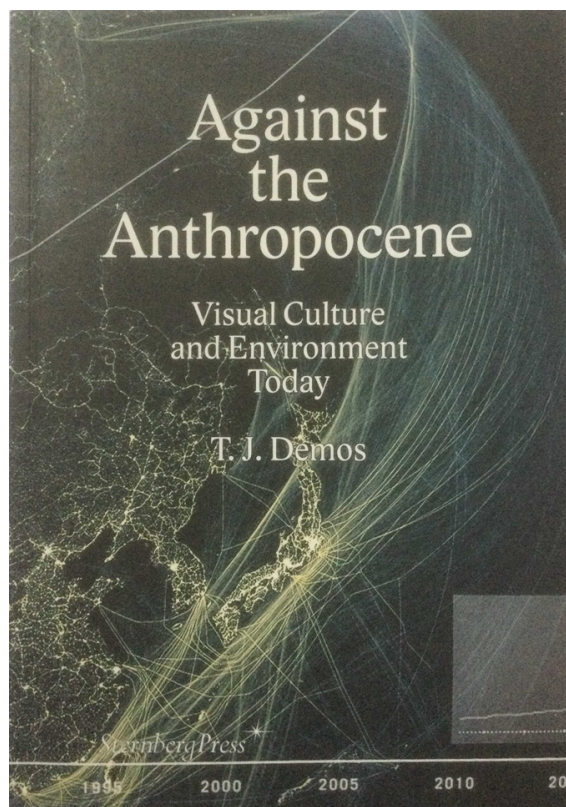
Against the Anthropocene

In a slim, very readable and well referenced volume illustrated throughout, TJ Demos sifts through the arguments to embrace life beyond the Anthropocene's techno-fixes and geoengineered delusions. Documenting resistance around the globe to the destruction wreaked by petrochemical and extractive industries, Demos contends Anthropocene masks capitalism's 'responsibility for Earth-system disruption ... diffusing political traction in the struggle against climate change.' He cites calls for eco-feminist stewardship within the rights-of-nature movement in South America, BP's self-serving sponsorship of museums and galleries and also post-heteronormative care for Earth-as-Lover ceremonies by performance artist-activists.

Whether we can summon the political will to construct post-capitalist localised sustainable cultures based on renewable energy, redistributive economics, with justice for climate and nature within the time available is open to question. But surely worth the effort. The dystopian alternative is of centralist, increasingly authoritarian governments with repressive militarised police enforcing ever-widening socio-economic inequalities, grasping for extreme geoengineered solutions to counter the disaster they have caused. Perhaps, it is time to make our voices heard.

Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today
TJ Demos, Sternberg Press, 2017

Professor TJ Demos is founder and director of the Centre for Creative Ecologies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.



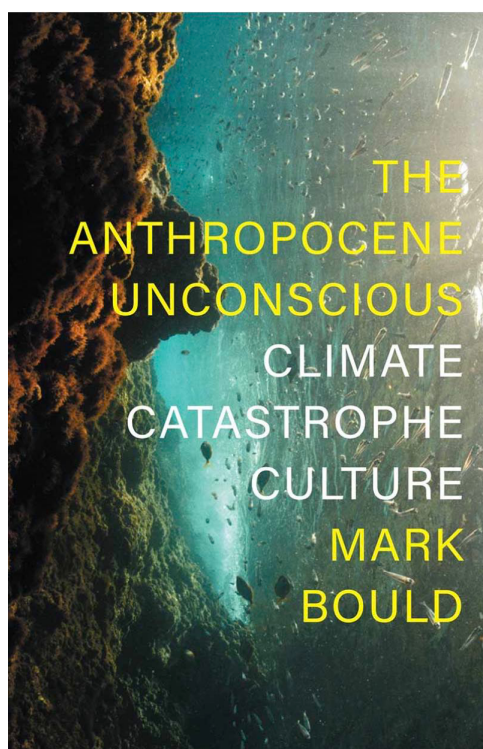
The Anthropocene Unconscious – Climate Catastrophe Culture

In Mark Bould's 2021 romp through popular culture, he picks up on various treatments in response to climate change induced anxieties, pulls them apart and throws them out there. Why should the mainstream news media treat this stuff seriously, if fiction and movie makers rarely address it directly?

"Imagine we carry on doing too little too late. Imagine we continue to set inadequate emissions targets with no real intention of meeting them, and keep right on missing them. The parts per million of atmospheric CO₂ relentlessly increase. Temperatures rise, releasing the methane naturally sequestered in permafrost and ocean bed clathrates." [Clathrates: compounds containing other molecules within their structure – I had to look it up too.] So it begins ... "there are still museums, libraries and bookstores ... for traces and portents of the upheavals that made their 'substantially altered' worlds."

Contrasting various takes on timescales of the short Anthropocene with longer perspectives, this book argues it *is* the unconscious of the 'art and literature' of our time. Singling out Doris Day singing about a 'secret love' in *Calamity Jane* (1953), gives rise to the thought "that *X-Men: First Class* (2011) was *Brokeback Mountain* all along." Then on to zombie movies as allegory and "about the middle-management of our own extinction."

Dissecting the mundane novels developed from the 18th century onwards with their disconnect from the real world, Bould asserts "Like capitalism, the novel depends upon producing – and by definition not counting – externalities." He later lambasts the neo-colonial class war imposed by the IMF, World Bank and others for producing worldwide impoverishment and immiseration, and clearly sees the current climate and biodiversity crises as the result of post-war expansion of the carbon economy. [Why for instance, do we still condone the proliferation of energy hungry UHD TVs in the home, and similarly greedy digital advertising displays on our streets?]



"Although climate change is an existential threat, for the most part we continue to live as if it were not." The book concludes, as does Demos similarly in *Against the Anthropocene* (2017) with a stark choice: "Ecosocialism or barbarism."

We have some task ahead of us to stem the rising tide of authoritarianism and an ever more hostile climate. Yet surely, a thriving liveable planet is worth striving for.

The Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture
Mark Bould, Verso, 2021

Mark Bould is a Reader in Film and Literature at UWE Bristol. He co-founded and co-edits the Studies in Global Science Fiction monograph series for Palgrave Macmillan.