

STORYING THE ANTHROPOCENE

The call for this special issue on *Curriculum Studies on the Anthropocene and in an Anthropogenic Context* asked three questions¹ regarding the “looming implications of what remain unimaginable realities” (from call). In response, submitting authors have turned to *storying* qualities of experience that far exceed our powers of analysis and that call on substantially more than analysis from us.

We begin with Susan Edgerton’s keynote address from the 2022 AAACS conference: *Curriculum Studies in the Anthropocene*. In “IT’S ABOUT TIME: Stories for Curriculum Studies in the Beforemath,” Edgerton proposes that “We need near-future stories that light up the imagination, provoke courageous action, and cultivate wisdom. Such stories can neither strain credulity with unwarranted optimism, nor simply pretend not to see at all.” Telling first her own story of growing up in the South, Edgerton then offers three additional stories—from authors Octavia Butler, Richard Powers, and Kim Stanley Robinson—that have lit her imagination in this way.

In “Narratives and the Anthropocene: Reflections on Place and Sustainability Education,” Nathan Hensley argues that “efforts to link the humanities and the sciences must be woven within a narrative framework that is able to transcend, transgress and transform deficit-driven conversations.” Authors such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, Gary Snyder, Terry Tempest Williams, and Wendell Berry can, Hensley suggests “bring inner and outer worlds of subjectivity and objectivity together.”

In “Posthuman Art Conservation Curriculum,” Nadine Kalin and Scott Peck propose that “the indwelling between curriculum as lived and as planned in art conservation education requires active self/other unlearning on the part of students as they craft their own stories while caring for art objects.” Kalin’s and Peck’s joint narrativizing of a catastrophic museum fire, in which Peck is nearly consumed, and its continuing

¹ The questions were:

- *What is our personal stance in relation to the threatening changes our species has wrought for life on earth? How might/should this stance manifest in our scholarship and teaching?*
- *In what ways are we investing our time and attention in systems that are serving to perpetuate the use and abuse of natural life and planetary rhythms? What is our responsibility as educators to lift up and study the workings of these systems?*
- *To what extent and in what ways shall we hold ourselves responsible for grappling with the ethical dimensions of our impulse to look away?*

traumatic reverberations is storied as “a radical rethinking of conservation education and curriculum in a posthuman key.”

Alysha Farrell, in her piece “Animality-as-Curriculum in the Anthropocene,” offers a dramatic and “dystopic portrayal of a teacher candidate’s emergence into the profession to make connections among educating the young, the negation of human-animality in curricula, speciesism, and other forms of oppression.” If schooling seeks to tame the feral child, Farrell asks, then what happens to the growing child’s “capacity to empathize with other humans and other animals”?

In the concluding piece, “Abeng for Multispecies’ Flourishing,” Steven Khan, Michael Bowen, and Douglas Karrow, “propos[e] multispecies flourishing as a goal for American Curriculum Studies.” Seeking to advance new imageries, the authors “explore the place of poetry in informing the epistemic foundations of mathematics, science, and technology education and in bringing to complicated curricular conversations [their] recent experiences and emerging connections.”

In response to the “traumatic loss of coordinates” (Morton, 2007, 2013) the Anthropocene has wrought—which has unmade and is unmaking us all—these authors have turned to *storying* experience in hopes of locating some way forward.

What, then, to make of Roy Scranton’s (2019) claims in his piece “Narrative in the Anthropocene is the Enemy: Stories Won’t Save You From Ecological Destruction”? “Narrative seduces,” Scranton intones, “Narrative misunderstands. Narrative confuses. Narrative lies. Narrative is the enemy” (para 14).

Some may be inclined to agree, while others, represented here, look to stories for the very hope Scranton decries—and also for other things. For, in the end, whatever any of us do or do not believe about stories and their possibilities, we all *do* need to find a way forward: to cobble together *some* terms upon which to enact our lives. Facing our own always certain destruction and now, also, an unfolding ecological collapse, Scranton outlines three potential plotlines: 1) succumb to nihilism; 2) pursue enlightenment in the Zen Buddhist tradition; 3) invest ourselves in the life and lives that surround us—despite all.

As Scranton ultimately acknowledges (2019), “Yet without narrative, human existence is absurd, human experience a surging delirium” (para 15). Indeed, as Ted Aoki and Jerome Bruner (among others) have both noted, our move to story represents a move to one of two meaning-making systems available to us: we have our analytic capacities,

and we have our narrative powers. “Is it possible to use narrative to subvert and attenuate narrative desire?” (para 21), Scranton asks. I imagine so.

The question before us, then, is not *whether* to story our experience, but in what manner. Scranton’s dark musings leave us with several related sub-questions: What are the stories *we* desire? What are we hoping these stories will *do*? Are these hopes reasonable? What signs do we see of their action in our lives and in the lives of others?

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References

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<https://lithub.com/roy-scranton-narrative-in-the-anthropocene-is-the-enemy/>