NARRATIVES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Editors)

Preface by Kirill O. Thompson

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Geographies of the Anthropocene

Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis

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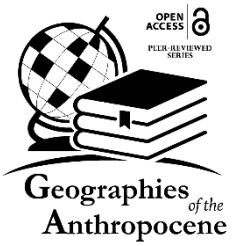
Editors



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Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)

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Geographies of the Anthropocene

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Geographies of the Anthropocene

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The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" edited by Scientific International Publisher "Il Sileno Edizioni" will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and

humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences, Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" publishes online volumes, both collective volumes and monographs, which are set in the perspective of providing reflections, work materials and experimentation in the fields of research and education about the new geographies of the Anthropocene.

"Geographies of the Anthropocene" encourages proposals that address one or more themes, including case studies, but welcome all volumes related to the interdisciplinary context of the Anthropocene. Published volumes are subject to a review process (**double blind peer review**) to ensure their scientific rigor.

The volume proposals can be presented in English, Italian, French or Spanish.

The choice of digital Open Access format is coherent with the flexible structure of the series, in order to facilitate the direct accessibility and usability by both authors and readers.

CONTENTS

3. We are not alone in the world

Noé Gross[1]

Abstract

Across the world, the coronavirus pandemic may have prepared us for a new ecological paradigm: we are confined on Earth with other living beings. But we still need to know how to tell the stories of these beings. In recent decades, scholars in the environmental humanities and social sciences have experimented with new ways of paying attention to the world and all its narratives. They have thus invented practices of narration to thwart our insensitivity to the fate of other living beings with whom we are linked. These practices cannot be reduced to human representations or projections, but are rather proposals for imagining various common causes and, ultimately, what Bruno Latour calls a common world. My inquiry in this chapter is to collect these narratives as real methods of knowledge about the connections between humans and non-humans. To illustrate these new knowledge experiences, I discuss the narrative practices offered by Vinciane Despret's work, as well as the importance of entangled stories in Donna Haraway, Baptiste Morizot, and Deborah Bird Rose's writing. By telling stories about the lives of animals and plants, these researchers have become the spokespersons for those with whom we live together but who cannot testify alone. These narratives are therefore capable of multiplying our world through diverse existences, stories of dependence, and other ways of living in a damaged planet. The hope is that they inspire us to regain a terrestrial footing.

Keywords: non-human narratives, togetherness, imagination, versions, cohabitation.

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"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories".

(Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p. 12).

1. After the Crash

Recall the end of Alfonso Cuaron's picture, *Gravity*. Dr. Ryan Stone gets out of her ruined spaceship, trying to go back to the surface but her heavy equipment pulls her down, threatening to drag her toward the abyss. A frog crosses the screen and goes up to the light. Then, she moves, takes off her suit, struggling to breathe. She coughs, turns her eyes to the sky. Like her, we are dizzy. We see materials, far away, entering the atmosphere like a rain of comets. She barely makes it to the edge of the lake, and crawls painfully onto the shore. It is the end of the film. Dr. Stone, the only survivor of a space adventure, has crashed on Earth. Her head rest at the line drawn by the water in the sand. Her body is pulled by the Earth's gravity. She grabs a handful of soil, gets up painfully, disoriented, she staggers forward, her arms dangling.

It is interesting to revisit *Gravity* today. Many have demonstrated the extent to which the film testifies to a change of paradigm, or more generally, to a change of spatial perspective (Latour, 2015a, p. 24). What the protagonist must escape from is no longer "the blue planet", the place it would be necessary to escape, but rather outer space, the dangerous and void. This paradigm shift is made through a brutal return to Earth, illustrated by the crash of Dr. Stone. With her, the audience leaves the debris of the space station to rediscover the link to Earth, shared with other beings. Notice the human voices that our astronaut needs to stay alive, that frog that appears in the water and guides her to the surface, that butterfly on the edge of the lake – or was it a dragonfly? All conspire, without meaning to, to the survival of our protagonist, to her will to stay alive, to go back home, here, on Earth. But where is she? And what beings will she meet from now on?

Although we have known this for a while, the coronavirus pandemic has dramatically reminded us that we are not alone in the world. Moreover, the climate crisis is forcing us to deal with a series of new actors or "social

actants" (Latour, 2005) well beyond humans. The time has ended when we considered ourselves, as humans, the only true actors in our history freely debating whether the Earth should be available for our needs or whether it should be protected (Stengers, 2009; Latour, 2015b).

In 1984, the anthropologist of science, Bruno Latour, described in a Tolstoyan style, the war that Louis Pasteur and his disciples waged against microbes. This scientific adventure – that is, the Pasteurian revolution – marked a deep transformation in human experience. It was then necessary to learn how to coexist with a new invisible world: the world of microbes. To link the laboratory to society and to shed light on this world that *we* cannot see, Pasteur invented what Latour calls the "Pasteurian style'. This incisive style is not only a way of narrating, but also a way of modifying the beliefs and perceptions of those to whom it is addressed. Perhaps we are today in a Pasteurian moment: leaving this period of confinement, we will have to explore terrestrial spaces in which there are forgotten beings – viruses – with which we will have to learn to live. Following Pasteur's example, the test of narrativity must reveal the importance and the place of the living on Earth, which is the product of their cumulative efforts over billions of years. By allowing them to express their narrative, they might teach us – humans with dangling arms – to orient ourselves on an Earth we share with others.

1.1 Cromwell's Cry

Since what is called "ecology" has imposed itself as the common problem of future generations, society shares with contemporary anthropology the same apprehension of things: they are both inhabited by deontological urgencies. Faced with the multitude of daily challenges posed by our lifestyles, it no longer suffices to adopt a position of critical denunciation. We must indispensable to draw attention to the consequences of our collective actions.

Where do we finds ourselves now and what beings are we going to encounter? We are today in a "decisive moment" defined by a complete overhaul of our vision of the world: the end of certainty (Prigogine, 1996) and of the stable foundations of science (Whitehead, 1948). A Nemesis would then await those who try to avoid the necessity that everything be reinterpreted, that is, time, space, matter, or organisms (Whitehead, 1948,

p. 18). The world has been different ever since Darwin (Gould 1977). Henceforth, Cromwell's cry relayed by Whitehead echoes through the ages: "My brethren, by the bowels of Christ I beseech you, bethink you that you may be mistaken" (Whitehead, 1948, p. 17). Here, the art of paying attention intervenes (Stengers, 2009), that is, the art of being attentive to the conditions of life in the grip of destruction, which marks our time and our entry into what scientists, after the Holocene, have proposed to name, despite its key problems (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2013), the Anthropocene. This era is characterized by the destruction of ecological refuges (Tsing, 2015; Savransky & Stengers, 2018). However, it also defines the moment when the Earth's stories have changed in nature and in scale: we no longer write stories to tell the creation or the course of the world, but to conjure its end. From this perspective, the "Extinction Rebellion" movement and the interests related to the theme of collapse have shown, in recent years, the concern that current generations feel in the face of the end of the world, conditions of habitability and "troubles with engendering" (Latour, 2021).

1.2 Dic cur hic

The exigency echoed by Whitehead asks us, in turn, the following questions: what should we pay attention to? To which consequences? What are the dangers?

Thinking about attention is classically relegated to rhetoric that seeks to capture it to exert persuasive force (Pelletier, 2017). But everything happens as if, in our new ecological regime, neither reason nor affects could excite the art of attention. Everything happens as if we should wake up, "remind ourselves and think: Say, why are you here? (*Dic cur hic*?)" (Leibniz, 1923, p. 276).

Leibniz calls attention the reflection on the reasons we are here. Of course, no one can possess ultimate access to the truth of his reasons, nor can he define or foresee their end. But the Leibnizian requirement asks us to reflect on – to pay attention to – all the reasons that do not transcend this world: *dic cur hic* (say why this?), without forgetting the maxim, *respice finem* ("consider the end"). Thus, to let oneself be affected by "this", by *this* world, to the point of generating an instantaneous metamorphosis (*momentanea metamorphosi*), is always to pay attention to the multiplicity of "reasons that make this world exist rather than another" (Debaise &

Stengers, 2015, p. 10). However, it is also to suspend the time of certainty – Cromwell's cry – so as to be attentive to everything that opens up amid the emergency, and that could eventually allow us to roll the dice again.

1.3 In Pandemic: Amidst the Ruins

During lockdown, many citizens around the world heard birds singing. The temporary halt of human affairs and the reduction of noise in the cities has indeed allowed the birds to remind us of their existence as if they flourish now under the wings of the virus. In this new human silence, ornithologists of the "Institut Català d'Ornitologia" (ICO) in Barcelona have obtained the sonograms of sixteen species of birds evolving in urban areas during rush hours. These patterns can tell us, for example, when the birds were singing, how much and with what intensity. They then compared the results with figures obtained in the previous decade. Their study showed that during lockdown the birds sang earlier and longer.

In Europe, the pandemic arrived in the spring, when avian territorial issues were at their peak. Due to the silence and our available attention, they have amazed many city dwellers, like this blackbird that reminded the philosopher Vinciane Despret of the importance of singing with the enthusiasm of its whole body. By beginning her book *Living as a bird* (2021) with this detail, the song of a blackbird that catches the ear through the bedroom window at dawn, Despret enables us to grasp the drama that takes place when another being we no longer hear begins to matter once more. It is, of course, through the work of Donna Haraway that Despret has learned to make herself more present to the world and to welcome in her life and research what the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls variations of importance. It is with this concept that he proposes both a definition of anthropology and a resource for multiplying our sense of the world (Viveiros de Castro, 2009, p. 169).

A blackbird sings… but what does it do? Is it part of evolutionary stories, contingencies, and biographies that are all adventures of life from which to draw the threads of an explanation? Does it answer problems we don't know, so that we are in front of it as if in front of the whole of history itself, looking for the traces of enigmas we cannot perceive? Or, perhaps, it is obeying a general theory of behavior that would allow us to find some order when faced with an infinity of undisciplined ways of being? By asking

ourselves the questions that Vinciane Despret puts forth, we understand that only certain versions allow us to give importance and attention to the emergence of an existence or a metamorphosis, however small they may be.

It is about metamorphosis. Birds that had lived together calmly during the winter suddenly start to choose a spot, to draw its limits, to watch the movements of their neighbors, to challenge those who would defy its borders. They defend their territory. Narrating the stories of different ways of making territory, Despret tells us the stories of the birds' lives. And these stories are woven into a thin pellicular layer, a contact zone, that Bruno Latour and his geologist colleagues call "the critical zone" (Latour & Weibel, 2020). Being called upon to tell these stories requires us to defy the trends of what is happening to us. We live in a time when we can no longer ignore that the species we hear out the window may soon no longer be. This awareness of living in the ruins of ancient dreams (Tsing, 2015) has marked our perceptions of the possibility of loss. For living in this damaged world prevents us from addressing the animal question without directly addressing the question of their destruction and disappearance. Earthly narratives are precarious, as is their duration and our future with them. Moreover, they demand that we give them justice, that we accompany their possibilities (Debaise, 2020). By writing what captures our attention, even the song of a blackbird, we can give beings singular lives.

2. Animals: new versions.

2.1 A biographer becoming

If the Anthropocene is characterized by the transformation of resources and landscapes into actors with whom we negotiate our terrestrial cohabitation, how do we bring the narratives of non-humans (animals, for example) into politics? Definitely, the world has changed ever since Darwin. The history of the animal is no longer a history of the past, an evolution with invariants and stable instincts. The transformations linked to an eventful history are no longer exclusive to humans: the bears of the Brasov suburbs in Romania, the wolves of the French Alps, the dolphins of Monkeymia in Australia, the baboons of Saudi Arabia, or the keas parrots of New Zealand, all have become the protagonists of astonishing stories and spectacular transformations (Despret, 2002). Bears can become urbanized, keas can become "urban terrorists", and dolphins can become therapists.

Our animals have changed, and so with them have the questions we pose to them (Despret, 2012), or what Despret calls the "versions" we tell about them. It is not just our representations of society, relationships, roles, and politics that have changed, as if everything was only an all too human affair. For some years now, animals have acquired biographies through these humans (Lestel, 2000). The paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, pursuing the beautiful ambitions of natural history, has written about Irish elks as well as about orchids, zebras, and pink flamingos. The theory of evolution has some beautiful oddities to recount. Each story is then singular and the work of changes that have mobilized humans to accompany them and to carry their narratives.

One fundamental thing that appears to me is that the stories we tell do not leave other animals unchanged, as they directly concern them. The ornithologist Bernd Heinrich has shown how the stories we tell about ravens determine attitudes that, in turn, will modify the ravens' own behavior (Heinrich, 1989). But which ravens are we talking about? It is through this question that we can ask the meaning of the "biographer becoming" of certain researchers. These scholars have taught us that, as we generally do not speak of "humans" without excluding or including too many people in the definition of a few, we must ask ourselves who are the animals we are talking about, how do we speak to them, and whether we give them "a chance" to testify otherwise.

Heinrich's ravens are the great ravens of the Maine forests, solitary and shy. These ravens leave their researcher with an enigma, a behavior that is absurd from the point of view of the traditional models of evolutionary theory: they share the food of a carcass where logic would have it that the first to arrive would be the first to be served. In her account of this "enigma of the raven", Vinciane Despret unfolds all the versions proposed to explain the phenomenon. These versions include the art of luring and trickery, as well as the transformation of the researcher. Heinrich was recruited by his animals in the mode of becoming "with the ravens", where what matters to them also matters to him. The cries of the ravens eventually generated an emotion in him, and their testimonies altered his own questions. He was recruited in a mode of decentering in the attempt to understand the way questions arise for a raven. To do this Heinrich had to invent the relevant modes by which to address his ravens and to speak on their behalf. This required some real imaginative work. Due to his apprenticeship and his "becoming a spokesman", Heinrich strives to exonerate ravens in Germany

from uncommitted crimes against livestock. He also assist colleagues in noticing an astonishing interspecific association between them and wolves in Yellowstone Park.

We see with Heinrich how much the beings who do not have a voice engage their researchers in "biographer becoming" where what is at the stake is adequate representation. I would like to give another example of the successful mobilization of researchers. In contrast to primates, which have succeeded in mobilizing many biographers to represent and defend them, parrots, excluded by behaviorist logic and from laboratories, have remained "voiceless" for a long time. But by modifying enthusiasm for research and the devices of experiments, the psychologist Irene Pepperberg revealed to us the astonishing capacities of her grey parrot Alex, exceeding the abilities expected of a non-human: he can accomplish complex cognitive tasks, he counts, he describes, he uses abstract categories and even concepts (Pepperberg, 2008). For Pepperberg, Alex does not testify for all parrots, but shows what parrots could be made capable of, how we could accompany them and cohabit with them. This is one of the fundamental elements of science studies today: the possibilities of transformation, exchange, cohabitation, and political proposals, all made necessary by the Anthropocene, could perhaps emerge if we ask animals the right questions, and if we listen to what they have to teach us.

2.2 Imagination and Togetherness

I strongly believe that narratives in the Anthropocene can eventually help us understand the lifestyle of each living being, and all the exchanges that we can weave with them. Gould's scientific and narrative work has allowed us to imagine that it is possible to tell a story for each species and that, at this stage, no hierarchy is desirable. Indeed, natural history, when it was attentive to all beings without exception, was a crucial resource that managed to combine the strengths of science and literature. As historian Romain Bertrand writes, it is not that humans do not really matter, it is that *everything* matters infinitely (Bertrand, 2019). Extinct species, insects, children, and wolves can neighbor one another in narratives that do not order themselves in an ontological gradation.

To give an account of an existence is to explore all that links it to others so that they compose together a history in a defined cosmos. But to think this cosmos of living beings linked to each other, Vinciane Despret seems to

require the imagination function as a diplomatic faculty. To be solicited and requisitioned by the existence of other living beings, we must allow ourselves to imagine their stories, both scientifically and literarily. We must tell their stories so that they enter our common history.

The philosopher and wolf tracker, Baptiste Morizot, while perceiving in the snow two territorial markings of two wolf packs, each isolating its border, realized that we do not have a monopoly on the capacity for *modus vivendi*, i.e. negotiating how to live together (Morizot, 2019). For millions of years, wolves have been setting up pack boundaries to reduce mutual aggression. They thus invent what Morizot calls pacification devices (Morizot, 2020). Tracking wolves can therefore teach us about their way of life, and how to live differently in a world of otherness.

We can see that the practice of biographers moves us away from an abstract universality to concrete versions of this universality that multiply points of view: a baboon, a raven, a parrot, wolves. Those who were once "nobody" in our stories become people. A person is therefore "the one whose importance to him or her can be taken into account by someone" (Despret, 2002, p. 258). Responding to this requirement involves considering "what matters" in to the network involved: from male baboons to female baboons, from ravens to humans trying to understand them, from wolves to trackers. These new "actors" are vectors of scientific stories that explore new ways of living together. Isn't this what is at stake in the Anthropocene as a matrix of narratives?

We must therefore welcome in our stories, far beyond the human, even the most fragile existences, surrounded by a range of possibilities that can multiply their existence. Of course, to multiply existence is to see one's existence consolidated and supported by good "spokespeople" who have been tasked with telling and defending this existence. As Despret points out, the animals did not enter alone into our narratives; they had to be accompanied each time by a human who narrated as a witness. David Lapoujade, in his commentary on the philosophy of Étienne Souriau, has chosen the figure of the lawyer as advocate, to define the one who pleads on behalf of entities whose legitimacy he wants to establish (Lapoujade, 2017). How can narratives function then to make more real what exists? That is the question.

2.3 Common causes

I would argue that narratives make existences more real when they give justice to the connections between human and non-human beings which naturalism has often conceived in terms of separation (Descola, 2005), resulting in a detachment from earthly things. This distance between humans and "natural beings", far from being natural itself, is a modern invention. It is itself an operative narrative and belief (Latour, 1991).

Therefore, against this tendency, I follow Deborah Bird Rose's proposal to conceive narratives as a method to grasp connectivity (Rose, 2019, p. 27). In her fieldwork, this anthropologist has collected stories of connectivity between different species that allow us to understand how the world is made up of stories that already exist, and which must be collected and told. Telling is necessary because events do not happen one after another in a random order. They are linked to each other, they affect or cause each other. And as Thom Van Dooren, the philosopher of extinction studies and disciple of Rose, points out, narrative is always about these connections and relationships. However, a story not only testifies to the existence of links, it also weaves new ones that can define common causes. This is what I would like to defend by relaying a story of connection that Baptiste Morizot once told.

In the 1980s, India was home to the largest population of vultures in the world, with several million species including the white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and the Indian vulture (*Gyps indicus*). These vultures played an important role in India which, at the time, had a huge cattle population, approximately 500 million, of which only 4% was destined for slaughter because the Indians did not eat their cows very much. Vultures, therefore, contributed to public sanitation by devouring the carcasses of cattle. However, in the 1980s, a spectacular decline in vulture populations was observed. Why did this happen? Researchers including Lindsay Oaks have shown the link between this massive disappearance and an antibiotic (Diclofenac) given to cattle that poisoned the vulture populations, so that more than 95% disappeared. The story does not end there, because this decline has produced disastrous environmental effects. First, there was the contamination of drinking water sources in the villages as the carcasses that were no longer eaten by the vultures rotted next to these water sources. Second, the vultures were replaced by rats and stray dogs. However, where the scavengers contained the pathogens that they ingested, the rats and dogs

spread these pathogens to wildlife and humans, and one of the consequences of this was the resurgence of rabies.

This case shows that, as soon as one poses the problem in terms of cohabitation, it involves common causes between humans and non-humans. And when a certain species that plays an important role in an ecosystem disappears, it produces an effect that Rose calls "double death" (Rose, 2012). She proposes the idea that the disappearance of a species breaks a vital connectivity and produces chain effects that diminish the living conditions of a whole series of other species, human and non-human. Indeed, the human is not discernible from the whole of its relations with the biotic communities and the ecosystems which found it. If the narratives in the Anthropocene teach us anything, it is that the interests of humans and the interests of living beings are now intertwined. We must therefore imagine common causes. If imagination becomes one of our most political resources (as we proposed with Despret), it should not give right to one individual rather than another, but to the relations that weave together humans and non-humans, what Morizot will call ethics of relations (Morizot, 2016).

3. Of what are narratives capable

It appears to me that the question that the Covid-19 pandemic has raised in recent months has also been: how can we imagine a cohabitation that would no longer be based on a mode of eradication? Because with their war rhetoric, governments have forgotten that epidemics are a dimension of bio-social history; that bacteria make life possible and kill us at the same time, humans and non-humans alike; that the history of the living is one of dependances on the lives of others, on which beings feed on one another.

The literary theorist Yves Citton has shown very well how current and future mutations cannot be "defeated" or "eradicated". Instead, we must "deal with" them, so as not to become powerless, which is a matter of active collaboration (Citton, 2021). Thus, it is necessary to welcome the agency of the world and the idea that we are not alone in nor in charge of the world. Narrations engage in their writing and their way of making us feel: it is not a question of being innocent or guilty anymore (vis-a-vis the state of the world), but of paying attention, of inventing an art of words that can produces the capacity to respond (*response-ability*, Haraway, 2016) the

consequences. In other words, we must dare new versions as Despret does, to twist the majoritarian narratives, to disconcert anticipations, and to surprise the catastrophe.

This is what the biologist and historian of science Donna Haraway has been doing for several years. She writes from the ravages of our globalized world at the beginning of the 21st century, which has inherited an acceleration and intensification of neoliberal capitalism. But, she also writes from a perspective according to which the sciences alone cannot prevent us from simplifying, from resigning, from bending to business as usual, from dreaming of apocalypse or final salvation. So many ways of not paying attention to what is here, of getting rid of the problem, of evacuating the disorder. So many ways of "living without", rather than "dealing with", that render us powerless. Haraway has, on the contrary, shown the way in which we must "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) inherited from the stories that constitute us through prodigious inventions and inflections in narrative practices in order to make the great binary divisions falter. The reality, for Haraway, itself produces interesting and problematic figures: Mixotricha paradoxa, an entity whose individuality is problematic, neither one nor many; OncoMouse™, a genetically modified mouse for breast cancer research (Haraway, 1997); the lichen, a symbiotic entity linking an alga and a fungus. Telling the story of the existence of these beings inevitably challenges our categories of individualistic ontology and nature. Thus, this world is not populated by autonomous, autotrophic, autopoietic, separate beings. But of hybrid beings that always depend on the activity, the "doing", of the others, what Donna Haraway names sympoiesis.

The sciences of the living are then for us a source of narrative matrices with inexhaustible experiences of entanglements, partnerships, and sympoiesis. I would say with Donna Haraway that we are made of stories. We are born in a *landscape of histories* (Haraway, 2000) that determine both a common history that we inherit and an intimate history in which we make our first dreams. As a young white girl in the Rocky Mountains, Haraway dreamed of being kidnapped by the Indians. Growing up meant inheriting histories of colonization and extermination, of land exploitation and territorial disputes, and becoming a responsible partner in the Native American situation. It matters where our stories and dreams are made because we are not independent organisms in environments that merely background us. We are never alone in the world, but always caught up in sympoietic relationships where every being involves the lives of others (Hustak & Myers, 2012).

How then to deal with childhood dreams, damage, other beings, bacteria, viruses? How to live-with and die-with each other well? This is the issue according to which Haraway isolates a particular task: "think we must" (Haraway, 2015). Perhaps a story best illustrates this. In her proposal to "stay with the trouble," Haraway predicted the emergence of compost communities, where humans must become Earthbound to deal with the biotic and abiotic powers that have been populating air, land, and sea for much longer than we have. In these “compostists” communities, humans and humus share the same root, and symbiotic and multispecies alliances have been formed. It is a matter of thinking and acting with other beings that make them live and die, with beings that live and die with them. Thanks to this type of story provided by Haraway, we might be able to think of a future in which humans are less solitary and arrogant, a future where they have become multispecies, become compost, where they have been "recomposed" into earthlings among others. These humans, perhaps, will have learned to live in the ruins of the ancient dreams of modernization. So what is the problem? We will say it simply: to conceive the ongoingness, as Haraway says, of these sympoieses in a more ambitious and joyful way than that of the simple survival. To think not only about the habitability of the earth against the extinction of species, but also of humans and of ways of living together. For it is not "life" in general that is threatened, but this very world sheltering forms of life with tangled destinies.

4. Narrating in the folds

Our love of storytelling is so strong that Gould has said we should call ourselves *Homo narrator* instead of *Homo sapiens*. Of course, some will say that it is more common to say *Homo faber*. As we know, the history of our species is easily simplified by the list of tools and technologies that Man has invented. His intelligence finds in this technical inventiveness the ideal criterion that would allow us to specify and distinguish Man from other species. But which tools? In *Homo faber*’s story, pottery and the nuclear bomb, paper and the firearm are juxtaposed. Ursula Le Guin, through her story *The Carrier Bag Theory of fiction* (1986), has rallied against these epic and virile stories defining a conquering Man as a manufacturer of weapons. She protested against the way in which these narratives do not take any care of those who populate them. By telling stories of small things – of inventions of containers, envelopes, gourds, nets, and boxes – Le Guin

offers a diversity of fragile things to populate our imaginations. These are things that take care of the beings and the things they keep, transport, or protect. There are certainly crucial inventions, however small and local, to be made visible in the face of capitalized narratives: communities of life, political experiments, and compositions of place. For our places never form a society as in a garden of Eden, since they are conflicting, disputed, and crossed by incompatible desires. I previously illustrated the way in which certain places can shelter individual and collective experimentation through the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia; how they are both material of exclusion and envelope for emancipation (Gross, 2020).

To loosen the impasse in which the debate between the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene is becoming bogged down, Donna Haraway proposes to multiply these narratives by showing the way in which each one draws our attention to a dimension that has something to tell. By using the term "Phonocene" to describe our era, she seeks to alert us to the future of the earth's sounds. We would be in the era where the sounds of the earth which have not yet disappeared are still audible. As Despret's account has taught us, a sound can uniquely summon sensitivity and generate a joy of attention and presence that attracts and engages in ways as important as the visual can strike us. Bioacoustician Bernie Krause, who records soundscapes, has created libraries of the richness of the sound world while also archiving the accelerating rate of species extinction. Fifty percent of the sound heritage is now degraded or extinct (Krause, 2015).

I would be one of those who follow Gould when he assumed the importance of safeguarding the worldly diversity and excellence that manifests itself in myriad places and whose difference and variation must be defended (Gould, 1996). Our modern attitude has been to banalize the experience of the living by destroying what Baptiste Morizot calls prodigies, those experiences that fill us with wonder when we "learn that the maple tree in the street communicates with the lilies in the flowerbeds, that bees know how to dance cards, that dolphins hear shapes" (Morizot, 2020, p. 46). To politicize the wonder and to thwart the crisis of sensibility which characterizes the late modernity, Morizot proposes the idea of a culture attuned to the living richness of knowledge and narratives which pushes the lives of non-humans into the field of attention. A culture, as a device, implies the importance of what it designates, the living, in the common world and in the common imaginary, making it difficult to neglect the phenomenon that it promotes. This is undoubtedly what researchers are

doing today by making it possible to write about birds (Despret, 2021), wolves (Morizot, 2016), mushrooms (Tsing, 2015), forests (Kohn, 2013), or microbes (Brives, 2010).

Never are these stories defended as forms of secondary curiosity, but rather as indispensable elements of our common world and thus of our economic, ethical, and political considerations. Bees have infiltrated our economic interests, soil fauna our agriculture, birds have imposed themselves just as much in our reflections on the city and architecture as the importance of trees has. With all this mass of non-humans entering as both political actors and actants of narratives, humans are being transformed as a collective in new ways (Houdart & Thiery 2011). The narratives in the Anthropocene can then be devices of attention that cultivate new forms of sensitivity towards the living. And the word Anthropocene can itself be understood as a proposal for narratives that attach creatures to one another, a demand to regain a terrestrial footing.

For the narratives in the Anthropocene, it is always a question of capturing those links that support our existence, the network of beings with which we live and on which we depend (Latour, 2021). It appears to me that this constraint must be conceived as a method of telling. For the links are what matter. Against the economy of attention, Yves Citton has theorized the ecology of attention as taking care of the fragile links and the precarious narratives that detail our earthly inscriptions. These links are important not simply to remedy the consequences of the ecological crisis, in the way Arne Naess opposed a superficial ecology to a deep ecology whose challenge is to work on the cause. Rather, the links are resources for composing other ways of making society and challenging the ways we present ourselves at a distance from things. Thus, Jean-Philippe Pierron, who continues the re-composition of our ways of doing things with those whom Bruno Latour calls the Terrestrials, invites us to think of our life stories in relation to the Earth, that is to say, to bring the whole environment into the biography, to transform it into an exercise of ecobiography (Pierron, 2021).

We can hope that these narratives can respond to David Abram's proposal to "animate" Earth. I would say that this is a major problem with naturalist guides or classical scientific works: they de-animate and do not mobilize us. How can we be required to live in a world that is disenchanted, mute, reduced to a meaningless setting where only human stories unfold? In our personal and collective lives, something is missing. The indifference to

the devastation of the Earth and to the sixth extinction of species proves it: we are anesthetized. Yet, in the Anthropocene, the Earth is not silent. We are full of suggestions for regenerating our multiple modes of interdependence. As we have seen, these require new arts of speaking, new narratives, that support the ethical possibilities of understanding ourselves as living among the living. For we are only human in contact with that which is not human (Abram, 2013, p. 16). Earthly beings are not autonomous, but always attached – to parents, languages, places, ways of doing things, ancestors, other networks of the living. This is what made Tobie Nathan choose as the title of his book one of his major lessons in ethnopsychiatry: *We are not alone in the world* (2001).

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"The Anthropocene has still the rank of a scientific hypothesis. Yet, it has already sedimented in our imagination with its stories of climate change and mass extinctions, global pandemics and energy crisis, technofossils and oceanic plastic, social justice and new minerals that are changing the face (and the bowels) of the planet. Investigating this imagination from multiple angles, Narratives in the Anthropocene Era, brilliantly edited by Charles Travis and Vittorio Valentino, is an indispensable tool for situating these stories into the conceptual horizon of the environmental humanities".

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