Rhetoric Review

ISSN: 0735-0198 (Print) 1532-7981 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hrhr20

Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture

Dustin W. EdwardsDUSTIN W. EDWARDS

To cite this article: Dustin W. EdwardsDUSTIN W. EDWARDS (2019) Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture, Rhetoric Review, 38:4, 484-486, DOI: 10.1080/07350198.2019.1654761

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2019.1654761

remix (creating videos to speak against state forces) is presented as a disruptive tactic responding to legal constraints of the material realities of queer youth. Martin and Licona's approach to remix works nicely alongside Jason Peters's assertion that unruly language is a subversive rhetorical means to "confront, subvert, and alter discursive structures" of the corporate and state body writ large (241). One's lived reality is potentially disruptive and powerful against restrictive and punitive forces. In the final chapter in this section, "Then Comes Fall: Activism, the Arab Spring, and the Necessity of Unruly Borders," a team of co-authors led by Steve Parks details their work with Middle Eastern and North American (MENA) activists and Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) to spotlight youth voices involved in the Arab Spring movement by way of publishing narratives and expressing solidarity as rhetorical tactic. Their moving chapter offers a catalytic conclusion to the collection, asserting that a rhetoric that moves beyond (inter)national borders and bodies "toward a deep engagement with the formation and reformation of communities" is unruly in its optimism (296).

Unruly Rhetorics is a refreshing, blatantly political collection that sits at a crucial intersection in the field of rhetoric and writing studies—that of rhetorics of protest and theories of incitement and action. In Welch's afterword, she writes of the divisively political climate circa 2018, pointing to "unruly means" as a floodlight forward through the murkiness of a post-truth age (301). Indeed, Welch underscores that the *means* of unruliness and social movement rhetorics have "received scant attention in composition, rhetoric, and communication scholarship and classrooms," an oversight that this collection aptly addresses (301). Welch poses an all-too-common question in our field right now: "how can we teach rhetorical discernment?" (305).

The multifaceted essays Alexander, Jarratt, and Welch have compiled in *Unruly Rhetorics* comprise a text that should be a companion to many graduate survey courses in the history of contemporary rhetorics, and several of the collection's chapters would be right at home in an upper-level undergraduate persuasive writing course or a graduate public rhetorics course. What *Unruly Rhetorics* offers is a stake, a pin on the broad map of rhetoric and writing studies from which to center "unruliness" more apparently. The impetus of unruly acts, the means behind the movements, is what *Unruly Rhetorics* spotlights and asserts as a necessary and inciteful element in rhetoric's ongoing social justice conversations.

Liz Lane
University of Memphis

Jennifer Clary-Lemon. *Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2019. 201 pages. $27.95 paperback.

It is by now not news that our new geological epoch is here. The Anthropocene, the much-contested name used to describe an age of human-influenced change, proclaims a new way for stratigraphers to read the inscriptions of Earth. But the Anthropocene does much more than name a new way of reading the planet. In *Planting the Anthropocene: Rhetorics of Natureculture*, Jennifer Clary-Lemon argues that the Anthropocene also matters for how we conceptualize rhetoric. As she writes early in the book, "The Anthropocene marks an epoch and also an argument" (6). Clary-Lemon provides readers a way to understand how the Anthropocene materializes as both epoch and argument

through the worlds of industrial tree planting in Canadian landscapes. Such a focus—described as a "window" into how the Anthropocene is constantly invented and reinvented—allows Clary-Lemon to cover much conceptual ground in the six chapters (including an introduction and conclusion) of the book. By thinking the Anthropocene through rhetoric and rhetoric through the Anthropocene, readers experience a re-tuning of both in the face of ever-accelerating environmental change.

The introduction roots readers in the themes of the book, as well as the methodological engine that drives the project. Described as a methodological practice in ambient rhetoric, the book works in a choric register by privileging associational over linear thinking. In doing so, Clary-Lemon opens us to the multispecies worlds of tree planting. Such an approach is accomplished, in part, through interviews with silvicultural workers. Yet we learn early on that human tree planters will not be the sole focus of the book—humans are but one part of the larger lifeworlds Clary-Lemon investigates. Throughout the book, Clary-Lemon attends to how rhetoric emerges in and through human and nonhuman entanglements: black flies, plant species, dirt, shovels, roads, and much else. It may seem odd, then, that *Planting the Anthropocene* relies on human-centered interviews as a way to make claims about the need to implode humanist categories such as subject/object, human/nonhuman, and nature/culture. However, Clary-Lemon figures her interviews as "a *way in* to the testimonies" of more-than-human worlds (16, emphasis in original). She decenters the human *through* the associational thinking of tree planters who are always in relation to a whole host of others. In this regard, Clary-Lemon's interviewing approach makes a significant contribution for rhetorical researchers interested in reading new materialist insights through more familiar methods by listening for how humans describe the lifeworlds they encounter.

Chapter one gets into the weeds of nature terminology. In particular, Clary-Lemon examines how *nature, wilderness*, and *environment* often participate in humanist separations, where nature is figured as an un-agential "out there," a place on which human subjects move around and exert their will, participating in nature only inasmuch as they seek to manage, control, or preserve it (26). In reviewing these terms, Clary-Lemon reminds us that "discourses of nature are pitted against culture," which has a constraining effect on the kinds of stories we can tell (24). While Clary-Lemon troubles such distinctions with a more relational understanding, she also examines the very real effects of thinking that separates nature from culture. Relying on interviews with tree planters, Clary-Lemon uncovers how tenets of humanism (for example, privileging the human above all else, focusing on individualism, centering reason, and so on) and rhetorics of efficiency (for example, economic exchange) manifest in how planters talk about their work. And yet, even in such entrenched frameworks, inconsistency abounds, and it is in these inconsistencies that Clary-Lemon finds hope for alternative ways of being in the world.

The second chapter picks up on such inconsistencies to elaborate a central theory developed throughout the book: a new materialist environmental rhetoric. Drawing on work from new materialism, material ecocriticism, and critical affect studies, as well as dwelling with the inconsistencies of tree planters' interview data, Clary-Lemon builds a case for new materialist environmental rhetoric that is located not in the actions of any one body but in the relations between and among bodies of all kinds. Clary-Lemon articulates a new materialist environmental rhetoric through three "élucubrations" or "wild imaginings": the first is to understand the rhetorical human as situated somewhere between "the rational and non-rational" (59); the second is to be attentive to the "underivable rhetoricity" (Diane Davis's term) of human and nonhuman bodies in motion (64); and the third is to understand planter-bodies as sets of relations. To extrapolate on these wild imaginings of an environmental rhetoric, Clary-Lemon details messy encounters between planter-, animal-, and tree-bodies—all in service of worlding an entangled sense of natureculture. "Perhaps such messiness is what may allow a rethinking, not of the Anthropocene

from without (as epochs of time suggest) or within (as metaphors of apocalypse encourage) but as a choric *through*, an ambient *with*" Clary-Lemon writes (66). While this chapter gives an account of a very particular set of scenes (nonhuman encounters on the cut-block landscapes of tree plantations), I imagine it will prove generative for those working on a range of issues related to the Anthropocene.

Chapters three and four work in a similar register as chapter two, only in the latter chapters Clary-Lemon is more attentive to affect and things. In attending to affect, Clary-Lemon describes the circulating intensities of working in devastated landscapes. I was particularly drawn to her interviews in which tree planters depict feelings of loss and grief. "Being-with, being affected, allows a recognition of the un-grievable object; it acknowledges nonhuman beings (and thing-bodies), natural environment, and ecological processes as appropriate objects for genuine grief" (124–125). Clary-Lemon argues that being-with the plantation landscapes—places where forests have been cleared—gives rise to what Nathaniel Rivers calls "intense rhetorics." As Clary-Lemon remarks, "These are not the simple stories saving the planet, of an over-privileging of human control to either destroy or renew" (129). Attending to the ways in which rhetorical encounters are intensified in these not-so-simple stories is a way to work through the Anthropocene rather than see it as a "foregone conclusion" (6).

I began this review with a universalizing statement—"our" age of the Anthropocene is here. *Planting the Anthropocene* certainly troubles what might get included in this universalizing "our" by examining the more-than-human worlds of tree planting. Still, though, by the end of *Planting the Anthropocene* I found myself considering how more work in rhetoric and writing studies might investigate how the Anthropocene performs other kinds of universalizing work. As Kathryn Yusoff argues, "[t]he Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (*A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, p. xiii). Perhaps Clary-Lemon's conclusion—her invocation to "stay with the trouble," as Donna Haraway puts it (168)—is a way to dwell with who gets to be a human under the sign of the *anthropos*. Inventing the Anthropocene otherwise, as Yusoff's work helps explain, may very well depend on such work.

In the end, Clary-Lemon's *Planting the Anthropocene* is not an end but a now, a "Choracene" or "new-where-things-take-place," a beginning of sorts that calls for constant invention (176). It should be noted, then, that Clary-Lemon's project is difficult to stabilize; it is a work on the move, both methodologically and in its subject matter. And while parsing thorny terminology (*wilderness, environment*, and *nature*) while also conceptualizing rhetoric through an array of theoretical support (new materialism, affect studies, environmental humanities, and Indigenous philosophies) would seem a daunting task, Clary-Lemon is at ease traversing such a messy landscape. If nothing else, she shows that to understand anything of the patchiness of environmental ruin requires a certain letting go of comfortable bifurcations and familiar boundaries. The Anthropocene demands an urgent implosion of such Eurowestern fabrications, and *Planting the Anthropocene* shows us a way through.

DUSTIN W. EDWARDS
University of Central Florida