

Anthroposcenes in the Firth of Forth

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Anthroposcenes in the Firth of Forth is an experiment in earth-writing. The Anthropocene has been a promiscuous concept. For geologists, the Anthropocene constitutes a practical search for a Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP), a golden spike that can stand in for the planetary transformations wrought by humans. For earth scientists more broadly, the Anthropocene is incitatory: an appealing metaconcept to communicate their passionately objective diagnosis of dangerous shifts in earth processes. Techno-optimists have mobilized the Anthropocene in their call for humanity to fulfil their destiny and become good planetary stewards. Critical social scientists point to the postpolitics of the Anthropocene, subsuming as it does socioecological conflict and difference under the alibis of nature and humanity. Hence the Capitalocene: an analysis of causes, not simply a catalogue of impacts. Still others—from the environmental humanities, social theory, and posthumanities to multispecies studies—are constructing a more generous story, allied but antagonistic to Earth systems science positivism. The Anthropocene's deep shocks, its spatial and temporal ruptures in the fabric of given knowledge, they argue, must trouble our repertoires and help us dream the Earth better.

These responses all share an inflationary tendency to “go planetary.” They invite us to witness the whole planet, laid out before us. Where exactly could we be we standing, asks Bruno Latour, when we claim to be surveying the Earth? In this book, I argue against “going planetary” without due process. The planetary is composed of loops, the actions of many agents, material and immaterial flows, all passing through specific sites: the trading floor, glaciers, the conference room, the mine, the image. In *Anthroposcenes in the Firth of Forth*, I offer a cascading series of *scenes*: slices of Anthropocene stories cut from a particular time and space. One of the shocks of the Anthropocene is the way it becomes harder to ignore the immanence of planetary scale right there before us in an object, or in a landscape. A second shock is that deep time is catapulted into the present, continually forcing us—as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes—to make tiny leaps over a vast mental crevasse. The *Anthroposcene*, right there before us, holds together deep memories, prospects of futures. No scene is contemporary with itself; no scene sits at a single scale.

The site for these *scenes* is the Firth of Forth, a sea inlet just to the north of Edinburgh, and to the south of the Kingdom of Fife, in Scotland. This is an area of long-term environmental transformation and a place I used to call home. It is a unique catalog of Anthropocene processes; it is also only one catalog among many. The cascading scenes explore the entanglements of the *geo* and *bio* across space and time, expressed as they are in their particulars. They encompass inhuman substrates (coal, ley lines, life as such, angels from God); capitalizations on earth processes (ecosystem services, hydrocarbon labor, genetic modification); the precarity and beauty of multispecies relations (gannet colonies, pandas not having sex, the ghosts of botanists from Yunnan, chimpanzees on the run); technics (depressing steam engines, albedo-enhancing ship fleets); attempts to recuperate damaged land (the Niddrie woman, gentrifying shorefronts, a radioactive beach). Weaving through past, present, and future, and land, air and sea—often teleconnected to faraway places—the cascade begins with James Watt's ruined shed, and ends with amateur ornithology on the Isle of May. Each *scene* is its own GSSP—a metonymic marker of long-term, wider-scale change. I offer a cascade of stories, an episodic confusion, to reflect the confusion of our Anthropocene times.

Anthroposcenes in the Firth of Forth responds to calls from across multiple disciplines to broaden out narratives of the Anthropocene. The stories offered within the book share an affinity with the growing tribe of Anthropocene narratives: they take seriously the claims of earth science, warnings of capitalism's transformative powers, and the speculative hopes of social theorists. But they also take seriously geography's core mission of earth-writing, the demand to find a form of writing rooted in this earth, fitting for our times.