

Call for Papers: *Journal of Public Pedagogies* special issue

Apocalyptic Pedagogies: Rethinking Publics and Publicness in the Time of Apocalypse

Guest Edited by Jake Burdick & Jennifer A. Sandlin

This issue centers on the public in an historical moment that is characterized by the metaphor of *exposure*. Under the aegis of COVID-19, we have fled public spaces out of fear of exposure to the virus, and simultaneously, the nature of the public itself has been subject to an exposure more akin to that of photography. COVID, as well as the overlapping sociocultural pandemics of racism, austerity, and fascism, has shone a light into, through, and across the institutions that we hail as public; created the desire for new spaces of public discourse and pedagogies; exposed disturbingly racist and violent movements for ‘freedom’ that had formerly been mostly hidden from sight; and potentially has been revealed as an ultimately illusory construct. The public has been lauded, even fetishized, across the history of Western thought, from its inception as a site of purportedly democratic discourse in antiquity to contemporary social thought that hails it as a space set apart from a world all-but-swallowed by the ravenousness of privatism and late capitalism.

Questions around how publics form and sustain have been particularly vexing issues within the field of public pedagogy, as scholars have struggled to understand and theorize conceptualizations of the *public* and what it might mean to enact public pedagogy in a way that opens up possibilities for a more just and democratic public sphere (Burdick & Sandlin 2013; Cooper & Sandlin, 2020; O’Malley, Sandlin, & Burdick, 2020; Sandlin, Burdick, & Rich, 2017; Sandlin, O’Malley, & Burdick, 2011). Within public pedagogy thought, then, the notion of the public thus remains contested--see, for example, Glenn Savage’s (2010, 2014) landmark work on decoding what a public might actually *be*, Anna Hickey-Moody’s (2014, 2016) development of the concept of micropublics to attend the vast complexity of intersubjectivity, and Gert Biesta’s (2012, 2014) reconceptualization of *publicness* as a state to be achieved by Arendtian action. Yet, even in contestation, the *public* remains a regulative ideal for our field, even a sort of panacea for the ills of institutional sites of education. However, a confluence of viruses--bodily, ecological, cultural, and political--have seized this moment in history and forced us to wonder what, and if, the public really *is*. And if we call into question what a public is or might be, what, then, does it mean to create and enact pedagogies in the interest of publicness?

As a means of conceptualizing the present moment, we take up the term *apocalypse* for its signification of ruin and the collapse of a particular historical assemblage, as well as for its etymological origins as an *unveiling*, a revelation of the cruel metaphysics working beneath placid ontologies. Berger (1999) claims that our social order is comprised of a decidedly post-apocalyptic milieu. Within this space, Berger identifies the cultural traumas of such events as the Holocaust and the Gulag as primal scenes of the breakdown in the narratives of modernism. Whereas these narratives once posited an arrow of human progress, one foisted via industrialization and technical enhancements and heading towards an enhanced moral, ethical, and decidedly human existence, the ends wrought by these historical traumas, their repercussions and repetitions, and--most importantly--their reframings and denials serve as a reminder of that project’s structural and narrative failings. Berger writes,

Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and

must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts; their symptoms. Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them. (p. 19)

Thus Berger argues that, in terms of the narratives of history and identity we are offered, the apocalypse has already come to pass, and we, like Nietzschean last men [sic], are left to pick through the representational dust and echoes, piecing together these remaining, still smoldering scraps and collectively suturing them into a history that elides the Real scene from which it is wrought. Thus, while we agree with Berger's (1999) characterization of meaning as a piecemeal corpse of sorts, we alter his theorization to argue that instead of being post-apocalypse, we are now living daily life in the midst of apocalypse. The mid-apocalyptic is a space that announces the end not as an event, but a process, one that cannot be adequately articulated via such causal language as beginning or end. In such a rethinking, the Holocaust and the Gulag do not lose their significance, but rather they shed the colonial reliance on distinctly Westernized notions of civilization and civility's failures. Instead, the Holocaust becomes a genocide among genocides, one whose horrific scope and perversely scientific undergirdings cannot be ignored or understated, but that must be situated as an historic event that serves as an exemplar in the long history and future of the apocalypse.

Applying these ideas to the moment of COVID-19's ravaging of global health and economies; the re-legitimization of nationalist, supremacist, and fascist politics in the ascent of Trump, Bolsonaro, Putin, and Morrison; the encroaching environmental crisis, heralded by the angels of drought, brushfire, and ever-rising tide; and the ongoing denigration of intellectualism, scientific reasoning, and common sense under the feet of a glibly self-gratifying populism; the term apocalypse seems neither overreaching nor alarmist, as all of these events certainly have the capacity to bring about the world's end. However, as in our reworking of Berger's theorizations, these discourses are not, as popular sentiment would suggest, effects of the year 2020. Rather, we contend that the rationalization of 2020 as a temporal epicenter of the apocalypse is both ahistorical and a marker of economic, spatial, racial, and gendered privilege. The disasters we described above are not discrete manifestations brought together by the happenstance of history; rather, they are instances of processes and machinations that extend deep into capitalist history and ideology. We are in the middle of multiple apocalypses that have always been with us. 2020 is not the year the world ended; it's the year White people noticed.

The public, then, has to be considered a particularly significant space for study, as its idealized state is wholly composed of the very species of interaction that these churning apocalypses enervate. But, turning to apocalypse as a sign of the *unveiling*, the public, too, has been stripped of its varnish, revealing--again, largely only to those who could afford ignorance--that it is also a fragile latticework of smoke and embers. Within the United States, public institutions such as national and state health systems rapidly collapsed under the weight of COVID, as their classist, sexist, and racist bones were cast into the broad light of day. As Savage (2010) realized, the idea(l) of the public as a truly common, democratizing space fails to account for the multiplicity of publics individuals experience and are allowed/forbidden to inhabit. For example, in Victoria, Australia, public housing lockdowns and mandatory testing as a response to COVID-19, which purported to be in the interest of the public good, were revealed as racist and classist, and echoed the same moral panics that have been created throughout history as fear of the 'Other' rises (Zevallos, 2020); Whiter, richer suburbs were not subject to the same surveillance and punishments. And in the United States, our sense of being *in public* bears little resemblance to the public George Floyd faced in his last minutes of life or its abject repetition

across the lives of Black peoples across much of the Western(ized) world. These collective misrecognitions of the public have now come into sharp focus, unveiled via exposure to/from the baleful, unyielding *light* of our many apocalypses.

The ideas we hope to include within this issue should center on a fairly simple proposition: what do we do now that we know? Whereas our collective apocalyptic exposure certainly reveals a dire state of reality, it has also served as a call to resistance in the form of activism, emerging ecological consciousnesses in the face of the anthropocene's end, and the growing visibility of mutual aid networks as alternate *publics* to meet the needs of minoritized peoples. As such, we call for both empirical and theoretical papers focusing on the multiple effects of this exposure, both in terms of what has been revealed and how we might create *publicness* from the ruins. Further, we seek work that describes how public spaces are produced and/or enacted, that problematizes the often taken for granted assumption that publicness is always an ethical enterprise, and/or that examines the *process of public pedagogy* and implores us to reflect critically on our roles as public educators beyond the academy.

Details and Timeline

The expected publication date will accompany the annual Public Pedagogies Institute Conference in Melbourne, Australia (November 2021). We invite proposals for submissions that address issues focusing on problematizing publics and publicness in the time of interlocking apocalypses of racism, colonization, ecological crises, the global pandemic, White supremacy, and fascism. Each 250-word proposal should provide a title for the submission, explain a theoretical orientation, and a brief explanation of content, arguments, and aspect of apocalyptic pedagogies, publics, or publicness that will be examined. Proposals should indicate if the final submission will be a full-length article or a shorter explication text (see below). If you include images in your proposal please embed these into your word document and then send the submission as a PDF. Include no more than 3 images at this time. Please include a permission statement that indicates that you have the copyright permission to include images in your publication. Please include a 50-word bio. The journal is an open source online journal that currently publishes the papers as PDF files. Images and URL links can be included in submissions. Please submit proposals electronically as Word documents (or PDF if including images), using APA citation style. Submit proposals and queries to: jennifer.sandlin@asu.edu or burdics@purdue.edu.

Final submissions can be:

- full length articles (5,000 to 6,000 exclusive of references) that theoretically and/or empirically attend to understanding apocalyptic pedagogies, publics, and/or publicness (these will be double blind peer reviewed)
- short texts (1000 to 1500 words) that explicate a particular public or pedagogy of publicness
- photo essays with short descriptions/theorizations

Deadlines (updated):

- January 8, 2020: Proposal/expression of interest (250 words plus 50-word bio)
- February 1, 2021 authors will be notified of acceptance of their proposal
- May 1, 2021 final submissions due for blind peer review

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