



Anthropocenic Research Forum

January 10, 2013

A gathering of projects
on the occasion of the official opening of
“The Anthropocene Project”
Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
January 10, 2013, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Program

09:00	<i>Registration</i>
09:30	Introduction
09:45	Session 1: Earth – OPEN Project, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research
10:30	Session 2: Education – KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Stockholm
11:15	<i>Break</i>
11:30	Session 3: Resources – Michel Serres Institute, ENS Lyon
12:15	Session 4: Epistemology – AIME Project, Sciences Po, Paris
13:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	Session 5: Law – Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London
14:45	Roundup

Admission:
Participation in the Anthropocenic Research Forum is limited to invitation and registration.
Please register at: workshop.anthropocene@hkw.de

The Context

Over the next two years Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin will facilitate a transdisciplinary investigation into the Anthropocene hypothesis, which states that Earth has entered a new geological epoch in which mankind has become a dominant geophysical force itself. Man's current acts and omissions are not merely historical but have a "geohistorical" scope, leaving a tangible discontinuity in the geological timescale.

"The Anthropocene Project" of the HKW sets out to explore the scientific and conceptual challenges as well as the imaginary possibilities of this proposed new epoch. The project will utilize methods of research and presentation from the sciences as well as the arts, while traversing the intellectual and disciplinary boundaries between culture, science, technology, and politics. Cooperation partners are the Max Planck Society, Deutsches Museum, the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (all Munich), and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (Potsdam).

From Jan 10-13, 2013 "The Anthropocene Project" will be launched with a large, discourse oriented event, featuring contributions by scientists, thinkers, artists, writers, filmmakers, and performers. Multiple formats are programmed over the course of the four days, allowing the participants to address the Anthropocene issue with a spectrum of intriguing questions and answers providing all guests to take an itinerant role in engagement and discussion.

By the time of this opening, two preliminary scientific workshops will have already convened at the HKW, both held under the auspices of Prof. Bernd M. Scherer, Director of the HKW, and Prof. Jürgen Renn, Director at Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), Berlin. In these workshops, young scholars had the opportunity to present their respective work on projects that engage with the "Anthropocene", thus sampling and outlining elements of a yet-to-be-established "Anthropocenic research". Such a research field could act as a bridge, uniting the thematic focus on the scope, impact and velocity of "global change" in its many guises, whether climatic, cultural, economic, historical, epistemological, geochemical, juridical, or any other of the many disciplinary facets the grand narrative of the Anthropocene embraces.

On the occasion of the project's opening event this academic stream is taken a step further and will reflect on the state, prospects, and feasibility of such an amalgamated effort to (re-)calibrate the numerous scientific endeavors according to the scope, weight, and possibilities of the challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

The Problem

The Anthropocene hypothesis presents an intricate problem to academia. Faced with an implicit mandate to assess the scope and impact of ecological and civilizational change, academics are challenged to realistically model the (deep) past, (deep) present, and (deep) future of planetary existence despite its pure – yet infinitely complex – empiricism. Moreover, the assessment of current global change must be done simultaneous to its unfolding, adjusting the settings while running the experiment.

Thus, any concrete conceptualization of the Anthropocene is based on pure heuristics. Its reality lies somewhere, far from Holocene home, where nobody knows the way, where nothing is to compare with. This is primarily true for the entirety of the Earth system. Although the geological record holds several examples of climatic and ecological hyper-transitions in the Earth's long history, there is no true geological analogue to current-day environmental dynamics. Building up on this paleo-scientific incommensurability is the nonlinearity and contingency of civilizational history, as political, economic, and cultural phenomena unfold in unforeseeable and often coincidental ways. To complicate things even further, science naturally finds itself amidst this very anthropogenic experiment with the Earth. The very idea of the Anthropocene makes it all too clear: There is no outside position to withdraw to.

Such intricate interconnectedness is not only philosophical; there are concrete ramifications with which we need to engage. Contemporary developments have repositioned the consultative relationship of science to politics; political strategies for regulating global warming (such as the 2 degree challenge) are under question; conservation efforts are foreshortened by industrial production in developing countries; natural resources are depleting; and the global market as well as (trans-)national governments insist on growth as its primary economic principle.

The Goal

However, the Anthropocene also provides for opportunities, which in the case of science is to rethink its modern endeavor. While “the age of man” is more than the sum of its analyzable parts, the Anthropocene concept provides room for a creative (in the double sense of imaginative and constructive) understanding of the future. Certainly, there is a need to connect the many, so far mainly isolated analyses of natural, cultural and social interactions. All of these factors are, by themselves, crucial elements, yet not ones that are reserved for the Anthropocene. Imagine the Holocene without cultural interactions. Only by crossing the categories between nature, culture, and society a real planetary approach can emerge. Yet, beyond having interaction studies to interact, where, on this planet, lies a new operative mode of experiencing, inquiring, and leveraging? What future lies for science and by extension, its sophisticated technological and social infrastructure, within the Anthropocenic reconceptualization of “Earthly” scale and scope?

Comprehending that science is part of the equation that it is to solve, an “Anthropocenic research” would have to take itself into account; it would need to operate on its own uncertainty principle, while engaging with epistemological readjustments in order to assess its own heuristic methods. The general aim of this Forum then, is to facilitate a trans-disciplinary discussion – having researchers from different scientific fields but also from the arts in one room, effectively nourishing the art of research with artistic research and vice versa – and together ponder forms and strategies for how much a new research perspective, appropriated to the challenge of the Anthropocene, could be achieved.

The Way

Haus der Kulturen der Welt provides non-academic meeting ground to discuss academic issues in an experimental, non-conventional, and open-minded fashion. By bringing together scientific scholarship and artistic research from a diverse array of fields and methodological approaches we hope to set discursive negotiations into motion, exercises of thought, so to speak. The Forum wishes to capture different views on a set of specific subjects, channeling these into a collective sensitization towards the ways and means in which constructive modes of inquiry can be introduced to turn science's self-entanglement with its own object of study into an epistemic advantage.

Convening this Forum on occasion of a large and many-voiced event allows for the unique opportunity to invite a broad spectrum of projects, individuals, and institutions all orbiting the Anthropocene topic and effectively providing different perspectives and metrics on the same universal subject. We are indeed delighted and feel invigorated by the great and very positive response we received from many different research communities. Unfortunately, due to the limited amount of time in which the Forum can take place within the dense schedule of the Opening, we only can have five different projects present on their work – a sample size far too low to gain representativeness, of course.

Yet, we hope to convene further Forums within the lifetime of “The Anthropocene Project”, effectively developing it into a series that constantly intensifies its work on outlining and stratifying “Anthropocenic research”. We eventually hope to provide cross-fertilization between a multitude of different projects and to create a viable collective approach to this central issue. One of the concurrent goals of this project is to reconsider modalities of presentation and manifestations of knowledge, thereby affecting current scholarship from within, through, and around such a holistic field of inquiry that the Anthropocene is setting on the human agenda.

The Anthropocenic Research Forum en detail

When confronted with the manifold aspects inherent in the Anthropocene concept one might quickly feel overwhelmed. For a start, the Anthropocene just triggers an avalanche of questions. Questions that have a lot to do with epistemic uncertainty, with unmanageable complexity, questions with no start and no end.

Still, some questions that evolve from a closer examination of the Anthropocene issue might have – far from driving oneself into a fatalistic or lethargic mode – a cathartic quality. This Forum seeks to pose some of these more pointed and revealing questions, confronting each of the invited projects with just one of them, effectively giving the respondent the opportunity to share their specific view on it and thus presenting aim, scope, and methods of their respective project. Each session will then start with this short presentation/response, before a general discussion of both the question and the project will be launched.

For this first Forum we have identified five key topics together with five corresponding projects or institutions:

Earth system

Cognoscente: Flagship Project "Planetary Opportunities and Planetary Boundaries" (OPEN), Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)

Wolfgang Lucht (Co-Chair of Earth System Analysis at PIK, Professor of Sustainability Science at Humboldt Universität Berlin)

Dieter Gerten (Senior Researcher at PIK, Head of Project OPEN)

Education

Cognoscente: Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm

Sabine Höhler (Associate Professor of Science and Technology Studies at KTH)

Sverker Sörlin (Professor of Environmental History at KTH)

Resources

Cognoscente: Michel Serres Institute, École Normale Supérieure (ENS), Lyon

Ioan Negrutiu (Director of Michel Serres Institute, Professor of Biology at ENS Lyon)

Pablo Jensen (Director of Complex Systems Institute IXXI, ENS Lyon)

Epistemology

Cognoscente: "An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence" (AIME), Sciences Po, Paris

Dorothea Heinz (Research assistant, AIME Project)

Heiko Müller (Research assistant, AIME Project)

Law

Cognoscente: "Fifth Geneva Convention", Centre for Research Architecture (CRA), Goldsmiths, University of London

Eyal Weizman (Professor of Spatial Visual Cultures, Director of CRA)

Adrian Lahoud (Architect and researcher, Fifth Geneva Convention Project)

Further Participants include:

Hosts

- Bernd M. Scherer (Director Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Head of the Board of "The Anthropocene Project")
- Jürgen Renn (Director Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin)

Further board members of "The Anthropocene Project"

- Reinhold Leinfelder (Head of Working Group on Geobiology and Anthropocene Research, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Christian Schwägerl (Science journalist and author, Berlin)

Further cooperation partners of "The Anthropocene Project"

- Helmuth Trischler (Head of Research at Deutsches Museum; Co-Director Rachel Carson Center, Munich)
- Falk Schmidt (Academic Officer of the Executive Office, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam)

Aarhus University Research Project on the Anthropocene AURA

- Nils Bubandt (Professor of Anthropology, Institute of Culture and Society, Aarhus University)
- Peter Funch (Associate Professor, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University)
- Pil Pedersen (PhD student Ecoinformatics and Biodiversity Group, Aarhus University)

Anthropocene Exhibition, Deutsches Museum, Munich

- Nina Möllers (Project Director/Curator Anthropocene Exhibition, Deutsches Museum)

Anthropocene Kitchen, Cluster of Excellence: Image, Knowledge, Gestaltung. An Interdisciplinary Laboratory

- Philipp Oswalt (Director Bauhaus Dessau Foundation; Professor of Architectural Theory, University of Kassel)

Anthropogenic land cover change, Max Planck Institute for Meteorology, Hamburg

- Julia Pongratz (Research Scientist, Department Land in the Earth System, MPIMet)

Australian National University Climate Change Institute ANU CCI, Canberra

- Will Steffen (Director of the CCI at ANU; Stockholm Resilience Center)

Carnivory: The First 1.8 Million Years, Rachel Carson Center, Munich

- Josh Berson (Carson Fellow, RCC)

Centre for Marine Environmental Sciences MARUM, Bremen

- Stefan Mulitza (Research Scientist Marine Geology, MARUM)

Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change CRESC, Open University, Milton Keynes

- John Law (Professor of Sociology, Open University / Manchester University; Co-Director of CRESC)

Centre for the Study of Environmental Change CSEC, University of Lancaster

- Bronislaw Szerszynski (Head of Sociology Department, Lancaster University)

Changement Climatique, Expertise et Fabrication des Futurs, CNRS Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris

- Amy Dahan (Research Director Emeritus at CNRS Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris)

Climate Pictures, University of Potsdam

- Birgit Schneider (Dilthey Fellow at the Institute for Arts and Media, University of Potsdam)

Travel writings in "Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen", University of Erfurt

- Wolfgang Struck (Professor for Modern German Literature, University of Erfurt)

Mathematical Modeling, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria ULPGC

- José M. Pacheco (Department of Mathematics, ULPGC)

DFG Network Atmosphere & Algorithms, BMBF Project Embodied Information
- Gabriele Gramelsberger (Institute of Philosophy, Freie Universität Berlin)

Doing the Anthropocene, Stockholm & Södertörn University
- Jonas Bylund (Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University)

Environmental History Network
- Sabine Wilke (Professor and Chair of Germanics, University of Washington, Seattle)

Global Governance of Climate Engineering, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies IASS, Potsdam
- Thilo Wiertz (Research Fellow, IASS)

History of the Anthropocene, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales EHESS, Paris
- Christophe Bonneuil (co-leader of the History of the Anthropocene project, EHESS; CNRS Centre Alexandre Koyré)

Interdisciplinary Institute for Environmental and Social Sciences and the Humanities, Universität Flensburg
- Harald Welzer (Director of the Interdisciplinary Institute, Universität Flensburg)
- Bernd Sommer (Research Fellow, Universität Flensburg)

Leibniz-Institute for Evolution and Biodiversity Research, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin
- Björn Kröger (Research Fellow, Museum für Naturkunde)

Media Cultures of Computer Simulations, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg
- Sebastian Vehlken (Institute for Culture and Aesthetics of Digital Media, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg)

Multi-sector impacts and climate eXtremes MusiX, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research PIK
- Christoph Müller (Group leader MusiX; Speaker: Global-Regional Integration of Impact Studies GRI)

Research Group on the Anthropocene at the Stratigraphy Commission, Geological Society of London
- Jan Zalasiewicz (Senior Lecturer in Geology, University of Leicester)

Speculative Poetics, Freie Universität Berlin
- Armen Avanessian (Peter Szondi Institute of Comparative Literature, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Anke Henning (Department of Russian and Slavic Studies, New York University)

Sustainable Bioenergy, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research PIK
- Tim Beringer (Research Scientist, Research Domain Earth System Analysis at PIK)

The Virtual Austrian Petrol Museum, Fossil Resources in Private Archives, Vienna
- Benjamin Steininger (Cultural theorist and curator, Vienna)

Time, Image, Space: The Planetarium, Technische Universität Berlin
- Hans-Christian von Herrmann (Professor of Literary Studies at TU, Head of the Planetarium Project)
- Isabell Schrickel (Department of Literature, TU Berlin)

Working Groups "Climate Change" and "Governance and Institutions", Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, UFZ, Leipzig
- Silke Beck (Researcher, Speaker of WG "Climate Change")

... and many more

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