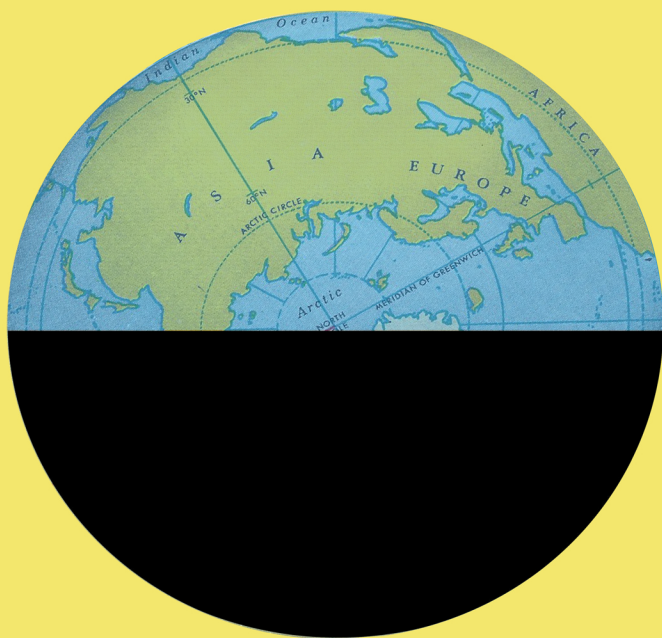


# ANTH ROPO ZINE



#0



# anthropozine #0

*Views from the Anthropocene Campus - HKW, 2014*

**Anthropos** - (Greek) "human being, man"

**cene** - (Greek) *kainos* "new," cognate with Latin *recens*

**zine**- (Am. English) *fanzine* "a self-published booklet, usually without profit."

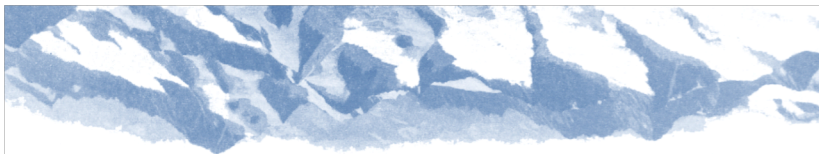
~ many and plenty of thanks to all of the interviewees for their generosity  
in sharing their thoughts for this publication ~

~ gratitude to Christa Donner for her keen editorial eye and to  
Myra Thompson for her help with transcription ~

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# Intro to an Anthropocene

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Where are we? The Earth, no doubt. More difficult to answer is when are we. Across the 200,000 years of our recognizable existence as modern humans,<sup>1</sup> we have continuously transformed our environments - hunting, taming, building, growing, mining, burning, and re-routing the world to suit us. And yet that 200,000 years is just a tiny fraction of the Earth's already long life, in fact just 0.000014 of its current age. *When we are* is in fact the thinnest sliver on an ever-expanding edge of planetary time.

Having spread exponentially to every crevice of this rocky place, we have now shaped the landscape and lifescape to such an extent that it is no longer possible to pretend that what is *human* and what is *nature* can be categorically distinguished. It is a novel realization for scientists, economists, and poets alike who – along almost every other aspect of Western modern life – have relied in one way or another on the fundamental distinction between 'the cultural' and 'the natural' as separable realms. A group of scientists, the International Commission on Stratigraphy, is currently debating whether this historic transformation has also made its mark on deep time to the extent that humanity has initiated a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. From a scientific perspective, the claim of this hypothetical Anthropocene is a matter of the future as much as the present: human activities like large-scale agriculture, intensive fossil fuel use, atomic explosions, and human-driven mass extinction are significant not simply because they are both the engines and the consequences of rapid social change, but because the biogeochemical traces that they leave will be legible in the rock millions of years from now.

Will there be geologists to read the traces of Anthropocene in the strata of the far distant future? If so, is there any chance they will be our human descendants? Where are we in this Anthropocene and how long will it last in the frame of planetary time? Of course no one knows, but from our near-sighted and anthropocentric perspective the concept appears to be ushering in a new sensitivity to the context of a 'long now'<sup>2</sup> in which humans understand their existence past, present, and future in the narrative scope of the Earth's entire historical arc. In such a 'now' things seem both unforgivingly



urgent and exhaustively remote, a geo-logic that serves to remind us that our behavior regarding climate change or any other macro-scale phenomena will also directly affect human and non-human life well into all possible futures. The question of *when are we* really becomes a matter of *who are we* - how, as diverse participants in this supposed Anthropocene, we live life. But of course what 'we' and which humans does this essay, or the Anthropocene concept itself, even presume to speak on behalf of? Is the idea a kind of conceptual panda - a faddish 'charismatic meta-category' <sup>3</sup> of popular culture akin to the 'charismatic mega-fauna' that draw attention away from the more numerous and more pressing (but less spectacular) species of concern?

In late November of 2014 over one hundred people gathered at the Anthropocene Campus at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin to wrestle with all of this. The aspiration was to experiment with approaches that might help make novel sense of this novel moment. It was a multifarious, and at times frenetic, event. In a makeshift effort to capture something of its closing momentum I conducted in-person micro-interviews with over 35 participants on the last day of the Campus, of which this zine is a selection. The interviews reflect perspectives of architects, historians, scientists, and artists coming from diverse geographic, intellectual, and personal standpoints. It spans views of those like climate expert and Anthropocene advocate Will Steffen, to the incisive questions raised by cultural critic Maya Kóvskaya; from people engaging directly with agricultural impacts in Africa such as ecologist Moses Kamanda, to Amita Baviskar who studies the complexities of natural resource conflicts in South Asia.

Three questions were posed: *Are we in the Anthropocene?* considers what the Anthropocene even presumes to be. Does it find strength in its presumption of a definitive, geologic standard, or instead is its primary relevance borne from the multiplicity of possible meanings and readings that defy any one articulation? The question *What role do you / does your discipline play in the Anthropocene?* explores personal agency as well as the notion that the complex issues raised by the Anthropocene are fundamentally multidisciplinary in nature. Will an anthropogenic recognition of the trans-permeation of natures and cultures lead us to new transdisciplinaries? Lastly, I ask: *If you had any message or question to people one hundred years from now what would it be?* This was a way to pose the possibility of a

dialogue with a future whose reality is just at the edge of our imaginary. One hundred years is the oft-quoted reach of many of the scientific predictions about climate change and its effects in an empirical sense. However it is also a period of time that safely extends beyond our possibility of personal knowing, and thus is an avenue for examining our sense of fear and optimism on equal footing – a span that seems distant while somehow also satisfying a desire for conceptual immediacy.

Replies to the last question were some of the most surprising, and perhaps shed light on the mixed mood of the symposium after nine days of delving into the complex matrix of the Anthropocene hypothesis. As you will see, they reflect sensibilities both hopeful as well as somewhat hopeless. "Human life has not a surer friend, nor oftentimes a greater enemy, than hope," wrote a teenage Owen Feltham in 1620, "It is the miserable man's god, which in the hardest gripe of calamity never fails to yield to him beams of comfort. It is the presumptuous man's devil, which leads him a while in a smooth way, and then suddenly breaks his neck." <sup>4</sup> Writing at a time often considered the dawn of Western modernity, Feltham's ruminations on hope and the human predilection to ponder the future should caution us in the 'post-modern' to carefully consider how either unreflective hope or pre-emptive regret - with all of its utopic / dystopic imaginings - will serve our participation in this time-being.

Regardless of what official decision the Commission of Stratigraphy comes to, the idea of the Anthropocene is likely here to stay, at least for this short now. It would appear to propose vast transformations in the way people might inhabit the Earth: knowledges, landscapes, aesthetics, as well as individual and collective selves in the everyday. Perhaps the Anthropocene concept can even find voicings that allow it to develop beyond the relatively Western, academic arenas in which it has cultivated its nascent status. If we take Carl Sagan's notion seriously that "we are a way for the cosmos to know itself," <sup>5</sup> then maybe naming a geological epoch after one's own activity as a species isn't any more presumptuous than the myriad claims that humans already make to different kinds of knowing, scientific or otherwise. Indeed, it could be claimed that that writing of human history into natural history is not a matter of scientific justification as much as a political and existential act of self-assertion. If, as Constanin Fasolt argues, "history is the form in which we contemplate a past that is immutably divided from

the present. . . by which we declare our freedom to change the present into the form that we desire for the future"<sup>6</sup> then the Anthropocene's prescriptive potency is inseparable from its descriptive capacity.<sup>7</sup> The question once again becomes exactly who will be granted the 'freedom' to make this future and what ways of being, human and non-human, will find a sustaining path through this particular, planetary present. Now is the time, but not only time will tell.

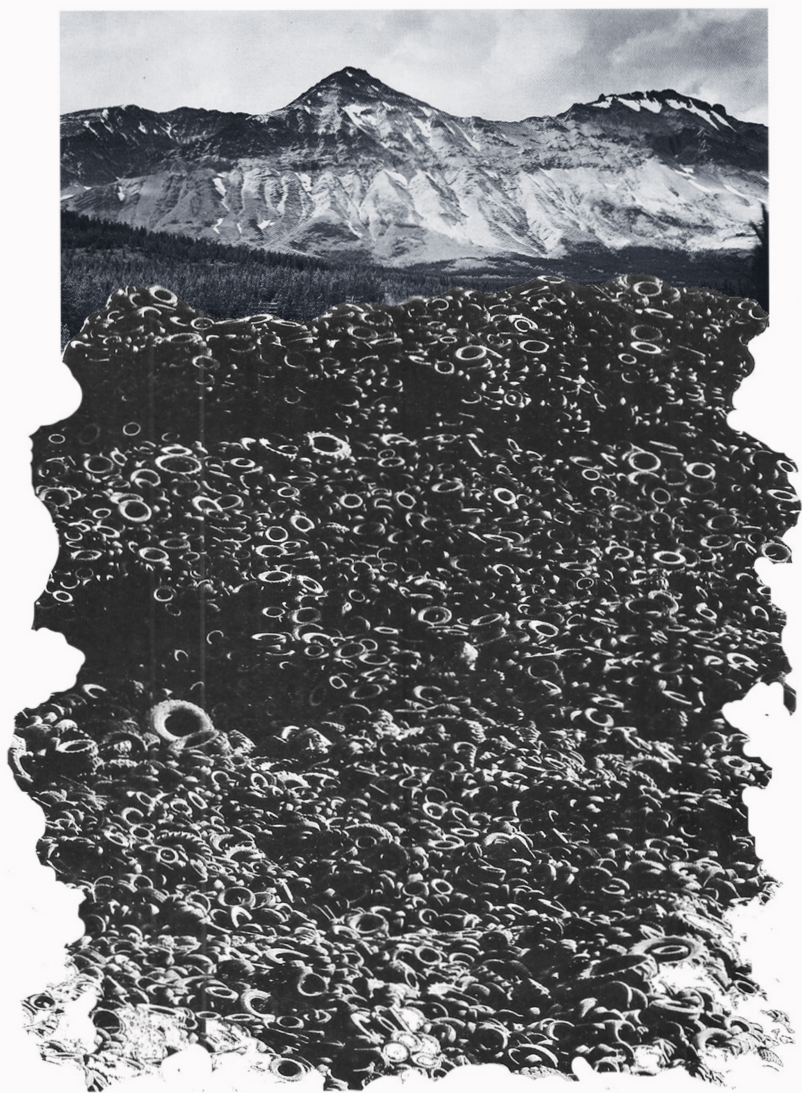
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- 1 In this case 'modern human' refers to the paleoanthropological designation of 'anatomically modern humans' (*Homo sapiens sapiens*).
  - 2 A term credited to Brian Eno: <http://longnow.org/essays/big-here-and-long-now/>
  - 3 A term that appears in a blog post by Elizabeth Reddy: <http://blog.castac.org/2014/04/what-does-it-mean-to-do-anthropology-in-the-anthropocene/> as well as in the essay 'Multispecies vs Anthropocene' by John Hartigan in *Somatosphere: Science, Medicine, and Anthropology*. Dec. 12 2014.
  - 4 Feltham/Felltham, Owen. 1820 (originally 1620). *Resolves, Divine, Moral, and Political*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Hatchard and Son: London. p.165.
  - 5 Sagan, Carl. *Cosmos Episode 1: The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean*. TV airdate: September 28, 1980 (Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), USA).
  - 6 Fasolt, Constantin. 2004. *The Limits of History*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. p.7.
  - 7 Jedediah Purdy reflects on the agency of the Anthropocene: "The idea that the world people get to inhabit will only be the one they make is, in fact, imperative to the development of a political and institutional programme, even if the idea itself does not tell anyone how to do that." Meanwhile, the self-proclaimed EcoModernists and other advocates of the 'good Anthropocene' clearly embrace a history-as-agency approach that advocates for a very specific, technocratic vision for this epoch. Purdy, Jedediah. 'Anthropocene Fever.' *Aeon*. March 31 2015. <https://aeon.co/essays/should-we-be-suspicious-of-the-anthropocene-idea>. Ecomodernis Manifesto: <http://www.ecomodernism.org>
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# Alejandra Torres Camprubí *(international lawyer)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

ATC: It depends on who is speaking, because as I see it, the Anthropocene is a claim that we are constructing. I think that precisely because it is a mixed concept that involves interdisciplinary exchange from the social sciences and the natural sciences, by definition there is no absolute truth about it. That is the input of the social sciences – so if you ask me, I'd say “yes.”

AY: What role to people like you, lawyers, have to play in the Anthropocene?

ATC: Wow. I think the main role, more than that of an analytical exploration of the concept, is of being ambassadors of a new way of thinking that the Anthropocene really forces us to do. Precisely because social scientists work very much within society, close to society, and extract everything from social structures, our main roles is as actors of the Anthropocene rather than just as researchers or intellectuals. I would like to see that we have a role in the outreach of this message and see how it changes public opinion little by little.

AY: I am going the send a message one hundred years into future later today, is there anything you'd like to say to the people one hundred years from now?

ATC: “Sorry.”

## Will Steffen *(chemist & climate scientist)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

WS: Yes, I think all the scientific evidence says that the earth has left the Holocene. The Holocene has been around for about 11,700 years and we can define that very well. But certainly since the middle of the early twentieth-century many of the parameters we use to define the state of the earth's system have shifted outside of that zone, so therefore I can say on scientific grounds that we're not in the Holocene. We've got to call it something, and Paul Crutzen was the one who suggested, "well, let's call it the Anthropocene." So yes, we are in the Anthropocene.

AY: And is that exactly how you would describe the Anthropocene, or do you have other descriptions for it in addition?

WS: No, that's how I describe it because being an earth systems scientist I think the term itself is a geological term. It was meant that way when it was originally used by Paul Crutzen. However, how humans react to it, how they interpret it, how they discuss it, is a much broader topic and that's what we've been talking about this week.

AY: And what role then do earth system scientists in particular play in the Anthropocene, beyond just in its definition?

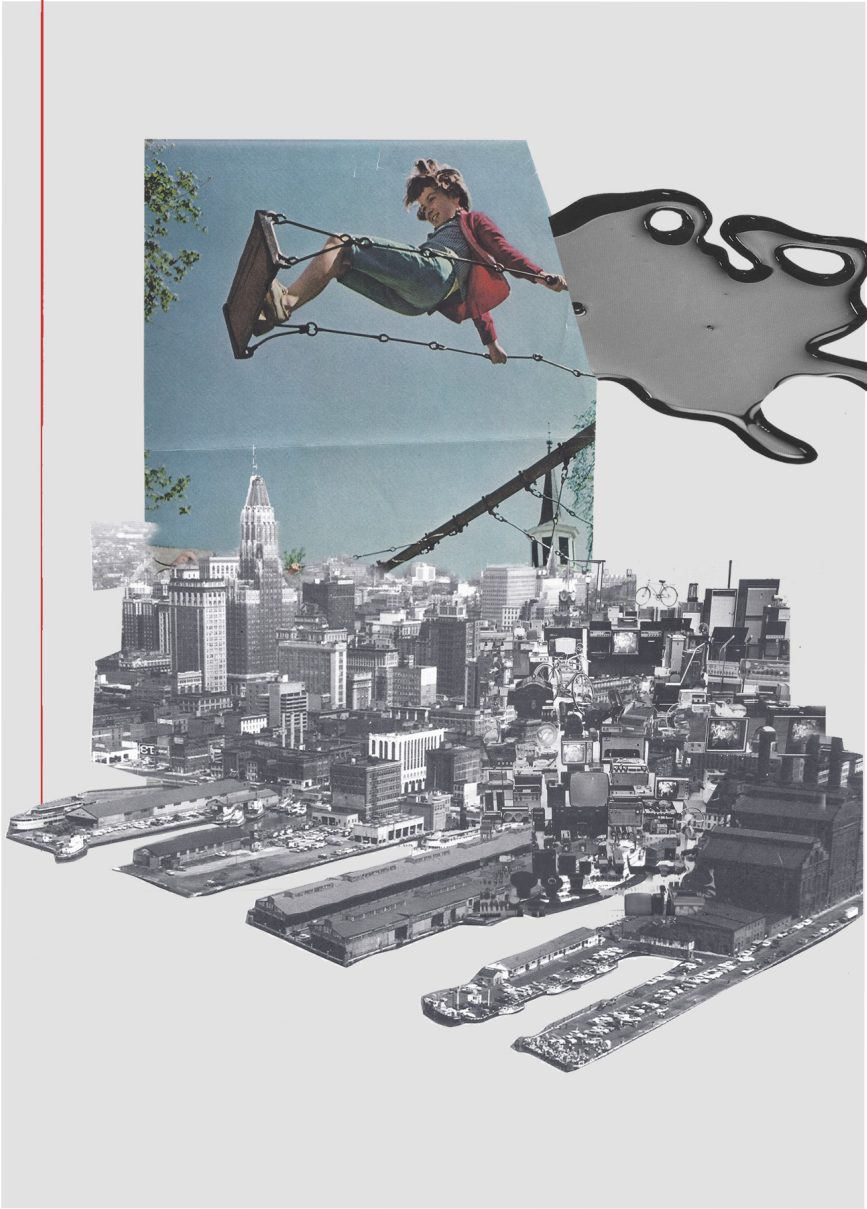
WS: I think what we can do is talk about what the implications are – again from a scientific point of view – and those are that if we keep going in the same direction the Anthropocene's going now, most indications are it'll be a much more difficult global environment for humans physiologically to live in. So it does have implications for us, as a physiological species. It gets more complex when you talk about societies because, of course, they themselves are complex systems. So how they're going to interact with a rapidly changing life support system, if I can call it that, is an area for active discussion and research.

AY: If I were to send a message a hundred years into the future, say later today, is there anything you'd want to say or ask right now?

WS: I would like to ask about the time that we're living in now, let's say the past decade or so: Why was it so hard to have a global discourse, a global dialogue, a global discussion, on our own future - about our own life support system? Why was there so much denial in the face of enormous overwhelming scientific evidence that simply says we need to have a discussion, as an increasingly global society, about our future? Why couldn't they have done that back then a hundred years ago? If I were a hundred years in the future, hopefully surviving, maybe in the very destabilized earth, I'd say, "why didn't they get their act together?"

AY: Do you think they'll have the answer to that question historically by then?

WS: Oh yes, I think so. I think they'll have the answer to that question by the middle of this century.





## Seth Denizen *(landscape architect)*

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AY: So, are we in the Anthropocene?

SD: Yeah, totally. We are in the Anthropocene.

AY: And how would you describe it?

SD: I would describe the Anthropocene as the sort of the moment in which the confidence that there's a technological fix to the problem of our species being, as Foucault called it, "the management of our biological conditions for existence"—air, reproduction – that our faith that there is a technical solution for that is gone or over. Now we have to think about other strategies that are much more about uncertainty rather than certainty.

AY: And so what role do landscape architects play in the Anthropocene?

SD: Well, we are the biggest peddlers of the myth of the well-managed environment and so our job is to stop peddling the myth, stop selling the fantasy that the only thing that's required is infrastructure and technology and ecological science, and that there is a technological fix to what I think is more rightly called the Capitalist-cene.

AY: Later today I'm going to try to send a bunch of messages a hundred years into the future. Is there anything you'd want to say to people a hundred years from now?

SD: I would describe the environment. When I wake up, I don't think about the air that I breathe, and there's grass that just grows and no one even takes care of it because things just grow. When I walk down from work there's the smell of these incredible flowers that are actually just weeds and that in certain seasons make me sneeze. In a hundred years, it's going to be hard to imagine what it felt like, what the environment now was like. That things just grew, you know? It's not like we're in some sort of Arcadian paradise, but there are things that we take for granted right now that people in a hundred years will not.

# Elena Bougleux *(physicist & anthropologist)*

---

AY: So you're here.

EB: Yes.

AY: Are we in the Anthropocene – is that where “here” is?

EB: I think so.

AY: How would you describe the Anthropocene to someone – maybe even a five year-old?

EB: It's a big box.

AY: A big box?

EB: It's a big box. It's a round-shaped box, but it's a box. It's a big box where it's very, very, very, very large. You can put many, many things in it. It shrinks and expands. And so it's a dynamic box. Dynamic, round shaped, rolling ... It is out of equilibrium, yes. It's not sitting on any table.

AY: What role do you think people like you – an anthropologist and a physical scientist – play in the Anthropocene?

EB: I feel a lot of responsibility, for both general and personal reasons. As for the general, a very obvious reason is that I am a teacher. I have responsibility for 300 students, very young, 21, 22 years-old. They listen to me for many, many hours for a couple years. What they listen to and what they read through my courses is going to affect the way they will live their lives, whatever job they do: psychologists, educators, anthropologists, sociologists, some historians, some philosophers. I hope that whatever they do, that they don't just speak to academics.

On a personal level, I have a very fragmented career. I studied physics for a lot of years – a PhD, a post-doc. And then I decided to leave physics and then I went into completely different things. I studied cultural studies, gender studies, and eventually ended up in anthropology. I think interdisciplinarity is the way to go.

AY: You're a model for that approach.

EB: I'm not! I suffered too much to get here and so on a personal level I feel I want to teach in a way that others can do a better job than I did in getting to this place.

AY: Maybe that relates to my last question actually, which is: later today I'm going to send a bunch of messages a hundred years into the future.

EB: Oh!

AY: And I wanted to know if you had anything, if you had anything to say?

EB: To anyone in particular or just to the people?

AY: Either way - your choice.

EB: Right, I tell you one thing - I wouldn't want to speak in English. I would like to draw, play something, sing a tune. No words. Just singing.

## Guido Caniglia *(philosopher & historian)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

GC: I think we are using the Anthropocene as a concept to look at what is going on. We might be in the Anthropocene, though that's not the issue for me. The idea of the Anthropocene is giving us a lens to look at the world in a slightly different way. That is more relevant than saying, "Yes, we are in the Anthropocene," which I find is a pretty self-centered way of looking at it.

AY: How would you describe the Anthropocene?

GC: As a lens, a lens that triggers the idea of responsibility. Taking responsibility for what has happened and also responsibility for what will happen.

AY: What do historians and philosophers - people like you - have to play in the Anthropocene?

GC: We are triggers. We trigger ideas, trigger action, possibly, change. I don't think it's possible to really solve anything we've been discussing with the complexity and the wickedness of everything now, but there is a crisis of agency. So perhaps we can trigger things on many different levels in many different ways to create some form of action - more experimental, more knowledge-oriented, more informed and thoughtful action. With the students that we teach, I think being a trigger is a good place to be.

AY: I'm going pull you! Pull the trigger. [both laugh] All right, so, later today I'm going to send a bunch of messages one hundred years into the future. I wanted to know if there's anything you wanted to say to people of the future a hundred years from now.

GC: Don't get mad at us.



# **Amita Baviskar** *(development sociologist)*

---

AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

AB: We clearly seem to be in the sense that human induced changes have already transformed the atmosphere. We have all sorts of other artifacts that we have placed on the earth – radioactive waste and so on - so yes, the Anthropocene does seem to be upon us.

AY: And so what role does your discipline, profession, or the place you come from – what role does it play in the broader idea of the Anthropocene?

AB: As somebody who works on the cultural politics of the environment, I think the idea of the Anthropocene in some ways only helps amplify the things that we have already been saying all along, which is about the interconnectedness of nature and culture, specifically through the lens of power inequalities. Looking at the ways in which decisions about how we affect nature - or the people who depend on nature - are shaped by systemic inequalities of power and knowledge.

AY: If I send a message today a hundred-years into the future, is there any message you'd like to send?

AB: "I'm sorry."

# Melissa Dubbin *(artist)*

---

AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

MD: Yes.

AY: How would you describe it?

MD: Well, a very textbook description would be knowing or having visible traces of human intervention that is shaping the earth - that those forces are visible and undeniable and not erasable. They're not going away.

AY: What role do artists play, if any particular one, in the Anthropocene?

MD: I've been thinking about that a lot this week. I think imagination is the most important thing that can be cultivated by artists. There's sort of a lack of imagination in a lot of fields and in the things that we do. Unlike the sciences, by not having any prescribed outcome from artistic research and taking on a project to investigate with the muscle of imagination we can contribute what you could call solutions, or mutations, or metabolizing of ideas. So, I think that's one of the main roles.

AY: Later today I'm going to send messages a hundred years into the future. Do you have anything you'd want to say to people a hundred years from now?

MD: Oh gosh... that's funny. I'm going to tell a story and then I'm going to think about what it is I want to say to people in the future.

Last year I was introduced to the work of Joanna Macy. She's kind of an activist anthropologist and she has this exercise about projecting yourself, it's called a "generation exercise," I guess. You imagine your child, or your child's child, you imagine five to seven generations in the future and you create a conversation about your world and their world. And I found this exercise really useful but also extremely difficult because the time scale is really hard to grasp without using some imagination.

At the end of this week there's a part of me that wants to apologize to the people of the future; there's a part of me that thinks we might still be the people of the future. There's a lot of talk about how to maintain and represent those that are no longer here, which I think will be us. I don't know. I don't really have a message.





# Mahrizal Paru *(agricultural economist)*

---

AY: And are we in the Anthropocene?

MP: Yes, I think so. We see big changes in the ecosystem because of human activities. I would say it has contributed to the climate change that we see now.

AY: And what role do people in your discipline play in the Anthropocene?

MP: Well, I'm in agricultural economics and I work with the farmers and the new possibilities to contribute to sustainability, for example going with less chemical imports and pesticides. So how can we contribute in a way that will lead to something sustainable?

AY: And if you had a message for a hundred years in the future, what would it be?

MP: Well, we want to live peacefully. We want to live sustainably for sure so that the next generation can enjoy the same things that we enjoy today. Currently, many of us use a "credit card" system with the consideration of extra income. In this case, we borrow from the future to pay for today's spending. If we can't pay it back, it means we have taken something from our next generation; hopefully in the future they won't borrow from the future as the way we do today.

## Marco Armiero *(environmental historian)*

---

AY: So are we in the Anthropocene?

MA: Sure we are.

AY: Okay. How would you describe it?

MA: As a point in time in which the planet has been affected so much by human actions.

AY: And what role do historians and people who do environmental humanities, such as yourself, play?

MA: Well first of all let me say something - you ask if we are in the Anthropocene and I said yes, we are. But what is the real question for me is not so much if we are in the Anthropocene but *where* we are in the Anthropocene. Because we might be all in the Anthropocene, but we are not sitting in the same room in this Anthropocene. The whole narrative of the Anthropocene can be very de-politicizing if we don't consider our social inequalities. And so I think that the right question is maybe *where are you?* Where are we sitting in this Anthropocene?

As for answering the other question about historians... well I cannot tell you how to stop CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and I am not able to invent any special machine to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. But I can tell you stories about how there are, and there have been, alternatives to the system in which we are now. We are in the Anthropocene, but we can also call this the Rich-o-cene. Others have called it the Capitalocene.

So first of all, I try to say something about when it started, I get to say something about alternatives that have been killed off. And then I can also try to provide alternative narratives about this Anthropocene. For instance, alternative narratives in which agency and social equalities will be present.

AY: Later today I'm going to send a message a hundred years into the future. If you had anything you wanted to say to people a hundred years from now, what might it be?

MA: Did you succeed in the revolution in the end?



**Natalie Jeremijenko** (*artist & experimental engineer*)

**Manfred Laubichler** (*theoretical biologist & complexity theorist*)

---

AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

NJ: Of course.

ML: Yes.

AY: How would you describe the Anthropocene?

NJ: The way I describe it is through the wondrous, irreducibly complex specificity of natural systems, and as a great kind of jolt to understand our agency. The idea that - OK, if we are major biogeochemical forces, then how do we respond? What is the responsibility? How do we understand, and use, and exercise our agency? I really think it is about the examination of agency - individual, collective, institutional - that is the great question of the Anthropocene.

ML: I would describe it as the wonderfully complex, but *understandable* phenomena of the simple fact that human systems and human behavior is an essential part of most networks and systems that are currently active on the planet. So in a sense what happened is that the human niche has permeated all other ecosystems and networks as an essential node in the regulatory structures that governs those behaviors, so we can't really understand any of those other systems without taking into account the actions of human populations and human technologies, and human behavior more generally.

AY: What special role do experimental designers or theoretical biologists / historians of science play in the Anthropocene?

NJ: It would be the exploration of agency - how we use agency to do experiments and examine what is possible. I think there is a binary response: You can do nothing and be overwhelmed by the complexity, or be fascinated and take the figuring out of what is desirable - what is our Anthropocene and how do we make it? I can't understand through just models, abstractions, or history, I need the world to speak back. Even the best computational model leaves out so much, they are necessary but not sufficient. So I need the experiments and I need to use my own life and agency as the primary mode of investigation and exploration.

ML: I think the role of theoretical biologists and complexity theorists is really to complement what Natalie said about experiments with the right kind of models. Another part of the computational universe that we are living in is finding ways to aggregate knowledge or information from different domains, which is now in the context of the Anthropocene – it is a completely different scale as well as urgency. In that sense our role is to no longer just ponder in some Ivory Tower some abstract principles. Anything that we find out about the Anthropocene through that interconnectedness has immediate, real world consequences. I think that is what we need to figure out: what to do and do it, or else they might no longer be an Anthropocene.

AY: So later today I am going to send a bundle of messages a hundred-years into the future. What might you say to someone a hundred years from now?

NJ: How are you doing that?

AY: Well, I've been working on it, it's a side project...

ML: "Sorry, we messed up."

NJ: "Hello! Hello world!" That's a great question... Let me think about that and I'll get back to you in hundred years!

## Meghan Bailey *(social geographer)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

MB: Yes.

AY: How would you describe it?

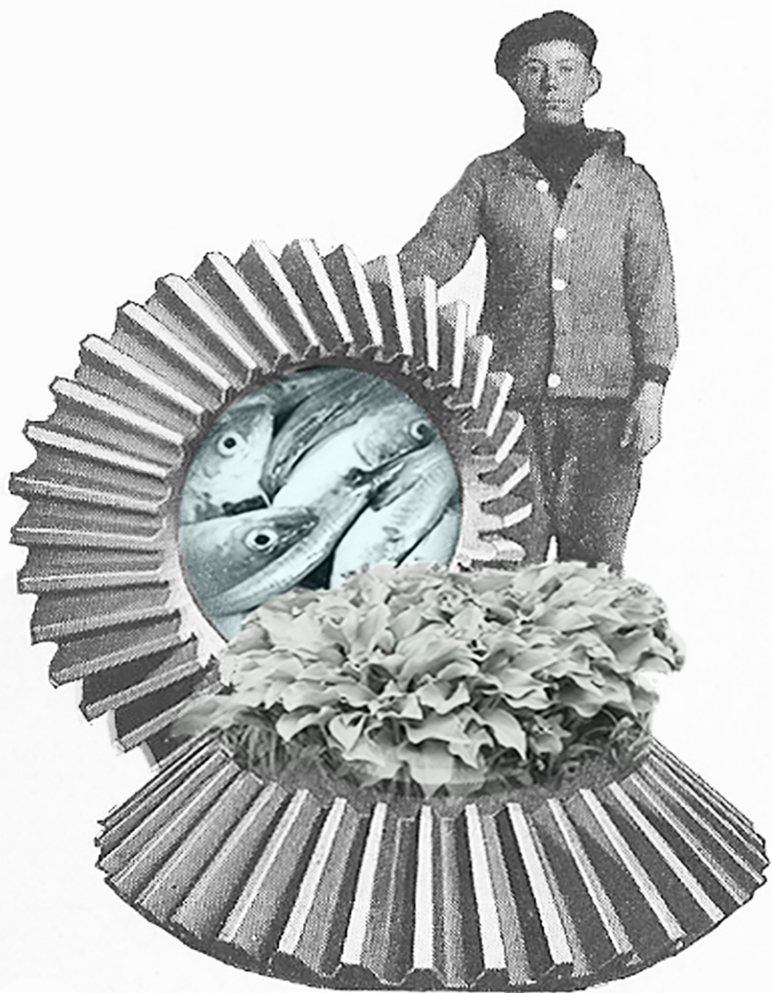
MB: I guess there is the standard definition of the proposed: the current geological epoch. I think my answer is "yes" because it just makes sense politically. It doesn't really matter to me whether the Anthropocene is confirmed or recognized by the broader scientific community. It means something on its own just in terms of efficacy.

AY: And so what role do people like you, who work in nutrition, have to play in it?

MB: I work in nutrition, and under-nutrition in particular, in subsistence-oriented communities. I think the relevance of the Anthropocene is this *Titantic* image of the Anthropocene, which is very class oriented. Fundamentally what I work with are people who have only a small fraction of the resources that should be available to them actually available to them. So I think this idea of the Anthropocene and "living well" in the Anthropocene is helpful for the kind of work that I do.

AY: Later today I am going to send some messages to people a hundred-years into the future. I'm wondering is there is anything you'd want to ask or tell to people a hundred years from now?

MB: "I'm sorry." I think that it is going to be a much less comfortable life than we had. I think that it is something that we are going to have to explain to our grandchildren – that we were so complacent – and it is not going to be an easy thing to do. I hope they forgive us.



*A large pair of plain teeth steel Mitre  
Gears. Ready for Shipment.*

## Moses Kamanda *(ecologist)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

MK: Yes.

AY: How would you explain it to someone else?

MK: The Anthropocene is an era where there's now a marked effect of man or human beings on the ecosystems, and maybe also geologically or atmospherically.

AY: What do you think the role is for a person like you - your specialty, or the place you live - in the Anthropocene?

MK: I'm an ecologist, so my main my role is creating awareness and to educate people about how the Anthropocene came into being and how to mitigate the negative effects.

AY: And if you had to send a message to people a hundred years in the future – just a short message, I'm going to send it after we talk – what would you say?

MK: Aim for sustainable living. You have to have sustainable living so that all the problems we've had can be overcome.



## Tom Fox *(architect)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

TF: Yes.

AY: What is the Anthropocene, how might you describe it to someone else?

TF: I find that geology is the useful lens to see it through. In order for it to be formalized by the geologists it has to be something they can measure globally through some kind of physical marker, and I think that discussion of what the physical marker is and how the period of time that that physical marker explains is what you can latch everything onto.

AY: What role does an architect, or a Brit, play in the Anthropocene?

TF: In creating it, or the term itself?

AY: Either way.

TF: I'll avoid the role of Brits in creating this because I think that's kind of self-evident, but I think the role of architecture is for me a way of decomposing the issue. As I said, the physical markers are a useful kind of way to be precise about things. From that you can unpack a number of interrelationships and I find architecture a useful set of tools in order to decompose global issues into things which are in themselves complex, contradictory, and yet you can act on them.

AY: So it's almost like a tool.

TF: It's a tool for sure. To break one problem into a number of problems which can be attacked, and debated, rather than kept unwieldy and difficult.

AY: So, I'm going to send a message a hundred years into the future later today. What would you say to the future, a hundred years from now?

TF: Krikey! I would say that I hope they're still debating what the Anthropocene, as a geological age, is. It's definitely going to be revisited at some point and I hope they're still debating it in a hundred years.



## Maya Kóvskaya (art & cultural critic)

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AY: So, just real quickly, are we in the Anthropocene?

MK: I don't know if the Anthropocene is something one can be *in*. I think it's something we're doing. I know we like to use the language of being "in" or "under," even. I think when we use the word "under" that we're kind of coping out, because we're trying to push off the power configuration onto somebody else. Or to think of it as some autonomous process that has nothing to do with us, when actually we are *making* this, we are *doing* and *being* this, so whatever the Anthropocene is, it's us. And that "us" is problematic, we know this.

AY: And then, so, is that pretty much where you'd leave it, in terms of describing it the Anthropocene?

MK: Oh god, no. I think that's an incredibly complicated question because from every disciplinary perspective, at every so-called "level of analysis," I think one would have to invoke different examples and different instances of what the Anthropocene is. I personally believe that general descriptions are vacuous. We abstract and we generalize as tools, or sort of mental shorthand, but there are no empirical generals. There are *only* specifics, there's only lived, situated things. So, even though abstraction is a great tool, if we don't reground it in real things, then it's all bullshit.

AY: And so what's the role of cultural critics in particular with the Anthropocene?

MK: Only cultural, or all kinds of critics?

AY: Whoever or whatever you consider yourself to be.

MK: I don't know what I am, but I think people who are critically asking questions – whether it's about culture, or power, or economy, or society, or phosphorous, or metal, whatever... if you're asking critical questions, then you are opening up a way to better understand how the world is getting made, in which case we're also opening up our understanding to figuring out where we're situated in all of this. I think part of the Anthropocene is about claiming what we're making as our own, and then taking the responsibility for it, which means, in Latin, *respondere*, to answer for.

AY: Ah!

MK: Let's answer for what we've made. And we better do something about it because it's a big mess.

AY: So, later tonight I'm going to send a bundle of messages a hundred years into the future.

MK: Okay.

AY: If you could ask something or send a message to people a hundred years from now, what might it be?

MK: A hundred years isn't very far...I think the message is the same thing I would say to people today, which is, "Think what you're doing."

## Olivier Hamant *(biologist)*

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AY: Do you think we're in the Anthropocene?

OH: Yes, we are.

AY: How would you describe it?

OH: I have a definition for this from a biologist's point of view, which is that we realize we're in the Anthropocene when we realize that we are parasites. And that the real realization comes when we realize that we need to be symbiotic organisms, so we need to be respectful. If we don't do that actually we won't survive.

AY: What do you think the role of a biologist is in the Anthropocene?

OH: Oh, that's a good question. Uh, I don't know. Maybe analogist? Bringing some analogies to it. There's a lot of discussion, for instance, on the technosphere – looking at it as a living organism that is completely autonomous. That's a biological point of view, I would say. Using analogies with the new world would be one way to bring things into a new view.

AY: So I'm going to transmit a message one hundred years into the future. What would you say to the future a hundred years from now?

OH: I don't know... "Please don't judge us"?



## Jeremy Bolen *(artist)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

JB: Yes.

AY: How do know that, or feel that, we are?

JB: I know and I feel it by interacting through the landscape, in the way I make my work. I deal with things empirically so I've been able to find evidence through my empirical, although sloppy, ways that let me know there is a significant amount of unresolved energy that remains from scientific investigation, military experimentation, and leftover industrial waste... and all of these energies evolve in undefined ways that are not absolute, they are a force that is not controllable. They are all man-made and a produced by us – they define the Anthropocene.

AY: And what role then do artists in particular have in the Anthropocene?

JB: Artists create work to help people see the unseen, to sense what they cannot sense, to understand the world in a different way. There is a failure in that there are very few images of the Anthropocene that are impactful. As artists there is a challenge to communicate that... I really believe in visual literacy and there are very few images of the Anthropocene, and the unseen in general that are convincing.

I think it is not just artists making their own work, but also those working in extradisciplinary ways – architects, scientists, etc. – having conversations that break down disciplinary boundaries and help them work in the Anthropocene.

AY: So later today I am going to transmit messages a hundred years into the future. Do you have anything you'd like to ask or say to people then?

JB: Question... I'd be curious if energy will become more visible - if the unseen is more visible - in the future. As for message... I think I'd rather show them an image, especially given the evolution of language, I think showing them an image would be much better.

## Emanuele Serrelli *(philosopher)*

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AY: Are we in the Anthropocene?

ES: Yes we are.

AY: How would you describe the Anthropocene?

ES: Oh my god. [laughs]

AY: Just maybe a sentence?

ES: An era in which human beings are the most important geological force.

AY: What role does a philosopher have in the Anthropocene?

ES: Understanding, and imagining, and teaching.

AY: I'm going to send a message a hundred years into the future – What would you like to say to people a hundred years from now?

ES: [pause] Always work hard to find your place in the universe.





# Notes

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