



ANTHROPOCENE – NATURE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE AGE OF HUMANS

Special Exhibition at the Deutsches Museum (2014-2015)

Since their first appearance circa 250.000 years ago, human beings have changed their home planet Earth. In the Pleistocene, hunting Homo sapiens were so successful that they wiped out several species. In the postglacial Holocene, humans rose to an influential power in the earth system due to their agriculture, livestock farming, trade and transport. With global industrialization and mechanization influencing ever more areas of living and biospheres on our planet, the associated changes have reached previously unimaginable dimensions and dynamics.



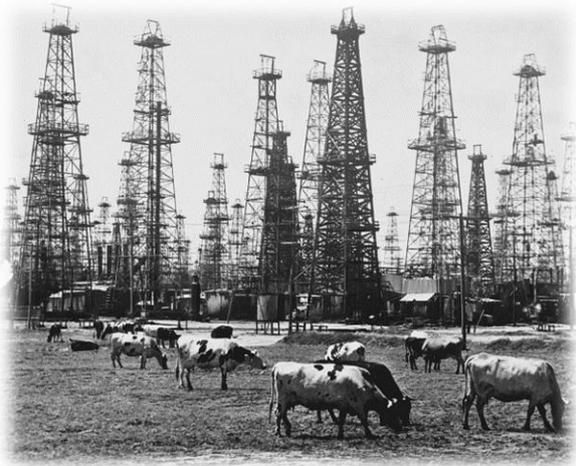
Instead of biomes as natural habitats, we nowadays live in “anthromes”, i.e. human-made cultivated landscapes that are shaped by intensive agriculture, building activity and the utilization of raw materials. The massive exploitation of fossil energy resources has changed the composition of the atmosphere; the average temperature has risen. Human-made materials like plastics have become a major problem for oceans and animals; reservoir dams and canal building influence the flow patterns of rivers and by creating modified and sometimes completely new species with the help of breeding and genetic engineering, humans deeply interfere in flora and fauna.

„The Palm, Jumeirah“: The artificial island off the coast of Dubai manifests the extensive transformation of the earth by humans. Source: NASA

For some time now, these manifold human-made transformations have been discussed in science and increasingly by the general public under the term “Anthropocene”. Originating with the atmospheric chemist and Nobel Prize laureate Paul J. Crutzen, it describes the idea of a new geological era following the Holocene and beginning around 1800 which is shaped by the deep interventions into nature by humans as bio- and geological agents. As a scientific



hypothesis, the Anthropocene entails the idea that the changes initiated by humans show up in geological evidence and that they have such long-term impact that they should be recorded on the earth's history scale. Beyond this geological interpretation, the Anthropocene denotes a new framework of thinking and action, which builds a bridge between natural sciences and humanities and interlinks the history of our planet and humankind with the present and future.



Oil field in Texas, 1960: The rapidly rising consumption of fossil oil since the 1950s has increased the extent of human interventions into natural environments immensely.

Source: Deutsches Museum

Together with the [Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society](#), the Deutsches Museum is currently planning a major special exhibit on the topic of the Anthropocene under the working title “Anthropocene – Nature and Technology in the Age of Humans”, scheduled to be opened in the fall of 2014. The endeavor is based on a proposal by [Prof. Dr. Reinhold Leinfelder](#) developed during his fellowship at the Rachel Carson Center and the book “[Menschenzeit](#)” by Christian Schwägerl. Both Leinfelder, in his function as affiliated Carson Professor, and Schwägerl are involved in the conceptualization process of the exhibition. Cooperation partner is the [Haus der Kulturen der Welt](#) in Berlin that will focus on the topic in its varied program over the next two years.

The exhibition will visualize the history, present and (scientifically based) future of the Anthropocene as well as the deep interventions of humans into the geo- and biosphere over the last two centuries. It will not, however, be conceptualized as a history of decline, but as a complex story of destruction and shaping in which science- and technology-based concepts of transformation towards a sustainable economy and society that overcome the dualism between humans and nature are as equally important as today's problematic phenomena and the ethic challenges connected with them. Among others, topics of the exhibition will be: humankind as destroyer, but also creator and designer; the anthropogenic planet that is shaped and changed by human beings; historically grown consumption patterns and lifestyles; time and space as important factors in the Anthropocene; the future as challenge but also as chance for humankind and its political institutions, social networks and dreams.



The hall of Power Machines shows the transition from the solar to the fossil era in the course of industrialization at a glance. Source: Deutsches Museum



The Center for New Technologies envisions scenarios for an open future of natural sciences and technology. Source: Deutsches Museum

In the tradition of the Deutsches Museum, the exhibition will show both historical artifacts and current objects from scientific and industrial laboratories and integrate the audience by means of interactive demonstrations and direct participation through digital media. Combining information and participation, the Deutsches Museum offers the public a unique opportunity to share available knowledge, pose questions and express concerns, evaluate answers and form an opinion. Above all, the exhibition enables the visitors to approach this fascinating topic in an instructive, but also exciting and enjoyable manner.

Over the course of the next three years, the Deutsches Museum will address the manifold topics of the Anthropocene, together with its cooperation partners, in its research and varied program of educational, scholarly and entertaining events.

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