

INTRODUCTION ANTHROPOCENE

Welcome to the Anthropocene. We arrived here a while ago and have changed the Earth to a tremendous extent (see <http://vimeo.com/39048998>).

Coined by Eugene F. Stoermer and Paul Crutzen, the Anthropocene has been finding its ways into various terminologies and has become a widely used term. However, it is still not formally accepted in geological chronology. But before we look at the Anthropocene as a geological or biospheric age of humankind, we should see it as a challenge to reflect on the state of affairs between humans and nature. With this in mind, the participants of the Anthropocene Campus gathered in mid-November at Haus der Kulturen der Welt. I was fortunate to be a part of this scientific forum and to be able to observe the hard labor involved in proposing such a major paradigm shift.

The Anthropocene Campus, co-developed by the Deutsches Museum and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, was embedded within a larger project – The [Anthropocene Project](#)¹ that began in 2013. Its goal is to intensify the research on the origins and implications of the Anthropocene.

For eight days, more than one hundred participants from various disciplines and thirty instructors participated in nine different seminars (for the list of instructors, see: http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozoen_curriculum/anthropozoen_curriculum_1.php). At the Campus, many voices gathered to discuss the challenges of knowledge production about the Anthropocene and the concepts surrounding it. In his welcoming speech, Bernd M. Scherer pointed out that the state of current discussion on the Anthropocene is one loud noise. In communication theory however, noise is perceived as a situation that provides the most possibilities. With this in mind, I entered this ‘noise’ with my own remarks, questions and doubts about the Anthropocene.

This article is a short report from one of the seminars coined SLOW MEDIA, presented by **Libby Robin** (Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, Canberra/Division of History of Science and Technology, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm), **Helmuth Trischler** (Deutsches Museum / Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich) and **Reinhold Leinfelder** (Institut für Geologische Wissenschaften, Freie Universität Berlin / Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich).

As a whole, the Anthropocene Campus and the SLOW MEDIA seminar in particular was dominated by a strong knowledge-production orientation: How should we teach about a concept as complex as the Anthropocene? What kind of knowledge should be produced? Where and how should it be distributed? And most importantly: **Who are we?**

¹ http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozoen/anthropozoen_2013_2014.php

The last question – who are *we*? – posed the largest problem throughout the Campus. Integrating non-western perspectives proved to be a great challenge not only to the topics discussed in the forum, but also to the curriculum, which was developed during the seminars.

But let us go back to the first question - “how”. The title of the seminar, SLOW MEDIA, was coined by Libby Allen and inspired by the terminologies of slow food and slow violence. Slow media can be understood as a way of distributing knowledge and as a reflection on the available media – on both their advantages and their limitations. Whether the focus lies on the non-linearity of the knowledge transfer, or on the full attention dedicated to the contact with the medium, slow media should be produced with a strong ethical background and it should be a product of multidisciplinary academic communication. To me, slow media has a lot to do with freedom of the recipients and their choice to reflect on it. The recipients are the ones to select the subject and to decide how much time they want to spend with it. Dealing with slow media should not be goal-oriented and the medium itself should give the recipients a possibility to contemplate the topic. Moreover, as Libby Allen pointed out, slow media is about “the big here” and “the long now”. It is a way of presenting a longer historical perspective instead of only dealing with current news.

Two slow media case studies were discussed in the seminar: a museum exhibition and a graphic novel.

In a museum exhibition, the visitors are free to interact with objects for as long as they want to and the knowledge transfer in this case is non-linear. An exhibition might use experience-based teaching methods and it has the potential to engage all of our senses. Thus, it is not about a fast consumption of the medium, but about a free choice of the path and speed of interaction.

Helmuth Trischler presented the Anthropocene exhibition, which opened last Friday, December 4th² at the Deutsches Museum in Munich (<http://www.deutsches-museum.de/en/exhibitions/special-exhibitions/2014/anthropocene/>). The exhibition was developed with the notion that the Anthropocene offers a holistic view on the past, present and future and its goal is to provide a focus on the interface between culture, environment, and society. “The Earth in our Hands”, the theme of the exhibition, not only tells the visitors about the complexity of the relationship between humans and the Earth, but also illustrates it by placing matters literally in our hands. By interacting with the design process of the exhibition, the visitors have the chance to be a part of it and to observe its constant flux.

One further case of knowledge transfer discussed in the seminar was the graphic novel. Reinhold Leinfelder is a passionate advocate of delivering science through comics. Together with Alexandra Hamann and Claudia-Zea Schmidt, he developed a comic entitled “The Great Transformation. Can We Beat the Heat?”

(You can download it here: <http://www.wbgu.de/en/comic-transformation/>)

Or order it here: <http://www.wbgu.de/en/order-single/>)

² depends when the article is published...

The comic explains the [WBGU flagship report](#) „World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability“ and offers a short and visually appealing version of the complex scientific text. It structures the knowledge in a creative way and attempts to explain concepts that are otherwise very difficult to understand. This visual way of knowledge transfer is seen by many as motivating and permanent (or at least with the potential to re-view selected parts) and has become a popular method of educating about climate. However, educational graphic novels face the challenge of becoming a condescending medium and of oversimplifying complicated issues.

Art can play a great role in education about social and environmental matters and can help develop sensitivity to certain issues. Participants of the SLOW MEDIA seminar had a chance to develop their own “slow” channels of knowledge transfer that will be a part of the open access Anthropocene CourseBook / CourseSite that will be available for download in several months.

Meanwhile, if you are interested in alternative media and alternative ways of knowledge transfer, have a look at the projects that participated in the FUTURE STORYTELLING media [competition](#): Whether it is a blend between a [graphic novel and an app](#) or an [online exhibition](#) of daily life objects, those projects prove that there are many possibilities to not only use the available media, but also slow it down. And while we continue our journey to the Anthropocene, such projects can help us to look for new ways to understand our place in the world and how we can describe it.

- Marta Niepytalska, Rachel Carson Center/Deutsches Museum Delegate to the Anthropocene Campus