

“Untitled (superorganism)”

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« Anthropocene Monument » : a colloquium-performance Les Abattoirs / 10-12 October 1014

Program

Organized by Les Abattoirs and La Novela, fête connaissance

INTRODUCTION

***Anthropocene:** a new geological epoch, thought to have started in the late eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution, a period in which the human influence on the Earth is dominant.*

Initiated by **Bruno Latour** (anthropologist and philosopher) and **Bronislaw Szerszynski** (sociologist and philosopher), and organized by the les Abattoirs and La Novela, the colloquium-performance 'Anthropocene Monument' aims to bring together researchers, historians, artists and the public for a time of reflection, experimentation and discussion around the major issues raised by the Anthropocene.

Drawing on the exhibition of the same name, it will also focus on modes of representation and on the monuments that could characterise this new geological epoch.

SCHEDULE

It should be noted that as this a colloquium-performance and an experimental event with a fluid format, the schedule may change.

Friday 10th October, 2014, 18h-19h30

- **18h-18h20** : introduction by **Bruno Latour** (Anthropologist and philosopher) on the Anthropocene.
- **18h20-18h45** : introduction by **Bronislaw Szerszynski** (Sociologist and philosopher) on the idea of a monument to the Anthropocene.
- **18h45-19h30** : talk by **Jan Zalasiewicz** (geologist, chair of Anthropocene Working Group, ICS) : « Stratigraphy of the Anthropocene ».

19h30 - 21h: The Museum remains open for visiting the shows.

- **21h** : projection « A visual (h)Anthology of the Anthropocene ».

Saturday 11th October, 2014, 10h-18h

- **10h-10h10** : introduction of the day by Bruno Latour and Bronislaw Szerszynski.
- **10h10-11h10** : free visit of the « Anthropocene Monument » exhibition with the presentation of the works-monuments by the artists.
11h10-11h15 : back to the auditorium
- **11h15-12h** : talk by **Christophe Bonneuil** (Historian) : « Four grand narratives of the Anthropocene ».
- **12h-12h45** : talk by **Armin Linke** (Artist), **John Palmesino** and **Ann-Sofi Rönnskog** (Architects and urban planners) : « Anthropocene Observatory ».

12h45-14h15 : break.

- **14h15-15h** : talk by **Pierre Chabard** (Architect, historian of architecture and urban planning) : « Architecture of anxiety : topology of the Anthropocene ».
- **15h-15h45** : conversation between **Adam Lowe** (Artist) and **Frédérique Ait Touati** (Researcher and stage director) : « Terra-forming: Engineering the Sublime ».
- **15h45-16h30** : talk by **Fabien Giraud** (Artist) : « Beyond the quarantine principle : strata and diagram ».
16h30-16h45 : break.
- **16h45-17h30** : conversation between **Iain Baxter** (Artist) and **Nigel Clark** (Geographer and geo-philosopher) : « Conjunctions of the Anthropocene ».
- **17h30-18h** : discussion with the speakers of the day and conclusion.
- **21h** : Live - Christian Fennesz.

Sunday 12th October, 2014, 10h-18h

- **10h-10h15** : introduction of the day by Bruno Latour and Bronislaw Szerszynski.
- **10h15-11h** : talk by **Emilie Hache** (Philosopher) : « Back on Earth ».
11h-11h15 : break.
- **11h15-12h** : talk by **Lise Autogena** and **Joshua Portway** (Artists) : « Untitled (superorganism) ».
- **12h-12h45** : talk by **Jerry Brotton** (Historian) : « News of the World ».

12h45-14h15 : break.

- **14h15-15h** : talk by **Catherine Jeandel** (Scientist) : « The Anthropocene Ocean ».
- **15h-15h45** : conversation between **Tomas Saraceno** (Artist) and **Bronislaw Szerszynski** : « Becoming solar ».
- **15h45-16h30** : conversation between **Yesenia Thibault-Picazo** (Artist) and **Alain Podaire** (Physician) : « Oceanic projections – Tracers and markers of the Anthropocene ».
16h30-16h45 : break.
- **16h45-17h15** : discussion with the speakers of the day.

- **17h15-17h45** : discussion with the audience hosted by **Jan Zalasiewicz** : « Which monument for the Anthropocene ? ».
- **17h45-18h** : performance by **Bronislaw Szerszynski** : « Onomatophore of the Anthropocene ».

The entire colloquium-performance takes place in the auditorium of les Abattoirs (apart from the visit on Saturday at 10:10 to be held in the exhibition space of les Abattoirs).

Abstracts of the talks and conversations

- Talk by **Jan Zalasiewicz** (geologist, chair of Anthropocene Working Group, ICS) :

Stratigraphy of the Anthropocene

Are we living at the dawn of an Anthropocene Epoch - an interval of geological time dominated by human influence? The term, proposed little more than a decade ago by Paul Crutzen, the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist, has since been widely used – and sharply debated. Its analysis as a potential new unit of the Geological Time Scale translates historical and environmental change into geology, or more precisely into stratigraphy: the urban stratum symbolizes human-driven lithostratigraphy, as do species extinctions/invasions for biostratigraphy, and perturbations of the carbon, phosphorus and nitrogen cycles for chemostratigraphy. Integration of the many such signals may reveal the Anthropocene's inception.

- Talk by **Christophe Bonneuil** (Historian):

Four grand narratives of the Anthropocene:

A political philosopher has recently argued that “the planet does not care about the stories that humans tell; it responds to what humans do, and is changing irreversibly as a result”.

This communication will argue that stories do matter. In the same way as the stories (about Nature as external and purposeless, about the world as resource, about human agency as incommensurable to the Earth temporality, about progress and freedom as an escape from nature's determinations and limits, about facts and values, about technology and forces of production as quasi autonomous prime movers, about money, market and capital, etc.) that the industrial Moderns told themselves did matter as cultural conditions for their shifting the whole Earth into the Anthropocene, the kind of stories we tell ourselves about the Anthropocene will shape the kind of future geo-histories we might live in.

I will examine four grand narratives of the Anthropocene, 1) the standard/naturalist narrative, 2) a post-nature neomodernist narrative, 3) a Medean or catastrophist narrative, and 4) an eco-marxist narrative, each calling for different kinds of monument.

- Conversation between **Armin Linke** (Artist), **John Palmesino** and **Ann-Sofi Rönnskog** (Architects and urban planners) :

Anthropocene Observatory

A new geological epoch, defined by the actions of humans, the Anthropocene, is now being widely debated and articulated. This thesis is developing across a number of circuits, institutions, organizations, scientific and intellectual fields. Operating as an observatory, a composition of documentary practices and discourses, the project traces the formation of the Anthropocene thesis. Combining film, photography, documentation, interviews, spatial analysis and fieldwork, the project

develops over 2013 and 2014 to form an archive and a series of installations, seminars, debates and cultural interventions.

Across a number of specific international agencies and organisations, information about scientific research is acquired, registered, evaluated, processed, stored, archived, organised and re-distributed. These behind-the-scenes processes and practices, that lead to the equally complex decision making procedures, form new discourses and figures of shift. The Anthropocene Observatory documents these practices in a series of short films, interviews and documentary materials: aim of the project is to illustrate in detail the unfolding of the thesis of the Anthropocene in its many streams of influence.

A project by photographer and film-maker Armin Linke, architects and urbanists John Palmesino and Ann-Sofi Rönnskog (Territorial Agency), and curator Anselm Franke. The project is commissioned by Haus der Kulturen der Welt HKW, Berlin.

- Talk by **Pierre Chabard** (Architect, historian of architecture and urban planning) :

Architecture of anxiety: topology of the Anthropocene

The concept of Anthropocene and the questions it imposes on us reshaping our relationship to time and space. Like all other fields of thought and action, architecture, whose culture is rooted in modern times, cannot but be affected by this new "condition of existence." Traversing the history of architecture, we analyze some moments of conjunction between forms of construction and forms of representation of the world. Through these examples, we will consider some spatial archetypes (the globe, the cabin, the labyrinth, the theater, etc.) to test the anthropocénique problematic and to consider its topological and architectural implications

- Conversation between **Adam Lowe** (Artist) and **Frédérique Ait Touati** (Researcher and stage director) :

Terra-forming: Engineering the Sublime

Frédérique Ait-Touati and Adam Lowe's conversation will use as its point of departure Lowe's relief map of the lithosphere, a cartographic response to the advent of the Anthropocene.

'Terra-forming: Engineering the Sublime' is intentionally active as an object. It does not propose to just re-present our environment: rather, it insists on engaging with the processes through which it is performed and made. The world is after all both a subject and an object, though one that we can never fully know in our endless act of mapping its contours and projecting its surfaces. Lowe and Brotton have proposed a cluster of projections as a way of engaging with the earth from different points of view. Each projection shows how, over time, the choices of particular worldviews are defined by specific social, cultural, political and ideological interests and beliefs. Their chosen model is a land-centred (or 'terra-centric') projection with a deliberately exaggerated vertical axis that dramatises the rhythms of the deluge and the uncanny features of an unrecognisably waterless world. This is the theatre of the world onto which many poetic acts can be projected. The relationships between the

lithosphere, biosphere, atmosphere, stratosphere and many other spheres are delicate, dynamic, inter-related and currently beyond the understanding of the ethnosphere.

- Talk by **Fabien Giraud** (Artist) :

Beyond the quarantine principle : stratum and diagram

It is difficult to imagine the inauguration of a memorial in the middle of trench warfare. As an object of memory, it must be separated from the events to which it testifies. By this foundational setting-at-a- distance, it establishes a space of exclusion within the world: everything monument is a quarantine.

The Anthropocene, by the entanglement of our actions with the ground which they emerge, denies the very possibility of such a departure. The paradox of a monument to the Anthropocene therefore requires a complete reconfiguration of the relationship between gesture and space.

In exploring the concepts of the diagram (space of gestures of knowledge) and the stratum (space of geomorphic processes), we can consider the Anthropocene as an opportunity for thought: not as the crisis of what we were but as the possibility of emancipation toward what we could be.

- Conversation between **Iain Baxter&** (Artist) et **Nigel Clark** (Geographer and geo-philosopher) :

Conjunctions of the Anthropocene

Questions about how to govern climate change, protect planetary boundaries or manage the global ecological predicament often seem to be looking for answers more than they are seeking encounters or new complications. Navigating a maze to arrive at an ampersand is not so much cracking a code or finding a resolution, as coming face to face with the very idea of a conjunction, a knot, an entanglement.

Iain Baxter& Nigel Clark will be talking about negotiating labyrinths, chance meetings, trial and error. They will be asking some questions about the kind of experiments, encounters and accidents that brought us through the Holocene, and wondering about what kinds of new enfoldings or conjunctions might help us negotiate our way across thresholds to come.

- Talk by **Emilie Hache** (Philosopher) :

Back on Earth

In a science-fiction novel of 1955, Marion Z. Bradley tells the story of the return to Earth of a group of astronauts sent into space to colonize another planet, or rather their descendants, four generations later, very excited about the prospect of 'returning' and discovering this Earth homeland. If what they find is far from our own situation, this story of a return to Earth resonates with the collective experience we are currently undergoing: there are no other planets to colonize, and we need to re-learn what it means to think / act / know / think or dwell on Earth.

- Talk by **Lise Autogena** et **Joshua Portway** (Artists) :

Untitled (superorganism)

The aftermath of an ant mill.

A fragile monument, it will blow away with the first wind.

In an ant mill hundreds of thousands of ants walk in a circle, a ceremonial procession, until overcome by exhaustion and, eventually, death. It's hypothesised that this behaviour is simply a quirk of evolution, a flaw in the ingenious system of pheromones that govern the complex social behaviours and hierarchy of the colony. But who knows, perhaps they choose this ritual suicide; perhaps this is their Stonehenge.

- Talk by **Jerry Brotton** (Historian):

News of the world

At a time when the online industry is locked in a battle over dominance of virtual geospatial applications and terra-forming shapes practice and debate across the social sciences, this talk will situate the current 'map wars' within a wider historical and cultural context of globalisation and the Anthropocene. Ranging from the Greeks to Google Earth, it examines how the subject of these concepts, namely the globe, has been mapped over time, and what this means for our current understanding of the waning of a global affect within the field of geography. We now understand that far from being purely scientific objects, world maps are unavoidably partial and subjective, intimately bound up with the systems of power, authority and creativity of particular moments and places. But if the paper map is a subjective thing of the past, then what of the map's future, and how will we map our anthropocentric world? The talk will conclude by offering one artistic response to this question in the shape of the 'flooded world map', an installation on which Brotton has collaborated with Factum Arte and Adam Lowe.

- Talk by **Catherine Jeandel** (Scientist) :

The Anthropocene ocean

The ocean, which gives our planet its blue color, suffers the full force of anthropic pressure. The increase in atmospheric CO2 disrupts the functioning of the ocean- atmosphere coupling that has been stable for about 8000 years, and with it the ocean circulation. This disequilibrium is expressed differently in different regions of the world, most importantly in Mediterranean evaporation, the desalination of water at high latitudes by melting ice, or by intense rains in the western Pacific. Similarly, the gradual rise of sea level varies from one place on the globe to another. The increase in atmospheric CO2 has another consequence, equally troubling: ocean acidification, with potentially dramatic effects on algae and animals with calcareous shells, which dissolve in acidic environments. These organisms are the basis of our food; it is urgent to act.

- Conversation between **Tomas Saraceno** (Artist) and **Bronislaw Szerszynski** (Sociologist and philosopher) :

Becoming Solar

Tomas Saraceno and Bronislaw Szerszynski discuss Saraceno's proposal to create an Anthropocene Monument out of Museo Aero Solar - a solar sculpture which flies by capturing the short waves of the sun during the day, and infrared waves from the Earth at night. This lighter-than-air monument will ride thermals, vortices and convection currents, making visible the "shape" of the atmosphere. To stay in the air, the monument will depend on people to follow it, capture it and relaunch it when the sun shines, thus embodying an ethos of care, hospitality and an elemental sensitivity crucial to the potential of a "good" Anthropocene. They will discuss how this floating "monument" might also point toward a new way of inhabiting Earth, an imagined, alternative future in which civilization is truly solar powered, but also liberated from Earth's surface to become airborne; a society held, propelled and continually re-cohered by the intensities of the sun-Earth-air relation; a world of flying solar sculptures aggregating like clouds; a world not of flight paths but of nomadic journeys.

- Conversation between **Yesenia Thibault Picazo** (Artist) and **Alain Podaire** (Physician) :

Oceanic projections: tracers and markers of the Anthropocene

Alain Podaire and Yesenia Thibault-Picazo will offer a crossover perspective, both scientific and creative, on the ocean, which is a key environment for the Anthropocene, particularly because it can contain many markers or tracers. Through their respective practices and sensibilities, they will discuss the behavior and evolution of the ocean - the "Oceanic Machine" and its perturbation by human activities - in connection with the advent of the Anthropocene. They will consider possible representations for these behaviours and changes, particularly through animations or realisations which describe the different scales of the ocean. They also propose to revive the stories of the ocean, the better to know and to share.

- Performance by **Bronislaw Szerszynski** :

Commission on Planetary Ages Decision CC87966424/49: The Onomatophore of the Anthropocene

In a piece for spoken word and animated video, Bronislaw Szerszynski will announce the decision on the status of the Anthropocene issued by the Commission on Planetary Ages, the extra-terrestrial institution which alone has the power to determine the names of the ages of all worlds throughout the galaxy. It considers the claim made to the Commission by a representative of Homo sapiens that its world is changing its state, and that the new age of its world should be named after itself, so that human beings would be proclaimed 'onomatophore', or name-bearer, of their planetary age. The final decision of the Commission, which is explained with reference to its more than two billion years' experience in naming planetary ages, is legal and binding.