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“WE MUST RE-
ORGANISE
SCIENCE, AND
WE NEED THE
IMAGINATION
OF THE ARTS
IN ORDER TO
MANAGE THE
PARADIGM
SHIFT”

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TEXT — Bernd M. Scherer
TRANSLATION — Astrid-Lilian Geese

*FOLK AFTER FAKE, AND MUCH MORE:
THE ANTHROPOCENE PROJECT
INSTITUTES A NEW GEOLOGICAL ERA
WHICH ASSUMES THAT NATURE AS
WE KNOW IT BELONGS TO THE PAST,
AND A NEW MODEL IS NEEDED TO
UNDERSTAND HUMANITY AS THE
DRIVER OF PLANETARY TRANSFOR-
MATION, WITH ITS FLOATING PLASTIC
ISLANDS AND DEVASTATED POLLINA-
TION SYSTEMS. IT ASKS, WHAT IMAGE
OF HUMANITY FORMS IF NATURE
APPEARS IN THE IMAGE OF MAN,
AS IF IT WERE HUMAN?*

NOTES ON THE THESIS BY
THE DIRECTOR OF THE HAUS
DER KULTUREN DER WELT

All images
MEGAN CUMP
From the series *Feral*, ongoing
C-print
71 x 96 cm
Courtesy the artist and Station Independent
Projects, New York
www.megancump.com

In his film “More than Honey” Markus Imhoof discovered profound and striking images for the correlations between mankind and nature. The Swiss filmmaker travelled to China to document a remarkable moment there.

The farmers were complaining about sparrows picking seed from the soil. Therefore Mao Tse Tung ordered the sparrows to be shot. This triggered an insect plague, because the birds could no longer act as a regulating force. In order to cope

with the plague, the farmers used pesticides: gone were the insects, but also the bees which pollinated the plants. The film’s final scene shows columns of Chinese people climbing trees in order to do what bees normally do, and pollinate the blossoms.

This story illustrates, in a somewhat drastic way, the twin role men and women play: we all are cultural and natural beings. We act and intend, and our undertakings form part of and have

significance in a given context: we combat sparrows in order to facilitate the sowing. Our action triggers effects which are unintended and, thus, natural. The double aspect of human action has been integral to the history of humanity from day one.

In modern times, after the invention of the steam engine and the late Twentieth Century’s “great acceleration”, human action has triggered ever more natural effects. Man created

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“ALL BUT NATURAL ELEMENTS AND PRIMAL URGES”

MEGAN CUMP GOES INTO THE WILD

For her “Feral” series American photographer Megan Cump combines the aesthetics of landscape photography with performative work. She equipped herself with a

medium-format camera and only basic camping supplies, and shot the series while on solitary kayaking and hiking trips through the landscapes of Delaware in the US, confronting

a mobility culture which has meant increased CO2 emissions. Man developed packing and forwarding systems which have created continents of plastic in the oceans. Chemical products substitute for natural products; they cannot (or can hardly) be recycled, and are stored as non-renewable materials in the ground. Not to mention nuclear energy and its impact.

Many of the problems this process involves are well known and have become items on our agendas. Against this backdrop, the Anthropocene thesis offers the following benefits: it offers a metanarrative, which reminds us of the point we have reached in the historical development, and which tasks we have to tackle.

The Anthropocene thesis claims that the human species has created its own nature because of the very fact that human action creates contexts of effects. The geological dimension of the thesis implies that man, by mapping his action in a special layer of

sediment, inscribes himself into the geological time.

The Anthropocene thesis is exciting, because it claims that the human being as a natural being has created a nature, which in its temporality and its spatiality affects the earth as a whole, and therefore has an almost universal – we might even say total – power. This power may be great enough to extinguish other species to an as-yet unknown extent. It also transforms the cultural being which man, the human being, used to be.

The Anthropocene thesis poses a challenge, because we have to find cultural answers for this anthropogenic natural process. We will, thus, have to expand the Anthropocene as a narrative of human nature and add the cultural narrative. We must integrate the contexts of effects, which we have deemed natural processes so far, into the contexts of significance.

However, we must not understand these cultural narratives as universal. We need local

and regional answers, first, followed by the global answers or the answers produced in a global network.

We have asked a number of questions to the city in the last days and weeks, and they show where the cultural narratives to be developed could head to.

Is the Anthropocene beautiful? How does the new nature inscribe into our bodies? How do we experience a world with urban centres that do not know darkness any more? How do we experience a world whose living beings and objects are increasingly produced chemically or biogenetically?

Is the Anthropocene legal? The human species has created the nature that is the anthropogenic theme. However, concrete action has been and is being undertaken by individuals, groups, companies, and societies. Often, the key players are not those who are affected most by the impacts. For a long time, the key players were based in the West, whereas the people concerned dwelled in the



the kinds of dangers only experienced adventurers would know.

Her work asks whether it's possible to return to the natural state, and what might happen when material

possessions are stripped away. Would we instinctively know how to survive, or would the outcome be more sinister? What is the human in nature now? The images in

“Feral” may be constructed moments, but they suggest a glimpse into a dangerous world which many of us will never experience, fully understand or have any strong con-

nection with. “Feral” juxtaposes human endurance and vulnerability in the face of an intimidating and all-powerful nature.

Amy Binding

rest of the world. Today, the connections are less transparent. We will, therefore, have to engage individuals, groups, and nations on the local, regional, and global level in a socio-political process of exchange.

Is the Anthropocene human? Men and women are natural and cultural beings simultaneously. The two spheres are not strictly divided. Things that belong to the world of objects, whether they have always been there or have been newly made, gain significance, become part of the culture, lose significance, or re-naturalise. There is a permanent cycle. However, the divide of the two sectors has been the driving force of our development since the Seventeenth Century. Nature was considered a mere resource for exploitation. Because of this divide, nature in its made form – formed by economic and cultural processes, polluted air, the plastic continents in the oceans – did not happen in the cultural image man had of himself. There used to be a black hole, which has only been

investigated in the last decades, and its real importance has risen to man's full awareness only now, thanks to the Anthropocene thesis.

The development as such was based on a linear understanding of time. All elements (aspects, processes) which did not serve the pursuit of the cultural goal, i.e. a business-driven consumer society, were relegated to the sphere of nature, with which one did not really engage, because it was not deemed to be part of the cultural project. Against this backdrop we may define the Anthropocene project in terms of a cultural project as follows: by reminding us that there is a man-made nature, it becomes part of culture. We therefore have to understand what it means for us.

Since we realise the context of effects of nature, we have to redefine the relationship between culture and nature. It will be important to not consider the two spheres separately, as divided ontological areas, but as the processes of culturalisation and naturalisation

of actions and objects. With respect to objects this would mean a system based on recycling. A cultural object, such as an old car, will be naturalised: its materials will be treated so that it becomes a new – cultural – object to be used by man, such as a fridge. Thus the Haus der Kulturen der Welt is interested in transporting the Anthropocene into a world that corresponds to human beings in their finiteness and naturalness – in seeing man as an integral part of cycles.

We must be courageous, in order to be modest.

We must reorganise science, and we need the imagination of the arts in order to manage the paradigm shift.

Perhaps it is not a bad idea to do as the Chinese did, and once in a while climb the trees – not just to pollinate, but to learn to see the world in a different way.

