

ANTHROPOCENE



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The Future Starts Here

The Age of
Human Influence on Nature
and the Climate

Humanity has created lots of great stories, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to *In Search of Lost Time*. But according to natural scientists, the greatest human story of all is unfolding in the present day.

Moreover, this story isn't by a single author; instead we're all working on it together. The way billions of us are consuming plastic, emitting greenhouse gases from cars, and destroying animal and plant species is changing our planet so fundamentally and profoundly that we are collectively writing Earth's history.

Burning rainforests in the Amazon, record temperatures in the Arctic and in Australia, dwindling insect populations, huge quantities of plastics in

Dissolving boundaries between nature and culture

the sea ... These are not just individual environmental problems, say scientists, but evidence of a gigantic upheaval that is affecting politics, the economy, science, culture – the whole of society, in other words. This radical shift has a dazzling and increasingly well-known name: the Anthropocene, the geological epoch of humankind.

As long ago as in 2000, Paul Crutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, put forward the argument that we are making history in geological terms. 'Anthropocene' comes from the ancient Greek words 'anthropos' for 'human' and kainos for 'new'. Since then, scientists have been collecting dramatic evidence of the Anthropocene to pave the way for an official renaming of our current epoch, the Holocene, to the Anthropocene.

It's hardly surprising that the book market has reacted too. Authors are approaching the Anthropocene in diverse ways: as a fascinating event, a scientific provocation, an ecological nightmare, a catalyst for key debates on the concepts of 'nature' and 'culture', or as a wake-up call for personal action.

The world of the Anthropocene is as new as it is disquieting. With our gigantic cities, we humans are creating artificial structures of stone, metal and glass that extend across ever wider areas of land mass. We synthesise minerals, along with new kinds of radioactive isotopes and elements being deposited in rock layers. We extract raw

materials in huge quantities for our electronic devices; we encircle the Earth with a mantle of space debris; we produce new types of 'technofossils' from electronic waste. Engineers create hundreds of thousands of kilometres of roads, railway lines and cables.

Agriculture also produces enormous amounts of future fossils, such as the bone residues of chickens, cattle and pigs. Our hunger for resources is so great that all of the concrete we've produced thus far is equivalent to a kilogramme for every square metre of earth – and we could wrap the planet in clingfilm using the plastic we've generated to date. According to analyses by the World Biodiversity Council, one-eighth of the estimated eight million animal and plant species on Earth could become extinct in the 21st century. This is reminiscent of earlier mass extinctions, such as those at the end of the dinosaur age – except that this time it's not an asteroid that's responsible, but a primate species called 'Homo sapiens'.

The result, as Paul Crutzen puts it, is the 'human Earth' – a fundamentally new structure that will never again return to an untouched natural state, even if humanity should one day become extinct. An extraterrestrial geologist landing on our planet a million years from now would thus find clear traces of our time.

It took several years for the debate on Crutzen's thesis to get going. But now, when the future of the environment and the climate is discussed, the Anthropocene is on everyone's lips. The 'human epoch' is the key new leitmotif in global environmental debates. No other idea is causing such a furore or triggering such groundbreaking discussions.

The German book market plays a special, leading role in exploring the Anthropocene globally. One

Humankind as a force of nature

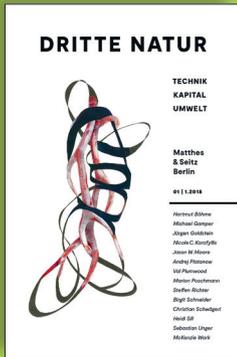
reason for this is that German authors have had something of a head start. Not only does Paul Crutzen live in Mainz, near Frankfurt, but German cultural institutes were the first to take up the subject in a way that had public appeal. For a number of years, Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) led an interna-

[buchmesse.de/
magazine/
anthropocene](http://buchmesse.de/magazine/anthropocene)

More information about the featured titles in German and English can be found [here](#).



The 2019 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade was awarded to the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado on 20 October 2019 in Frankfurt's Paulskirche, to honour an exceptional visual artist who has continually campaigned for peace and social justice and whose entire photographic oeuvre lends a sense of urgency to the global debate surrounding nature conservation and environmental protection.



Dritte Natur
 (Matthes Seitz)
 The biannual magazine Dritte Natur illuminates the simultaneities, interplay and feedback between nature and culture.



Selbstverbrennung
 (C. Bertelsmann)
 A sobering report on the self-destructive consequences of unchecked global warming.



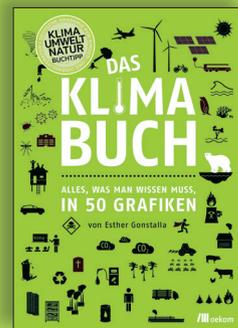
Vom Ende der Klimakrise
 (Klett-Cotta)
 'We are the first to experience climate crisis and the last who can make a difference.'
 Luisa Neubauer



Das Ende der Evolution
 (C. Bertelsmann)
 Today, humanity has mutated into the Earth's greatest predator and most crucial evolutionary factor. It threatens the existence of all living beings – including itself.



Proposes various solutions for stopping climate change:
 Esther Gonstalla's
 Das Klimabuch (Oekom)



Esther Gonstalla
Das Klimabuch
 (Oekom)
 Everything you need to know about climate change. Complex interconnections and scientific data in 50 easy-to-understand infographics.

tional discussion and art project sponsored by the German Bundestag, and the Deutsches Museum (German Museum) in Munich, one of the world's largest technology museums, held a special exhibition that attracted lots of visitors. These projects have given German-speaking authors plenty of inspiration, producing a wealth of new titles.

German cultural institutes were the first to take up the subject

Numerous works are devoted specifically to the Anthropocene, such as the recently published book *Anthropozän zur Einführung* by Eva Horn und Hanno Bergthaller, or the anthology *Willkommen im Anthropozän* by the Deutsches Museum. Other works explore popular subjects – such as the life of the environmental pioneer Alexander von Humboldt – in the context of Earth's new epoch. The engagement even of usually rather reserved German natural scientists is notable – such as climate researcher Hans Joachim Schellnhuber in his book *Selbstverbrennung* or biologist Matthias Glaubrecht in his newly published *Das Ende der Evolution*.

German authors see the Anthropocene as far more than just a specialist field – it's an absolutely fundamental topic that affects everyone. The

magazine *Dritte Natur*, for example, focuses on the dissolving boundaries between nature and culture. How can we view as natural a hurricane that draws its energy from man-made global warming? Or rock formed from plastic sediments or mining slag?

Previously untouched nature is turning into 'touched nature' and this has an impact on us all. Consequently, there is no lack of calls for individuals to take personal action. Everyone needs to help avert the climate crisis, warn the #FridaysForFuture activists Luisa Neubauer and Alexander Repenning in their book *Vom Ende der Klimakrise* – which, in contrast to other works, strikes an optimistic note.

The question of when the Anthropocene will be officially declared Earth's new epoch is still open. The hottest candidate for a start date is 1945 to 1950, when the fallout from nuclear weapons explosions and the first global wave of plastic consumption altered the Earth. At any rate, the notion of the Anthropocene is already changing our thinking about the relationship between humanity, nature and technology. We now realise that this is about much more than the sum of our environmental problems – it's about consciously shaping the planet's future, which is why leading politicians such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel regularly reference the Anthropocene in their speeches. The science historian Jürgen Renn, co-author of *Das Anthropozän*, says that it is not simply about formalizing a new geological epoch, but about developing a much deeper awareness of our own role in the Earth's future. ♦



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Extending the boundaries of art through the materials used and the positioning of the works: land art.

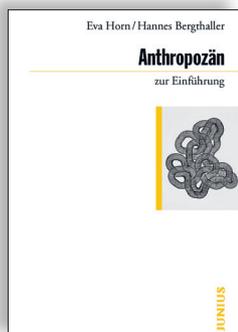
Andy Goldsworthy's 'Sentinelle', Alpes de Haute Provence.



Christian Schwägerl

is a political and environmental journalist living in Berlin. He works for outlets such as *FAZ*, *GEO* and *YaleE360*, and is co-founder of www.riffreporter.de. In 2010 he published *Menschenzeit* (Riemann), the first widely read book in Germany on the Anthropocene.

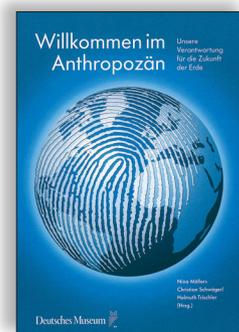
It was the impetus for two major projects at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and the Deutsches Museum.



Eva Horn, Hanno Bergthaller
Anthropozän zur Einführung
(Junius)
'The authors begin by offering us well-presented key facts, before going on to explore wider issues.' *FAZ*



Bernd Scherer, Jürgen Renn (ed.)
Das Anthropozän
(Matthes & Seitz)
The current situation. With pieces by Jane Bennett, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paul Edwards, Anne Peters, Peter Sloterdijk, Benjamin Steininger and others.



Nina Möllers, Christian Schwägerl, Helmuth Trischler (ed.)
Willkommen im Anthropozän
(Deutsches Museum)
The catalogue for the exhibition of the same name.