

PRELIMINARY NOTES

1. In the year 2000, the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen made the explosive proposal that the name Anthropocene should be adopted as a way of describing a new geological era, which principally differs from the Holocene in terms of the significance of the impact of humankind as a factor in geophysical systems. The measurable alteration of many important geological conditions and processes, of the chemical composition of atmosphere, soil and ocean waters, combined with global warming and climate change, have all been interpreted as driven by human activity, activity undertaken with little concern for the future of Earth's environment or even for the prospects of continued human existence. The human imprint on the environment has reached such a magnitude, according to Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, that it is overwhelming the great forces of nature in terms of their influence on the Earth System, thus painting «a gloomy picture for the future of contemporary societies»¹.

After this sensational birth, the Anthropocene immediately found itself the subject of numerous debates, starting from the question of its precise genesis. At least four possible beginnings or causal origins have been proposed: the great technological and industrial acceleration after the Second World War (or an atomic marker resulting from the atmospheric deployment of nuclear weapons commencing from the end of that war), the first industrial revolution, the colonization of the Americas, and the rise of sedentary civilization. From the outset, this concept has also proven to be a question not just of beginnings but of endings: the advent of something that would also

¹ See W. Steffen – P. J. Crutzen – J. R. McNeill, *The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?*, «Ambio», 36 (8), 2007, pp. 614-621.

be an encounter with limits, in the first place ecological, but also economic, political, technological and conceptual. In this light, if, following Frédéric Neyrat, we can recognize in current transdisciplinary theorization a general ‘climatic turn’², it is with the Anthropocene that a genuine turning point for critical thought has emerged, becoming as such also the symbol of a scientific, anthropological, theoretical, and political condition (and of its limits).

What seems to have no limits, however, is this term’s own spirit of conquest: indeed, seizing hold of and reopening some of the most significant questions of the 20th century human sciences, it has suddenly disseminated and gathered ground well beyond the scientific fields to which it is most immediately relevant. As such, the concept of the Anthropocene has resonated in the humanities and social sciences more than in science, or even geology – where, despite having been admitted as a term of discussion in 2016 (which is the starting point for its definition as an Epoch, through the investigation of the markers that will be incorporated into deposits in the future geological record), the official validation of the concept is yet to occur³. If, as suggested, this may be viewed as the conquest of intellectual territory by a geological term, it perhaps serves more to indicate the degree to which the concept has become a site of contest rather than conquest, as scholars in every field wrestle with a notion that seems undecidably lodged between prematurity and lateness, death knell, prophecy and call to arms.

For fifteen years, in other words, this disruptive conceptual germ has been gestating and expressing a genuine metamorphosis, in which the forms (*morphé*) of the discourse shifted (*meta*) from specifically geological and climate issues to the very heart of ‘theoretical’ thinking. We might also see such a turn as a parable, the advent of which has already been described as its own twilight – not without reference to Nietzsche⁴. For, in fact, every twilight is a metaphor for a limit beyond which there must arise the question of a new dawn, which, in Nietzschean and Foucauldian terms, necessarily

² F. Neyrat, *Climate Turn. L’anthropo-scène, Chakrabarty et l’espèce humaine*, «Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées», 2010.

³ In fact, even if on 29 August 2016 the official Working Group on the Anthropocene (WGA), chaired by geologist Jan Zalasiewicz, officially recommended to the International Geological Congress that the name Anthropocene should be used and formalized as a notion, at present neither the International Commission on Stratigraphy nor the International Union of Geological Sciences has officially approved it as a formally defined geological unit within the Geological Time Scale. Source: Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy website <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene/>.

⁴ T. Cohen – C. Colebrook – J. Hillis Miller, *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*, London, Open Humanities Press, 2106.

takes the form of the following question: what kind of forces internal to Anthropos are to be fought against today, and what other complex of forces might somehow be located in man – or in whatever comes to take his place – in some hypothetical post-Anthropocene?

2. Given that every discipline wants to impose its own theoretical framework, giving rise to several points of view that converge in various ‘great narratives’⁵, the Anthropocene has immediately begun configuring itself as a battleground whose front line seems to be planetary catastrophe.

From the anti-naturalist thesis (‘nature’ doesn’t exist, or it is being replaced by some artificial entities able to supplant its deficiencies), which in a way represents the renewal of scientific modernity, where the human, master and possessor of the natural world, tries to refresh its strategy of conquest by trying to solve the disasters of which it is itself the cause⁶, to the most Gaia-centric theses, whether they are focused on the physical transformations of the Earth or on ‘humans as [the] geological force’ impacting on them, these narratives are all generally marked by a sharp change in the relationship of humans to the ‘natural’ world.

In this vein, many theorists have insisted on the fact that the Anthropocene necessitates the development of new concepts, new ontologies, new ways of seeing the world, all of which can be assumed into a call to reconceptualize human agency. In fact, during the fifteen years of life of this term, the accent has mostly fallen on the ability of human beings to act. On the one hand, a tendency has emerged emphasizing the need for a reconciliation with nature, abandoning the logic of perpetual growth and abdicating human supremacy in favor of a new ‘fusion’ with the non-human, while, on the other hand, a blind or short-sighted faith in technology and in techno-science has led to proposals for the reconstruction of a damaged planet. In both cases, Anthropocenic humanity appears, paradoxically, in the form of both a super-powerful and exceptional subject with the capacity to *control* and *decide* about other bodies, and as the victim who suffers the consequences of his own actions upon the Earth⁷. And, in both cases, too, the relation human/technology is the central pivot through which agency can be reconsidered.

⁵ See *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, C. Hamilton – F. Gemenne – C. Bonneuil (eds.), London-New York, Routledge, 2015.

⁶ F. Neyrat, *La part inconstructible de la Terre. Critique du géo-constructivisme*, Paris, Seuil, 2016.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

In any case, the perspective of a collision with worldly and human finitude has hastened the quest for a reliable solution, opening a field of debate as to how best to *performatively* alter our relationship with the planet we inhabit, engaging questions such as development, sustainability, technological intervention and planetary stewardship. The scale, speed and complexity of the challenge suggests that any response risks appearing limited.

3. Generally speaking, the *epochal* event of the Anthropocene – as defined by Bonneuil and Fressoz⁸, at least in terms of its material side (the historical, social, political and climatic problem) – while unfolding the possibility of the *end* of man, and thus forcing us to put into question also the *ends* of man, re-opens, in circular fashion, the discourse on *Anthropos*. To which humankind does this *Anthropos* refer, who is this ‘one’ who determines not its ends, but its own end? Even if the reasons for this imminent catastrophe reside in a set of specifically human activities, nevertheless, *Anthropos* cannot refer to an abstract human kind whom one could accuse, in general and in toto, of poisoning the Earth. This is not only a question of Western ethnocentrism – that is, the garb assumed by anthropocentrism when it attributes the character of ‘human’ to activities that are specifically Western – but of the exploitation and the oppression of the living. Hence the debate has, in some areas, taken a more self-conscious turn, in awareness of the differentiated economic questions grounding those activities: it is preferable, in these terms, to refer to the Anthropocene as the Capitalocene⁹.

Furthermore, the cognitive invention of the Anthropocene, that is, the performative appearance of this signifier, emanating through Paul Crutzen’s voice during a lecture¹⁰, has itself the very character of event, hence of an irruption in the course of history by a traumatic element, an *epoké* produced

⁸ C. Bonneuil–J.-B. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* [*L’Événement Anthropocène*], New York, Verso, 2016.

⁹ See J. W. Moore, *The Capitalocene*, Part I e Part II, available online at: <http://www.jasonwmoore.com/Essays.html>; *Anthropocene or Capitalocene. Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, J. W. Moore (eds.), Oakland (CA), Kairos, 2016, and D. Haraway, *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin*, «Environmental Humanities», vol. 6/2015, pp. 159-165. Available online at: <http://environmentalhumanities.org/arch/vol6/6.7.pdf>.

¹⁰ Whilst the term was already informally used since the Seventies by biologist Eugene Stoermer, it was only with the proposal that Cruzen and Stoermer himself did during a meeting of the international Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP) in the year 2000 that the term became popular.

and experienced by humankind through an affirmation and the replies that this has solicited from several disciplines.

What has been called the Anthropocene and recognized as an event might actually be conceived, therefore, as a *multiplicity* of events, a dispersal each moment of which, from its most superficial layer of meaning directly tied to the climate change brought about by industrialization, breaks with one or another of the traditional dichotomies and hierarchies of Western metaphysics (Nature/Culture, human/non-human, anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism) and not least the very ideas of *telos* and universal history. But might it not be seen also as a dehiscence within the very field of theoretical thought itself, and hence as a kind of pure Event in a Deleuzian sense: as a shock that would be a kind of chronological suspension of the very possibility of events? Such a field thus opens up that new battlefield towards which Deleuze gestured in *The Logic of Sense*, to which all philosophical fighters should look not just as territory for conquering but for re-thinking, for struggling within themselves:

If the battle is not an example of an event among others, but rather the Event in its essence, it is no doubt because it is actualized in diverse manners at once, and because each participant may grasp it at a different level of actualization within its variable present. (...) But it is above all because the battle *hovers over* its own field, being neutral in relation to all of its temporal actualizations, neutral and impassive in relation to the victor and the vanquished, the coward and brave; because of this, it is all the more terrible. Never present but always yet to come and already passed, the battle is graspable only by the will of anonymity which it itself inspires. This will (...) is present in the mortally wounded soldier who is no longer brave or cowardly, no longer victor or vanquished, but rather so much beyond, at the place where the Event is present, participating therefore in its terrible impassibility. "Where" is the battle?¹¹

Are we now all, collectively, that mortally wounded soldier? If so, what remains of responsibility? Is it that we must fight on in that battlefield, or must we flee the war zone that Planet Earth has become, refugees of the Anthropocene itself? But flight to where? Such a flight would have to be undertaken not simply out of fear, but in the name of a beyond of courage and cowardice that would also be, not just beyond good and evil, but beyond those twin maladies of the Anthropocene that are optimism and pessimism. And so to be worthy of a future yet to be invented, or even dreamt.

¹¹ G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 100-101.

In any case, even were we to set flight, we would need first to find a weapon, for which we will always be responsible, in the sense of a responsibility for the concept that we have to forge for and in the Anthropocene – this is perhaps our philosophical duty, in finding new weapons as conceptual pathways beyond this very battlefield. Indeed, such a philosophical battlefield seems still to remain «anthropocenic, all too Anthropocenic»¹².

Conscious of these Anthropocenic limits, the *duty of flight* calls for a decolonization of thought from old and new hierarchies, a decolonization based on a general ecology. Such a decolonization would thus need to be involved in the elaboration of another image of thought, aimed towards a new kind of relationship between technology, environment and social ties, so as to make possible the creation of a future in which one can believe.

The papers collected in this issue of *Azimuth* match with these questions and problems, and provide a dynamic idea of such a battlefield. Indeed, although it is possible to highlight some common theoretical path, the perspectives and concepts that the authors of this issue bring with them are often at odds with each other, and rightly so, thereby providing an indication of the scope and the limits of the Anthropocene as an intellectual construct: such a concept will continue to disseminate its meaning and its sense only by transforming itself, by becoming other. In this vein, one could see in Javier Collado Ruano's paper, as a general philosophical insight into Anthropocenic issues, a mutual insight brought by the philosophy of science and the philosophy of nature to one another, which nevertheless already contains a set of ethical, ecological and epistemological purposes that perhaps will find alliances, complicities, or even enmities, in the following texts. Anaïs Nony's paper represents another way of addressing the issues raised by the Anthropocene, defining a new kind of power as the dismantling of cultural practices of solidarity, a power that short-circuits all meaningful relationalities. Fighting against such a power – which represents an empowerment of Deleuze's control society – thus means developing an ethics of care through which new relational practices can be cultivated, along with a social politics of investment. Sara Baranzoni analyses the Anthropocene as an epoch of the loss of confidence in the human-world linkage, where an 'apocalyptic reason' is leading humanity towards a general acosmism. Through a virtual dialogue between Whitehead, Musil, Neyrat and Stiegler,

¹² See B. Stiegler, *Éléments de néguanthropologie. Pour imaginer l'avenir des neurotechnologies*, conference text, Nijmegen (NL), February 1st, 2016.

Baranzoni attempts to draw a cosmological path on which several conceptual milestones are marked, from 'ends of the world' up to the possibility of a new concrescence between the human and the world.

Jason W. Moore's paper, which is the original version of a text to be published in Italian as the foreword of one of his books, is already a kind of warrior-text, because of its radical critique of the term Anthropocene and of its suggestion that what we are all living through today instead be named the Capitalocene. In some few pages Moore outlines a general theory of a 'world-ecology' whose goal is to demonstrate the deep ties between geology, labor and social relations as the very substance of capitalism. Another way to struggle within such a battlefield is suggested by Federico Luisetti, who attempts to deconstruct Latour's philosophy-theology of Nature, which underlies Gaia's image as the Leviathan of the Anthropocene. Luisetti's goal is, indeed, to show the rewesternization of Nature that operates in Latour, and by this exposure to decolonize his approach. In this sense, Paolo Vignola's paper, which focuses on the colonial dimension of every discourse on the Anthropocene, could be conceived as an indirect dialogue with the analysis of Luisetti. At the same time, the question raised by what Vignola calls the Trumpocene, as an update of the Capitalocene, links directly to the next group of papers.

Tom Cohen, Dan Ross, Gerald Moore and Bernard Stiegler's works share a particular care about the psychological, epistemological and technological side of such a full-late capitalistic event. Tom Cohen's paper is precisely a deep description of what the 'Trumpocene' could mean from several points of view, of which the fact of overwhelming the first period of debate on the Anthropocene represents the starting point. Dan Ross offers a way to read the Anthropocene between the lines of its scientific and environmental definition, promoting a critical discourse on protentional finitude as the only way we have to (fail to) think the end of the world. A second goal of the paper, intertwined with the issue of protention, consists in describing Stiegler's architectural conception of entropy, negentropy, neganthropy and neganthropology as a strategic way to create new cosmologies beyond the Anthropocene – that is, beyond the terroristic conception of contemporary apocalypticism. Through a discourse that crosses contemporary anthropology, French epistemology and philosophical politics, Gerald Moore suggests looking at the climate as an object of phenomenotechnical experience, and in this way analyses the manufacture of '*disattention*', distraction, eco-apathy or disavowal by media, governments and corporations, exacerbating epistemological uncertainty and provoking a loss of confidence in the organisation of knowledge. Confronted with this situation, Moore evokes the chance of

a pharmacological reversal, suggesting Interscience as a new social organization of tool-use through which to overcome the 'interpassive' relegation of experience. Interscience should thus move towards a new organization and redistribution of the sensible, that is, a democratisation of access to the prosthetic sensory apparatuses that condition both the horizons of experience and the production of knowledge.

We propose Bernard Stiegler's introduction to his forthcoming book, *Beyond the Anthropocene*, as the final text of the present issue. By describing a set of political, economical, psychological and epistemic troubles of our time, Stiegler offers an insight into another battlefield that lies behind the Anthropocene: the cosmological struggle of *différance* against entropy. On the one hand, Stiegler sketches a broad conceptual map of the entropic and anthropic issues connected with the Anthropocene, but, on the other hand, he indicates a way to re-orient the relationship between technics, episteme and human being, towards a micro- and macrocosmological economy fighting against the entropic results of a Capitalocene that has entered its Trumpist age.

SARA BARANZONI – PAOLO VIGNOLA
sara.baranzoni@uartes.edu.ec
paolo.vignola@uartes.edu.ec