Exhibiting the Anthropocene – and the Technosphere – means breaking away from established knowledge orders

Helmuth Trischler (Deutsches Museum and Rachel Carson Center)
Workshop „Anthropocenic Objects Collecting. Practices for the Age of Humans”
Museum für Naturkunde, April 14, 2021
Opening December 4, 2014, by Secretary General of UNEP, Achim Steiner, and Jan Zalasiewicz, Head of the Anthropocene Working Group

Running until September 30, 2016

Joint project of Deutsches Museum and Rachel Carson Center

1,400 qm² (≈ 15,000 square feet)

Architects/Designers:
Klaus Hollenbeck Architekten
and krafthaus, das Atelier von facts and fiction, Cologne
Challenges:

1) scope of the topic

2) openness and topicality of the Anthropocene concept

3) newness of the concept to visitors

4) trans-sectoral range of the exhibition
Do you know the term “Anthropocene”?

Visitor Survey, Deutsches Museum, August 2012

If not, what do you think it could mean?

Exemplary answers:

„bacteria or stratum“
„archaeology“
„new type of propulsive power“
„something medical“

Despite growing interest in certain communities, the term Anthropocene has been still largely unknown to the broader public.
The Anthropocene Exhibition

Six Selected Topics

- Urbanisation and Resources
- Mobility
- Human-Machine-Interaction
- Nature
- Food
- Evolution
... geological trace ...

... to showcase the geological dimension of the Anthropocene, i.e. the long-term effects of human actions creating a geological layer

... to tie back the selected phenomena to the Anthropocene hypothesis

... to surprise, fascinate and baffle the visitors
Was ernährt mich?
What feeds me?
Kernbotschaften der Ausstellung:

Der Mensch erschafft das Anthropozän!

Das Anthropozän ist da. Seine Auswirkungen sind global, langfristig und oftmals beschleunigt.

Der Mensch ist ein erdsystemischer Akteur.

Technik spielt eine prägende Rolle im Anthropozän.

Du bist anthropozän!


Wir gestalten die Zukunft der Erde durch unsere heutigen Entscheidungen.
BACK TO THE FUTURE

Computer der Zukunft könnten mit 1000 Vakuumröhren auskommen und nur 15 Sekunden benötigen. (John von Neumann)

Computers in the future may only have 1000 vacuum tubes and perhaps weigh only 1.5 tons. (John von Neumann)
I hope we see our impact on the world and the important role we all play in making it a better place to live.

Benjamin Grant
Epistemic Spiral: Exhibitions as Products and Generators of Scholarship – Sources of Input

• discussions with fellows at the Rachel Carson Center
• multiple workshops and conferences
• Anthropocene Campus
• debates with members of the Anthropocene working group
• participatory workshops with the public
• collaborative projects with partnering institutions worldwide (earthwide)
Epistemic Spiral: Exhibitions as Products and Generators of Scholarship – Outputs and Products


- *Environmental Futures*-project jointly with KTH Stockholm and University of Wisconsin-Madison ==> *Anthropocene Slam* and *Anthropocene: A Cabinet of Curiosities*-exhibition and book

- numerous publications, including the exhibition catalogue, but also per-reviewed articles

- innovative educational programs (graphic novel, lyrics festival)

- new strategic alliances (*Future Congress* with Federal Government, Club of Rome-lecture series, etc.)
Connecting the special exhibition with the permanent galleries through a graphic novel
Epistemic Spiral: Exhibitions as Products and Generators of Scholarship – New Ideas and Follow-up Projects

• Research group on Practicing Evidence - Evidencing Practice

• International Training Network ENHANCE and International Doctoral Program Re-thinking the Environment

• Numerous projects of RCC fellows on the Anthropocene

• Follow-up exhibition project on energy transitions at Deutsches Museum

• Munich Science Communication Lab on Planetary Health with Biotopia and Deutsches Museum as joint practice partners
Launched in 2015: *Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health*

Human health and the health of our planet are inextricably linked. Our civilization depends on human health, flourishing natural systems, and the wise stewardship of natural resources. With natural systems being degraded to an extent unprecedented in human history, both our health and that of our planet are in peril.

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*Munich Science Communication Lab on Planetary Health*
Lessons learned

- The Anthropocene concept stimulates both (great) interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.
- The Anthropocene asks for new narratives and new temporalities.
- The Anthropocene forces both academia and museums to leave their comfort zones and to critically reflect upon established concepts, practices, and institutional arrangements.
- In the framework of the Anthropocene boundaries – museum boundaries – become blurred, if not obsolete.
- The Anthropocene fosters inter-institutional collaborations.
- The public is not shying away from the complexity of the Anthropocene concept, if publics are addressed as responsible citizens.
- The Anthropocene can serve as a laboratory to experiment with new tools of communication and education in order to foster civic society and sustainability – or may even pave the way for a novel mode of knowledge production and communication, in other words: a new knowledge order.