



© FRAME NO. 29.2 NOVEMBER 2016|05–10

Foreword

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Gallus gallus domesticus, generally known as “the chicken,” is the most common domesticated bird in the world, with around sixty billion chickens slaughtered for human consumption every year. According to Jacob Bunge in a 2015 article in the *Wall Street Journal* (“Tastes Like Chicken: How to Satisfy the World’s Surging Appetite for Meat?”), this number is anticipated to rise exponentially with the expected growth in human population from 7,3 billion in 2015 to 9,7 billion by 2050. Bunge refers to UN statistics from 2015 stating that chicken will overtake pork as the world’s most consumed meat by 2020, and globally, poultry farmers and agricultural experts are working hard to meet this increasing demand in more healthy, sustainable, animal-friendly ways. The palatable little bird has received more empirical attention than normal in the past years, and a recent statement from the annual International Geological Congress in Cape Town establishes the chicken as one of the geological markers of the Anthropocene: the new-born geological age named after, not the chicken, but its consumer.

On 29 August 2016 *The Guardian* reported the official recommendation by a panel of experts in Cape Town (led by prof. Jan Zalasiewicz) that the start of a new geological age should be formally





declared (Carrington, “The Anthropocene epoch”). The Anthropocene, a term coined by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, refers to the geological period after the Holocene during which human (Greek: *anthropos*) influence on Earth’s geology and environment has become statistically significant in relation to other geological agents (Waters et al. 137). Scientists and experts have presented overwhelming data supporting the emergence of a new, human-marked age, of which the nuclear bomb tests of 1950 mark the beginning. Furthermore, key evidence for the arrival of the Anthropocene includes statistics of mass species extinction, global warming, plastic waste, fertiliser by-products (nitrogen and phosphorus), and a layer of (among others) black carbon from fossil fuel burning (Carrington, “The Anthropocene epoch”). More surprising, however, is the observable trace of chicken fossils in the Earth’s crust that makes Zalasiewicz and his Working Group on the Anthropocene argue that the chicken is one of the key indicators of the Anthropocene (Carrington, “How the domestic chicken”).

In the newly recognised context of the Anthropocene epoch, the chicken becomes a symbol not only of human consumption, but of human dominance and large-scale (ab)use of natural resources. The Anthropocene might sound like a shameless, megalomaniac self-appraisal of the human in the great span of planet Earth’s history, but in the Anthropocene discourse—and within the humanities in particular—the concept is often discussed in critical, satirical, or nearly humble terms. Since cultural historian Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote in 2008 that humans “now wield a geological force” (“The Climate of History” 206), the notion of the Anthropocene has gained traction in the humanities, and many contemporary theorists criticise the human-nature binary, and the typical subject-object hierarchy implied therein, through the lens of the Anthropocene condition. As Chakrabarty notes, “[t]he geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history” (212). In the recent *Shock of the Anthropocene* (2016), Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz accordingly write that “we find ourselves each day a bit more entangled in the immense feedback loops of the Earth system” (20-1), or as systems theorist Bruno Latour puts it in “Agency at the Time of the anthropocene”: “Through a complete reversal of Western



philosophy's most cherished trope, human societies have resigned themselves to playing the role of the dumb object, while nature has unexpectedly taken on that of the active subject!" (13).

Latour and many other current thinkers thus address the need for a radical shift in the way humans perceive the world: the roles of subject and object must be discarded, and an effort should be made to, in Latour's words, "*differentiate* agency in as far and in as *differentiated* a way as possible" (17). How do (or should) literature and literary research come into play in such a collective modification in thinking about the world? Can writers and readers imagine the consequences of, or solutions to, Anthropocenic problems of such massive temporal and spatial proportions when most people would struggle to imagine a scale much bigger than their own neighbourhood? From the perspectives of ecocriticism, posthumanism, and animal studies, facing issues like overpopulation, nuclear landscapes, apocalypticism, and what counts as "Life" in the Anthropocene, the discussion in the present issue of *Frame* contains genres ranging from literature, philosophy, and visual art, to literary criticism itself.

A renowned pioneer of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell opens *Frame* 29.2 with a paper that sets the stage for the Anthro(s)cene, critiquing what he perceives as a problematic unwillingness in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities in general to address the problem of overpopulation. While outlining the parameters of the current critical landscape around the Anthropocene, his "Anthropocene Panic: Contemporary Ecocriticism and the Issue of Human Numbers" furthermore challenges current ecocriticism to embrace its regained interdisciplinary potential and join the debate more actively and aggressively. Rosi Braidotti next turns the focus towards philosophy, her paper "Anthropos Redux: A Defence of Monism in the Anthropocene Epoch" arguing for a shift away from anthropocentrism and its inherent violent hierarchies, towards a more compassionate "relational ecology." Braidotti maintains that Spinozist monism (crudely put: the view that reality consists of one substance) may more than ever provide a helpful way of thinking about the Anthropocenic reality into which we find ourselves flung, because monism in essence promotes a politics of affirmation that explores and promotes, in



Braidotti's words, a "neo-material vital subjectivity ... that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of becoming."

In "Ironic Encounters in the Anthropocene: Jürgen Nefzger's Nuclear Landscape Photography" Anna Volkmar shows how visual art coupled with (satirical) documentary photography can aid us in thinking subjectivity in the Anthropocene from what she calls a "non-unitary position." Volkmar argues that visual irony has the potential to produce such a "non-unitary subject position" by analysing the irony in Nefzger's photography series not only as a satirical response to traditional landscape aesthetics, but also as a tool through which the viewer is asked to take on a relational position from which she can more productively consider predicaments of the Anthropocene. Ben de Bruyn thereafter turns to literature in "Learning to Be a Species in the Anthropocene: On Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*," reading Proulx's novel in terms of its critical take on humanity's status as a species in relation to the environment. Asking how contemporary literature approaches the current global crisis, De Bruyn argues that *Barkskins* promotes "species thinking" in the Anthropocene without overlooking questions of race, class, and gender, and thereby "enable[s] us to recalibrate our view of the novel and the human, and teach[es] us, not just to die as a civilisation, but to be a species."

Frame's interview with Cary Wolfe touches on Anthropocenic problems of terminology, issues with apocalypticism, the trouble of thinking on large scales, and the importance of (re)thinking ecology as a "dynamic and fluid process." Spanning topics from "Life" in the Anthropocene, to the value of art, to Heidegger's view on technology, the conversation culminates in Wolfe's critique of Heidegger's idea of "dwelling" as "too earthbound, ... too terrainian," returning to the consensus among contemporary (eco)critics about the need for a global collective mental shift away from anthropocentrism. In the "Masterclass" section, Eline Tabak compares and reviews two recent (2015) monographs on literature in the Anthropocene: *Ecocriticism on the Edge* by Timothy Clark and *Anthropocene Fictions* by Adam Trexler. Tabak's review presents two strong positions within contemporary ecocriticism, demonstrating how the debate around the Anthropocene





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concerns not only the human predicament as represented in literature and art, but also the development of an entire field of literary criticism.

All articles in “Perspectives on the Anthropocene” problematise the position of the human in the greater scope of planet Earth’s past, present, and future. The arrival of the Anthropocene forces human attention towards a number of large-scale questions and concerns—and transforms seemingly small-scale decisions, like eating a chicken salad, to geologically traceable, ethically loaded acts. It encourages critical thinking and demands interdisciplinary collaboration across cultural, political, economic, social, and ideological borders. How does an ever-increasing human population measure up to the challenges posed by abstract, hard-to-grasp Anthropocene issues such as climate change, mass species extinction, fossil fuel waste, deforestation, globally divergent energy footprints, and animal welfare—coupled with the inevitable, looming backdrop of apocalypse? Leaving the reader to ponder onwards along these lines, aided—or challenged further—by the arguments of our excellent contributors, I have little doubt that this issue will both encourage and provoke, soothe and antagonise, tickle and itch. It is, I think, the providence of the Anthropocene to infuse my chicken salad with a slight, bracing after-taste of *planet*.





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