

Grégory Quenet

The Anthropocene and the Time of Historians

The notion of the Anthropocene has arrived so rapidly on the political and academic scene that it is sometimes difficult to orient oneself amid the mass of publications and events, or even to situate the different arguments presented. This article proposes to take a step back by examining the effects of this concept on historians' notion of time. In the absence of a sociological and intellectual study providing a precise map of the actors and places involved, a genealogical approach can reveal a certain number of conceptual displacements that have occurred since the idea was first proposed. In particular, the passage from geological time to historical time has transformed the nature of the Anthropocene as event. Furthermore, the response of the humanities and social sciences has been critical, revealing the tension between the Anthropocene as a label and forum for discussion, and the Anthropocene as an analytical frame applied to empirical studies. Finally, while applying the notion of period to the Anthropocene poses a certain number of difficulties (teleology, the return to a Western-centered vision of the global, the synchronization of history, etc.), the pluralization of thresholds and temporal breaks appears to enrich the writing of history, opening up new avenues of research receptive to materiality and to non-human actors.

Pierre Charbonnier

A Genealogy of the Anthropocene: The End of Risk and Limits

This article aims to shed light on the emergence of the Anthropocene as a concept within the social sciences and philosophy. It frames this evolution in the wider context of a crisis of knowledge, confronted with the need to consider global climate change as both an empirical ground and an inescapable political horizon. The central hypothesis is that the organization of knowledge concerning the relationships between modernity and nature has undergone a profound shift over the last decade, necessitating a reconfiguration of the two main concepts on which this knowledge relied: risk and limits. To consider the present situation through the concept of the Anthropocene is to imply that the rationality of risk (i.e., the suspension of modern political autonomy) and the notion of a fundamental limit to material development can no longer be considered separately. In the final part of the article, this hypothesis makes it possible to discuss some aspects of our current epistemological configuration.

Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin Waters, and Mark Williams
 City-Strata of the Anthropocene

The fabric of a city represents a transformation of raw geological materials into a complex assemblage of new, human-made minerals and rocks such as steel, glass, plastics, concrete, brick, and ceramics. This activity has been considered in terms of an “urban metabolism,” with day-to-day inflows and outflows of people, food, water, and waste materials. Here we adopt a longer time-scale spanning years to millennia, related to geological time-scales but still meaningful for present and future generations of humans, and consider cities as sedimentary systems. In natural sedimentary systems, flows of materials are governed by natural forces such as climate and gravity, and leave physical records in, for instance, river-strata. In cities, the flows of geological materials needed for construction and reconstruction are directed by humans, and are largely powered by the fossil energy stored in hydrocarbons rather than by gravity or the sun. The resultant assemblages of anthropogenic rocks and minerals may be thought of as sedimentary (and/or trace-fossil) systems that can undergo fossilization and now exist on a planetary scale. Far more diverse than natural geological strata, they are also evolving much more rapidly, not least in terms of their growing waste products. Considering cities through such a perspective may become increasingly useful as they come to be influenced by, and need to adapt to, the changing conditions of the emerging Anthropocene epoch.

Bruno Karsenti
 Political Ecology and Modern Politics

The increasingly pressing need to politicize ecology depends on our capacity to conduct a critique of modern politics, reexamining its fundamental concepts and its history. This thesis, developed in Bruno Latour’s most recent book, *Facing Gaia*, raises the question of what kind of critique is best adapted to this end. This article seeks to address this question by tracing the arguments of *Facing Gaia* and its recomposition of the relations between science, politics, and religion. These relations, which are constitutive of the experience of modernity, appear differently depending on the conception of collectives that one emphasizes and how one understands their anchoring in their environment. Unlike Latour, this essay argues that it is within the framework of *modern societies*, understood as an entirely new kind of collective whose history has been distorted and ignored by modernist ideology, that a conception of a specifically ecological justice must be formulated. The critique that is necessary to the politicization of ecology implies a new way of determining the actors involved in the environmental crisis, breaking the particular ties that modernity has forged between societies, the forms of self-awareness they produce as they develop, and the expectations of justice that result from them.

Nadia Matringe
 The Fair Deposit: Credit Reallocation and Trade Finance in the Early Modern Period

Based on the private records of a prominent sixteenth-century merchant bank (Salviati of Lyon), this article focuses on an important instrument of trade finance in the early modern

period: the fair deposit. While the financial history of deposit banking has often been separated from that of merchant banking, this study demonstrates that during the sixteenth century a specific type of deposit banking emerged at fairs, intrinsically connected to merchant banking and international trade. As analysis of the Salviati archives reveals, the fair deposit was an instrument of both clearing and credit, sustaining the financing of large-scale European trade. Credit mostly derived from international trade and banking, where it was reinjected almost immediately. Investments were stimulated by the numerous advantages offered by the fairs held at Lyon: licit lending at interest, a choice of investments, and the possibility of making purchases and rapid transfers. Loans to local and foreign businessmen nourished the trade of commodities and, above all, the exchange business, conferring on Lyon a crucial position in the European trade and exchange system. This form of deposit banking was closely related to the development of merchant banks that worked mostly on commission, drawing substantial profits from it without becoming specialists or even deposit banks.

**Arnaud Bartolomei, Matthieu de Oliveira, Fabien Eloire,
Claire Lemerrier, and Nadège Sougy**

The Embeddedness of Inter-Merchant Relations in France (1750–1850): A Revolution in the World of Commerce?

The grand narratives of modernization often describe the period between 1750 and 1850 as marking a transition from embedded economic relationships (relying on kinship or community ties) to impersonal market transactions supported by legal arrangements. This article questions these narratives by studying three corpora of tools employed by early modern and modern merchants on a daily basis: initial-contact letters, circulars, and notarized proxy forms. Systematic quantitative and qualitative analysis of these documents reveals few traces of a revolution or even a consistent linear evolution. To the contrary, it challenges the opposition between embedded and completely disembedded relationships. Indeed, there is strong evidence that personal and impersonal supports for economic transactions complemented rather than substituted one another. In addition, other types of embeddedness also played an important role: on the one hand, repeated interactions and relational chains involving intermediaries; on the other, a homophilic sociability among merchants that was partly based on the shared language of commerce.