Solvejg Nitzke
Technische Universität Dresden, Germany
Solvejg.Nitzke@rub.de

Gregg Mitman, Marco Armiero, and Robert S. Emmett, eds., *Future Remains. A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225pp.

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The Anthropocene rests on an inherent and, by now, well-known paradox. On the one hand, it refers to the historical moment in which the concept of the human species as a geomorphic force is about to be ratified by the announcement of a new geological age. At the same time, it is a moment in which 'humanity' has to grapple with the facts that 'it' is neither as clearly defined nor as in control as the concept might suggest. One can subscribe to the notion that it is time to acknowledge the anthropogenic shape of the entire Earth-System, or else regard "the Anthropocene [as] a Joke" (Brannen n.p.). In either case, to observe, discuss, and conceptualize the Anthropocene, consequently, means to shape it, literally and figuratively.

Future Remains reacts to this by presenting a collection of "object stories" in order to spark curiosity, "make visible the uneven interplay of economic, material, and social forces that shape the relationship among human and nonhuman beings" (x), and explore the Anthropocene as a "narrative about space, as well as time." This notion is quickly challenged by the first essay, Rob Nixon's "The Anthropocene. The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea" (1-18). After looking at the "interdisciplinary energy" on which much of the appeal of the concept rests, Nixon takes up the task of challenging the "hasty universalism" of the Anthropocene "that masks the connection between our conjoined crises—between accelerating environmental devastation and rising inequality" (11). Thus pointing out the fact that conceptualizing the Anthropocene as a "narrative" tends to overshadow the economic and material consequences of the entanglement of crises in this 'epochal idea'. Herein lies a great strength of this volume: The intriguing concept of presenting objects and making their (hi)stories comprehensible runs danger to illustrate the crises all too beautifully and thereby forgetting the actual danger posed by the Anthropocene. Nixon's as well as essays by Gregg Mitman ("Hubris or Humility? Genealogies of the Anthropocene" 59-68), Laura Pulido ("Racism and the Anthropocene" 116-128), and Marco Armiero ("Sabotaging the Anthropocene; or, In Praise of Mutiny" 129-139) frame the object stories with challenges of the concept that brought them together in the first place. This is a strength, not because it contrasts "the whimsy, wonder, and the unexpected" (165) with more conventional seriousness, but because the collection performs the inherent contradictions of the Anthropocene and refuses simplistic or sentimental assessments. The future perfect position of the collection—imagining a future from which to look

back on the present as the past—thus, avoids the reduction of possibilities in favor of a multitude of voices. Within this frame the object stories enfold the particular force of different approaches and styles, spanning the academic and the artistic.

The collection is divided into four parts: Hubris, Living and Dying, Laboring, and Making, covering objects ranging from, among others, a glass of sand from Wrightsville Beach ("The Anthropocene in a Jar", Thomas Matza and Nicole Heller, 21-28), a "Technofossil" (Jared Farmer, 191-199), human imitations of birdsong (Julianne Lutz Warren, "Huia Echoes", 71-80) and the "Cryogenic Freezer Box" (Elizabeth Hennessy, 108-115). These stories are connected by the attempt to follow and track—much like the "Marine Animal Satellite Tags" (Nils Hanwahr, 89-98)—the objects in focus and connect them to, or rather, unveil their connections to the Anthropocene. That is, their anthropogenic nature is pitted against a supposedly natural existence, as in case of the sand on the beach which is piled up both by the tides and the ships "dump[ing] millions of cubic yards of sand and shell every four years" (23). In a similar vein, Warren's exploration of a recording of the song of an extinct bird imitated by a Maori voice intently nests media and (re)mediation practices within natural and cultural forms of competition, environmental and historical pressure. This demonstrates how the Anthropocene calls for a 'parallax view', one that is able to always already view things as both 'natural', that is, not made by humans, and 'unnatural' that is heavily influenced by humans. This technique is brought to a climax in "Concretes Speak: A Play in One Act" (Rachel Harkness, Cristián Simonetti, and Judith Winter, 29-39), in which a choir representing concrete addresses the human species, and enlightens them about their service and effect on people and planet. This is what one of the editors, Robert S. Emmett, might in his own essay on "Anthropocene Aesthetics" (159-165) call "the whimsy." Although there is some lightheartedness to it, this serves a clear and somber purpose: Many of the texts serve either as agents of estrangement in a Brechtian sense or present to the reader a kind of "mirror test" (Sörlin, 169-181), asking not only whether "Anthropocene" is an appropriate concept to describe our current epoch, a question all too often dominated by the wish and fear, respectively, to be part of an age that will go down in (geological) history.

Future Remains, however, explores the ways in which scholarship and art can come together to experiment with the consequences of thinking the oxymoronic power and powerlessness of humans entailed by the implications of an age of humans. It is able to both eulogize and mock the losses and aspirations that the anthropogenic illusion of control has brought about the planet. It is a book that in many ways fulfills its aim to collect and present a cabinet of curiosities. Thus, it cannot and should not be held to the rigorous expectations one might direct at a scholarly collection. Rather, it should be read as an invitation to start collecting by asking objects for their stories, their specific entanglements with humans and nature and, hence, to contribute object stories to this *Wunderkammer* in the hope that it is more alive than it might seem at first glance.

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Works Cited

Peter Brannen. "The Anthropocene is a Joke: On geological Timescales, Human Civilization is an Event, not an Epoch." *The Atlantic*. 13 August 2019.

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