

## ANTHROPOLIS

I've often been asked how I'd like follow up *Anthropocene* - so here's my answer.... *Anthropolis!*

We now have a name for the *time* we live in - the Anthropocene, a geological epoch created more by humanity than Nature – so what should we call the *place* we've created, our synthetic planet? Is it possible Planet Earth doesn't quite hack it anymore? After all Planet Earth is largely blue, and water won't be preserved in the Anthropocene rock layer. My modest proposal is we now call the global warren we're creating here on the edge of the Milky Way... *Anthropolis.*

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I like the word and hope you do too - it's the obvious complement to the *Anthropocene.*

Like 'Anthropocene', it has a slightly romantic yet pre-apocalyptic J.G. Ballard ring. As with many of the SF novelist's eerie artificial landscapes, it evokes an ambivalence shimmering between dystopia and utopia. And just as the import of its Mother Word is still being contested – even members of the official Anthropocene Working Group disagreeing whether the story is tragic, comic, or plain surreal – so the meaning of 'Anthropolis' can be usefully debated as we try and decide where the Hell humanity is headed right now.

Anthropolis may yet be the nightmare of Alphaville, the SF city where private dick Lemmy Caution lands up in Godard's eponymous '65 classic. And yet our future home could also be like Angouleme City, Lemmy's cosmic dreamhome. Or maybe something borderline like the film's mysterious Nueva York or Tokyorama. In fact a decent cinematographer could create Anthropolis from the urban landscapes already around us, just as Godard shot Alphaville in Paris's once futuristic *quartier* La Defense. Because we're living in the early years of Anthropolis... our World City... already.

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We've long come to accept, thanks to urban geographers like the Netherland's Saskia Sassen, that the global economy is being waltzed into the

future by a cluster of vast digitally interlinked metropolises.... not just *megacities* but *global cities* as she said in 1991's *The Global City*. Or *world cities* as we now like to say. We also know many of our cities are forming regional clusters. It's not much of a leap to suggest these world cities and urban regions... Rine-Ruhr, Greater London, Tokyo-Yokohama, the Bay Area *et al...* will effectively soon form a single World City... *Anthropolis*...

Whether it's the internet, Big Tech, globalized supply chains, or the Network Society – a term also coined in the Netherlands, in 1991, by sociologist Jan van Dijk - there's no shortage of evidence our urban civilization is crystallizing into a single vast metropolis. I will *pro tem* consign objectors to the dustbin of history - where their home may contain the species mostly likely to survive us if we get it wrong - but will return to them in a moment.

Of course no planner has actually decided to construct Anthropolis, but then nobody decided to live in Sassen's global cities... or indeed *any* cities. As far as I know, the mass migration of humanity to urban zones was never part of any government platform – with a slight caveat here for the Chinese – or any party manifesto, or any mad dictator's dreams. And yet according to the UN's World Urbanization Prospects report, 30% of the world's population was urban in 1950, 54% in 2014, and a projected 68% by 2050. That's two thirds of us living in cities by the time a child born today is 32. I don't think it's too far-fetched to suggest we give a name to our common home, because nobody who's in charge right now is going to do it for us. And I'd also suggest the foundation of Anthropolis will be when our DNA-inspired desire to live in a single network finally goes critical, exponential, and reaches a kind of urban singularity.

And the purpose of usurping the term Planet Earth or its linguistic and cultural aliases? It would make us stop and think about what we're doing... just as the Mother Word Anthropocene has done for more people across the world than even Paul Crutzen ever imagined. And note we don't have to replace the old term Planet Earth entirely, since it still remains host to Anthropolis. We just have to accept that's where we're mostly living together. Once we've done that we can work out which species we're happy to share with, on whose terms, and where the others should hang out and be safe from us – although maybe not from each other – in what was once called Nature.

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It's now over a decade since the inspirational paper in *Ambio*, the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences Journal, by Crutzen, McNeill and Steffen really fuelled the Anthropocene debate. *The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature* (2007) formalized Crutzen's ad hoc suggestion, and kickstarted an inquiry by the International Stratigraphy Commission into whether to formally declare a new geological epoch.

That process is now under way, and while the ISC's Anthropocene Working Group is recommending positively, the geology remains moot. But as AWG member Andrew Revkin has suggested, it's the *metaphorical* force of the word that's fuelled its brushfire expansion across different disciplines. Recent requests for screenings of our film *Anthropocene*, for example, have come from a literature faculty in Shanghai, a humanities conference in Hong Kong, a planning faculty in New Zealand, and an ethics conference in Indiana. There are now Anthropocene clusters, conferences, courses and two Anthropocene journals. I think there's plenty of evidence the concept is starting to alter the drift of most of the intellectual chores our species has set itself.

And the Anthropocene insight that we are dislodging the grip of Nature, without really fessing up that's our intention, doesn't just interweave academic so many disciplines. The Anthropocene conceived as *narrative* also raises the question of whether our story is a tragedy, a comedy, or something more surreal.

After all the Anthropocene is pretty much what Rachel Carson, author of 1962's *Silent Spring* feared lay behind the DDT scare. This was the disastrous reshuffling by humanity of the Periodic Table to create a largely synthetic environment. And yet that's also precisely the goal that her undeclared nemesis, the leaded petrol and CFC inventor Thomas Midgley, wanted to achieve.

Leafing through his published works in the UK's Imperial College, I learnt Midgley thought artificial grass was *ipso facto* better for golf courses *just because it was artificial*. In other words a synthetic environment can be celebrated for its very artifice (stop calling the Manhattan skyline beautiful and romantic if you disagree) just as much as it can be abhorred for its ruination of Nature. Personally, looking down on Rio from Corcovado... the samba music wafting over the lagoon, and yet the concrete below like the extrusion of giant termites... I've had both visions of wonderful artifice and planetary ruin

simultaneously. What's so useful about our two A words is they accommodate both these competing visions without calling the shots between them.

And yet embedded within both neologisms is the notion that it is now time to call the shots...

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In our film, Andrew Revkin describes humanity's recognition of the Anthropocene as our "mirror moment", a time of self-recognition for our species. Revkin's not alone in dating this moment to the 1968 release by NASA of the famous Earthrise photo, snapped by the Apollo 8 astronauts. Environmental scientist Erle Ellis agrees, proposing we've woken up behind the wheel of a car running down a highway "and now it's our turn to drive." My own contention is the highway is signposted *Anthropolis*...

Like other Working Group members, Revkin hopes the neologism could help different disciplines further define our "mirror moment". But Guatemalan anthropologist Monica Berger Gonzalez – the only voice in our film not from the Working Group - goes even further. Dr Berger agrees the Anthropocene can become a *common narrative* in which divisions that will rightly survive the term's adoption – race, gender, class – could nonetheless seem "a bit secondary" as we reconsider our destiny collectively *as a species*.

If Dr Berger is right that recognizing the *Anthropocene* could help determine a shared future, could *Anthropolis* Studies help?

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Anthropolis Studies could build on what's already happening. We don't have to believe in World Government, for example, to recognize we're light on a framework for organizing Big Tech, supply chains, disease control and other Anthropolis networks. Parag Khanna has already taken a stab at mapping global trade and communications flows in *Connectography* (2016), thereby starting to map Anthropocene without yet naming it. And while I missed the last couple of World Urban Forums, I now realize from chairing workshops in Barcelona, Vancouver, Nanjing and Rio between 2004 and 2010, the notion of Anthropolis was like an unfurled backdrop on every platform.

Just today I read that the IMF has noticed property prices in world cities may be co-ordinating into a single network of value. Meantime networks of "smart cities", D.C.-defying U.S "sanctuary cities" and global mayors'

movements could all be seen as models for Anthropolis governance. Algorithm-monitored smart cities could ultimately organize themselves into *Algopolis* or *AI-opolis* that could be as remote from human as Nature once was... better our species map and define our destination first... *Anthropolis*.

We could even build on the work of Dutch (what is it with these guys) biologist Menno Schilthuize by studying how Anthropolitans (Anthropolites? Antrhopolistas?) are already evolving in their own *sui generis* way, just like urban foxes or Central Park's white-footed mice are. (I do have an email from the USA's Working Party member Anthony Barnosky to thank for prompting this one). It's been suggested Anthropolis is a little too built around the Greek idea of the city as *polis* to be a truly cosmopolitan term. That's maybe true though I would argue it's more reminiscent of Science Fiction than political science discourse. But a fully worked-out Anthropocene Manifesto could certainly jettison some of the Western baggage of these terms by evoking aspects of say 17<sup>th</sup> century Benin City as a planning model... I'm just riffing here but you take the idea.

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Of course I'm not advocating (at least not without support!) we sign up as citizens of Anthropolis, merely that we recognize that's where we're heading. And of course there will be plenty who hate the idea of most folks living in a single world city. If a citizen of the World is a citizen of Nowhere, as UK PM Theresa May would have it, God knows what *she'd* call a citizen of Anthropolis. And in fact a revanchist backlash to the underlying phenomenon is upon us already - plain sight enemies of Anthropolis include anti-globalists, Trumpists, Brexiteers, jihadists, nativists, and those trying to divide us into Anywhere and Somewhere types. Indeed I don't think it's too far-fetched to suggest we're witnessing not just a backlash against globalization but an Onslaught against Anthropolis.

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Now at the risk of bathos let me tell you about the Damascene Moment when I realized I was already there, already in Anthropolis...

I was looking around the Mission Coffee Company cafe in Columbus Ohio three weeks before the Trump election -- the walls distressed brick, the

sofas faded pastels, the *baristas* Persons with Beards, the light bulbs Edison, the cups porcelain, the computers Macs, the customers clearly Citizens of the World. It's not true that I could have been in UK writer's David Goodhart's Anywhere - I was a very particular Somewhere that was uncannily like the last cafes I'd visited in Toronto and London.

I'd half-jokingly told my host at the English Faculty, who had asked me over to talk about Anthropocene, that I like to lunch in hipster cafes in my travels. I'd once written a book called *Café Society* tracing Enlightenment culture through coffee-houses and cafes and still feel more at home amidst flat whites than flat beers. My host quipped that I obviously like to spend time in... *AirSpace*.

I didn't know the term but thought it sounded cool. Turned out *AirSpace* had been coined as a critique of the "sterile harmonization" of supposedly hipster tastes emanating from Silicon Valley. This was the writer Kyle Chayka in *The Verge* in 2016. But rather than letting the term become weaponized in that most bitterly fought skirmish in the Onslaught against Anthropolis, namely the War against Hipsters, I reckon Mr Chayka's clever neologism can be reclaimed.

The extraordinary thing about *AirSpace*, ventured my host, is that it's clearly branded – not by an agency, a corporation, or a design studio *but spontaneously by its own scattered denizens*. And those denizens are mutually connected – across both time and space - by all those Macs. Like Anthropolis, nobody had proposed, recognized or even celebrated the coming of *AirSpace* – but here it surely was. And so my coda is *AirSpace is the frontier of Anthropolis*.

Hence my modest proposal of renaming our cosmic address *Anthropolis*, *Planet Earth*, *Milky Way*, *Orion Arm*, *Virgo Supercluster*. Of course we Anthropolitans should also still use our more conventional addresses, since we'll surely be needing them a while, even as Anthropolis coheres remorselessly around us. Unless of course we are about to tip the dustbin of history right over and let the rats and cockroaches run Planet Earth instead.

Steve Bradshaw 24 June 2018

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