


**Sklair, Leslie ed. (2021). *The Anthropocene in Global Media: Neutralizing the Risk*.
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A systematic overview study shows how the concept of Anthropocene is reflected in the mass media in a global context, including the perception of the problem of global climate change and the way the media represents this problem. As for the title of the publication, it indicates the fact that the media interpret the Anthropocene in optimistic colours as a “good” Anthropocene. This might sound quite strange, because when it comes to global climate change news, media reports are usually full of negative information. This contradiction, which common sense draws our attention to, indicates that it is, nevertheless, necessary to clarify the meaning of the term Anthropocene.

The book was based on “The Anthropocene Media Project” (AMP) and much of the data in this book were provided by volunteer researchers from this project. Summarizing the current state of research on how climate change is reflected in the media around the world, Sklair points out that so far the Anthropocene itself has been little mentioned in the media. The Anthropocene is still a rather unknown term to the public, so it is essential to clarify the nuances of significance between the terms “global climate change” (climate and its impact on all ecosystems in an incorruptible circle of action and reaction) and “the Anthropocene” (a more holistic term that is associated directly with *human behaviour*). It is precisely this greater emphasis on human behaviour that is of fundamental importance for the possibilities not only of understanding, but also of coping with the critical historical situation in which we are currently living.

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This book may serve just as well as a resource for comparing how the media deal with the topic and how the issue is reflected by experts. This clash of perspectives proves to be problematic because the term “Anthropocene” has not been satisfactorily, publicly, disambiguated. Naturally, an explanation of how the idea of the Anthropocene was formed in history will also contribute to the elimination of this obscurity.

For decades, if not more than a hundred years, scholars have been drawing attention to the fatal consequences that climate change has on the possible future of life on the planet. At least since 1979 various international climate agreements were concluded and still – the pollution and warming curves on the charts are growing. Although scientists not only draw attention, but also propose various solutions, which, however, need to be global in nature.

But the whole thing is so complex that it resembles the well-known play Jenga. In my opinion, in order to be able to successfully activate people globally, first of all, it will be necessary to arrange social reconciliation across nations so that the social and economic impacts associated with the transformation of the global economy are evenly distributed... but apparently there is no will to achieve such a state: look at the situation within the EU.

If the results of the research in this book are carried out consistently, taking into account the various cultural specificities, to say nothing of the “mentality” of the mass media in areas of the world, then this book is fundamental just for the reason that we get, at least, an approximate, overall picture of the degree of comprehension of the impact of human activity on the ecosystem. The media, as a formative agent of the subconscious, actually show the (im)possibilities of perceiving our integral connectedness to, and inseparability from the world, at the fundamental level of the ordinary citizen, to the so-called elite that owns most of the global capital.

However, the question is whether the media itself can be perceived as a separate, independent field. Not likely – they are mostly subject to a specific political atmosphere, and economic imperative. There is, also, no need to be deluded about the funding of science by the certain interested parties that very often finance the media as well. In this book, on the other hand, the authors are not concerned with blaming, but rather with pointing out that the Anthropocene itself throws us all into a number of almost insoluble dilemmas, caused by *our* (conscious or unconscious) choices. Other alternatives to the Anthropocene appear – Capitalocene, Technocene, etc. It is thus essential that environmental scientists and philosophers finally come to *the question of capitalism and ecological justice* (which have only, relatively recently, in the last 5 years, become considerations).

The first scientific studies of the Anthropocene began to appear shortly after 2000. The media always find it difficult to process serious scientific knowledge without turning it into something instant and easily digestible. The

contradiction between the nature of science and the media is that while science (wants to be) based on openness to uncertainty, the media (if only because of their mission, but also their deep connection with politics) want to present accounts as, more or less, clearly established “facts”. Rather, people are looking at the media for information about how things *are* in the world. Few have the time (due to the busy procurement of basic needs) to build this “big picture” on the basis of a thorough study of scientific accounts. The problem is thus the ability to think critically at all, and therefore – the philosophy of education, which is mostly subordinated to the market; the inequitable distribution of the instruments required to access data relating to this scientific domain, which is precisely why, ideologically, climate change has ascended to the prominence it has, for elites who must justify interfering with resource distributions.

In the book, the authors set out 3 main research questions: 1. the probability of a common reader encountering the term Anthropocene, 2. the way of reporting the Anthropocene in different types of media, 3. placing Anthropocene issues in a local / national context. The book is full of notes and a rich bibliography, the countries are divided into 9 geographical regions, and overview tables are also helpful to the reader. It is divided into three parts and containing a total of 14 chapters.

In the first part, we find an overview of the results of the project as a whole; it also shows the frequency of the term in the media over the years, which is not at all high; the lead author admits possible shortcomings in the research and emphasizes that the results could be quite different if social media were also examined. In this study, the researchers focused on media whose articles, and reports, were freely available and reliable (so is it possible that there are more Anthropocene articles behind paywalls?). The instability of internet sites, their fleeting validity is shown by the fact that the research results are *very approximate*. It turns out that in the 17 years since the appearance of the term Anthropocene in public discourse, the term has become most established in North America, Western Europe and Central/Eastern Europe. If we want to be critical, we might argue that, once again, the so-called Global North, with an emphasis on Europe and USA, investigates the behaviour of humanity as such and acts to rescue humanity, symbolically at least.

The collective of authors does not shy away from defining the narratives in which the term Anthropocene appears – this has to do with the problem of allocating environmental responsibility (and therefore social justice). This examination of narratives also represents the interpretation of the meaningfulness of the Anthropocene concept in general. The latter represent the possibilities of *neutral*, *positive* and *pessimistic (radical) interpretations*, and their possible combinations, which are described in more detail in the book.

Which of these narratives prevails actually influences people's perception of the whole complex of environmental, social and economic problems that the

global climate crisis brings with it. At the same time, this research provides an approximate view of people's attitude to specific actions, or even their willingness to perceive the Anthropocene as a call to changes in lifestyle and in the running the so-called civilized modern society. Here, however, it is necessary to pay attention to the limitedness of the level of popularisation of the term Anthropocene, which in 20 years, is still not widely known – and yet it is here a criterion on the basis of which certain (theoretical-practical) conclusions are to be drawn.

The second part presents the results of research within nine individual regions of the world. In these specific regions, the historical-social, or economic context is taken into account. Very interesting is the connection of narratives to art. For the reader, the results of research within the countries that are the largest producers of pollution (China, North America) will certainly be important.

Within the framework of individual chapters, the dynamics of the processes of formation of a neutral or slightly positive narrative of the Anthropocene is shown, while in Western Europe, more space is given to the issue of scientists' disputes than to emphasizing the seriousness of the Anthropocene in the context of human survival. It seems that it is these neutralizing tendencies that do not allow the concept of the Anthropocene to come to political awareness. Either it will take a few more years (and the worsening of the situation), or the need for global social reconciliation will *finally* be taken seriously, as a pre-preparation for conscious political engagement. Unfortunately, despite the activity of scientists, the popularisation of topics related to climate change, between the lines of any climate agreements noises: «(...) "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (...)». (p. 183)

In the third part, the book presents a shift from the concept of Anthropocene to *Anthropo-scene*. The authors represent the result of research into how *humanities scientists* reflect the Anthropocene. Indeed, it is linked to the age-old question: What is man? It is equally remarkable that scientists, with their theories and research, also receive space in the media. However, popularisation often leads to distortions and misinterpretations or over-simplifications (for example, identifying climate change with the Anthropocene; overlooking the fact that the very concept of the Anthropocene is strongly Eurocentric; the media avoid the history of colonialism, etc.), whereby the understanding of the very concept of the Anthropocene loses its dynamism and complexity, which is nevertheless a precondition for its social and political engagement.

Finally, the book draws attention to the need to talk about the Anthropocene, but not in a neutralizing tone, as it sounds in the media, because it is about a lot – about another extinction of a species on our planet: *our extinction*. The Anthropocene must not be just "one of many" concepts. It is necessary to take it "*vitally seriously*" according to this book. However, there is

no need to create illusions... Again, without an initial social reconciliation on a global scale, there will be no voluntary practical reflection on the need for changes in behaviour and in relation to the world in general. Even if it means that 2/3 of humanity will become extinct. This could be ensured by those who do not intend to give up their majority stake in global capital.

The Anthropocene is a symbol of our time – a symbol that, more than any other, calls not only for interdisciplinarity, but also for interdependence, universality, respectively, cosmo-logic in our lives. Likewise, the conclusion of the book points out that the essential moment that seems to decide whether to take this call to sobriety seriously is the problem of education, of education that respects our inseparability from the world. It would also be good to *hope* that this entire Anthropocene-movement is sufficiently aware of its own incorporation into a network of legitimization of very particular power and economic patterns. If it really could be *more* than just a newly built academic space, usually serving only to build an academic career, it would be exceptional. Thanks to an “innate” appeal to interdisciplinarity and sharp awareness of the significance of human behaviour, this new area of the Humanities has a chance to become socially and politically engaged. However – it will be extremely necessary to critically clarify the functioning of legitimizing power processes *within* educational institutions.