

A Non-Conventional Encyclopedia on the Anthropocene: Dissecting a Concept from Philosophy to Poetry

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Abstract:

Connectedness: An Incomplete Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene, edited by Marianne Krogh, offers an engaging journey through the many facets of the concept of the Anthropocene by presenting an original selection of almost a hundred keywords regarding it. Through the voices of relevant contemporary personalities, including A-list scholars, artists and architects, this non-conventional encyclopedia pursues a pluralistic standpoint – both in its organization and its contents – which establishes it as a useful tool for navigating the complexities of current ecological crises.

Eine unkonventionelle Enzyklopädie zum Anthropozän: Die Sezierung eines Konzepts von Philosophie bis Poesie

German Abstract:

Connectedness: An Incomplete Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene, herausgegeben von Marianne Krogh, stellt durch eine originelle Auswahl von fast einhundert Schlüsselwörtern eine fesselnde Reise durch die vielen Facetten des Konzepts des Anthropozän dar. Durch die Stimmen von relevanten zeitgenössischen Persönlichkeiten, herausragenden Wissenschaftler_innen, Künstler_innen und Architekt_innen, verfolgt diese unkonventionelle Enzyklopädie einen pluralistischen Standpunkt – sowohl im Aufbau als auch Inhalt – was sie als nützliches Werkzeug zur Navigation durch die Komplexitäten aktueller ökologischer Krisen etabliert.

How to cite:

Rozzoni, Stefano: "A Non-Conventional Encyclopedia on the Anthropocene: Dissecting a Concept from Philosophy to Poetry [Review of: Krogh, Marianne (ed.). *Connectedness. An Incomplete Encyclopedia of Anthropocene*. Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2020.]." In: *KULT_online* 63 (2021).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2021.1075>



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Krogh, Marianne (ed.). *Connectedness. An Incomplete Encyclopedia of Anthropocene*. Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2020. 416 pages, 349,95 DKK. ISBN: 978-87-93604-86-5.

While the Anthropocene has become a well-established concept for discussing present-day environmental emergencies, *Connectedness: An Incomplete Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene* reminds us of the importance of unravelling its many facets and the complexity that this term addresses. That is the idea behind this ambitious edited volume, which offers almost one hundred keywords for analyzing the era in which humans have become the major cause of biospherical alterations on planet Earth. A diversified selection of scholars and today's public personas who lead contemporary ecological discourses, such as philosophers Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, ecocritics Timothy Morton and Bill McKibben, activist Greta Thunberg, and even polyhedric artist Björk, lent their voices to this unconventional book, which is partly a glossary and a scholarly sketchbook. By assembling short essays and contributions in other formats, such as poems and interviews, this book takes a step ahead in underlining that the Anthropocene is not *one*, but *many*, and that these versions are all bound together.

Reviving the idea of an encyclopedia – the epitome of humanistic rationalism – during the 'posthuman turn' may appear to be contradictory. However, the editor Marianne Krogh revisits the assumptions of this Enlightenment-era format through a creative, post-anthropocentric, and stylish outlook, due to her background in architecture: thus, practicality and aesthetics merge in a variety of inventive textual arrangements, which ensure an engaging reading experience. Moreover, by avoiding any attempts to provide a univocal, absolute picture of the Anthropocene, Krogh responds to the idea that "the modern world is highly specialized, divided into silos, each with its own language and perceptual spaces, its own logic" (p. 15) by establishing a multivocal, pluralistic compendium. This dynamic mirrors the ontological premise of this work: all phenomena are *connected*, and this is the way in which they deserve to be studied.

Marianne Krogh is also the curator of the Danish Pavilion for the 2021 Architecture Biennale in Venice, which this volume is intended to accompany. Just like the exhibition “examines the notion of ‘connectedness,’ articulated by means of water – physically, atmospherically, sensuously and conceptually” (p. 19), this non-encyclopedia covers many topics, from the classic issues like ‘Climate,’ ‘Pollution,’ and ‘Sustainability’ (albeit in a new, original way), to more ambitious topics, including ‘Earthlings,’ ‘Window of Opportunity,’ and ‘Oxymorons.’ Trending philosophical notions like ‘Object-Oriented-Ontology,’ ‘Chthulucene,’ and ‘Posthuman’ are also included.

Connectedness is not simply the key topic of this book, with its impact on the ontological entanglement of humans and nonhumans. Connectedness also touches the volume in a more methodological sense, in at least three ways. First, each keyword is linked to many others, in and outside of the encyclopedia; this choice emphasizes the editor’s attempt to establish a non-hierarchical principle among the several entries, as does the strategy in some cases, of the same term being discussed multiple times, as is the case of ‘Architecture.’ Second, this book includes different, sometimes clashing positions, which allows Krogh to respond to the “totalitarian impulse that fails to embrace the inherent nature of all living things” (p. 14) and that is still evident today. For instance, in the opening entry, ‘Abrupt Climate Change,’ the author Sune Olander Rasmussen proposes a counter-narrative to dominant discussions about this topic: he underlines the importance of considering the still unclear mechanisms governing large-scale abrupt climate changes next to “the gradual and relatively well-understood climate changes that we are already observing and must expect based on projections of future climate” (p. 33).

Thirdly, the variegated profiles of the contributors result in a combination of different expressive forms, both on a linguistic and visual level. For instance, next to more philosophically structured short-essays, like Rosi Braidotti’s contribution for the word ‘Co-existence’ – three pages complemented by twenty notes citing scholars of the caliber of Stacey Alaimo and Viveiros de Castro – more experimental discussions are encouraged through image-only entries, such as is ‘Home,’ curated by Danish architecture office lenschow & pihlmann. Hence, a kaleidoscopic reading experience is engendered, which draws parallels between leafing through this book and visiting a museum.

The stunning visuals of this volume cannot be disregarded as aides in achieving this effect: its readability is facilitated by an array of graphic devices, like different colors, sizes, fonts, and text alignments; furthermore, the diversified and customized effects of each entry, both in form and in content, keeps the reader ‘glued’ to the book and eager to discover what will come next.

Although the volume is presented as accompanying the Danish Pavilion at the Architecture Biennale, it should not be conceived of as a mere exhibition catalogue. Instead, I suggest that it should be first regarded as a useful learning tool for different educational levels and for an (eco)critique of today’s world. Moreover, in a time when new editing strategies and ways of writing are encouraged for extending ecological debates outside academia, Krogh’s exploration of a non-digital alternative form of knowledge production becomes a valuable contribution. In this way, *Connectedness: An Incomplete Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene* prompts a widely-evoked paradigm shift based on the idea that “We – you and I, animals, plants, organic and inorganic, systems, artefacts and so forth – not only *share* the space; together we *create* it in a mutual process of emergence” (p. 13) through a quality object-book of rare format.

In conclusion, while this volume could perfectly find its place on your coffee table to impress your guests or enhance the bibliography of your dissertation, make sure you don’t leave it on your bedside-table if you really want to sleep: you may end up spending all night skimming its delightful and informative 400-plus pages.