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Chirping Machine

Gruber, Marcus

Since the appearance of modern humans some 250,000 years ago, our species has substantially altered the Earth. In the Pleistocene, Homo sapiens was a successful hunter and managed to hunt several species to extinction. In the post-Ice Age Holocene, farming, animal husbandry, trade, and increasing mobility enabled humans to become a major force in the Earth's system. The spread of industry and technology since the eighteenth century is affecting ever larger areas of the planet, and continue to unfold in new and ever-changing ways. Instead of living in biomes, or natural habitats, today we are living in "anthromes," human-made cultural landscapes that are characterized by intensive agriculture, buildings, and exploitation of natural resources. We are even able to artificially recreate nature, such as a machine that can imitate the movement and sound of birds. We have to decide what role we will allow nature to play and the degree to which we will shape it in the future.



Chirping machine by Bontemps, Inv.-Nr: 33769
Markus Gruber

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The chirping machine

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Chirping machine, Paris, around 1900
"Could you explain to me why they killed Rudi, then stuffed him and put him in a box?"

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"Maybe for the same reasons they are cutting down the forests, then planting their own trees."

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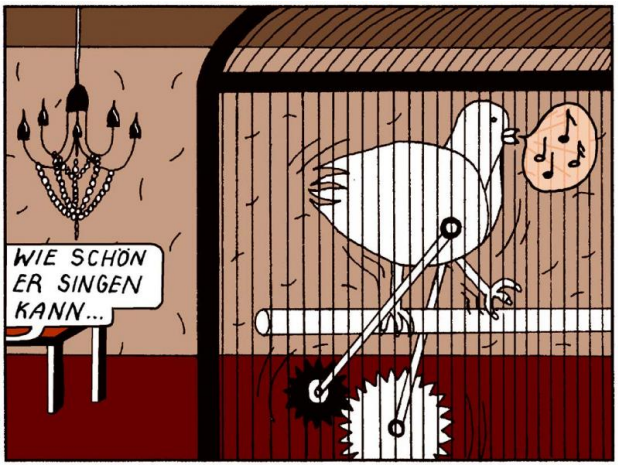
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"Is this the new chirping machine made by Bontemps?"
"Yes, it is all the rage in Paris!"

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"How beautifully he can sing..."

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"That sounds totally fake! Let's show the ladies how it is supposed to sound!"

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"Ugh! Look at those disgusting birds!"
"I'll take care of them!"

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"Go away!"
"I don't understand the world anymore ..."

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Artist's comment

Prior to my work on Bonetemps' Chirping machine I had only read Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about the nightingale. I didn't know that a machine in which mechanical stuffed birds could be made to sing like real birds actually existed. This bird symbolizes a social paradox—we prefer to imitate rather than protect it.

How to cite

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The comic also appears in Alexandra Hamann, Reinhold Leinfelder, Helmuth Trischler, and Henning Wagenbreth, eds., *Anthropozän – 30 Meilensteine auf dem Weg in ein neues Erdzeitalter. Eine Comic-Anthologie* (Munich: Deutsches Museum, 2014).

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Further readings:

- Sources and Literature for the Anthropocene Milestone Comics

Related links:

- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Special exhibition at the Deutsches Museum http://www.deutsches-museum.de/en/exhibitions/special-exhibitions/archive/2015/anthropocene/
- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Virtual exhibition on the Environment & Society Portal https://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6354
- Comic-Anthology, Deutsches Museum Website http://www.deutsches-museum.de/sammlungen/entdecken/comics/

Websites linked in this text:

- http://www.marcus-gruber.com

Websites linked in image captions:

- http://www.deutsches-museum.de/ausstellungen/musikinstrumente/objekte/zwitscherautomat-1/