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Writing (Hi)stories in the Anthropocene

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Formatting the Future: Notes on The Speculative Matrix

Pieter Vermeulen

The question of how different forms of Anthropocene storytelling encode agency, uncertainty, authority, and the possibility of change is a crucial one in the study of Anthropocene (hi)stories. This presentation pursues this question by focusing on one particular form that abounds in theoretical, consultancy, and corporate discourses about our near future. I call this form the speculative matrix. In these 2x2 matrices, the space of the future is divided into four sectors along two dimensions. The combination of these two dimensions delivers four possible futures, one of which is clearly superior to the others. What can we learn from the prevalence of this format? Drawing on insights from literary theory, media theory (especially the subfield of diagrammatology), and business economics, the presentation argues that this format encodes particular assumptions about human agency, the epistemic authority of science and the humanities, and a fundamental uncertainty of the future. By surreptitiously encoding these assumptions in its representational form, the presentation argues, the format performs the necessary cultural work of avoiding an outright acknowledgment of the finitude of our current life forms. The presentation compares the format of the 2x2 matrix to a different kind of diagram that was popular during an earlier phase of cultural theory, that of the semiotic square. Comparing the semiotic square to the speculative matrix, I suggest, can serve as a shorthand for understanding the impact that the notion of the Anthropocene has had on critical thought.

Narrating and Archiving Nature: Tom Committa's *The Nature Book* as a New Genre of the Anthropocene

Javid Aliyev

The intricate interplay between posthuman historiography, literary critique, and the Anthropocene context drives a quest for new historical and representational paradigms beyond human-centric perspectives. Amidst this complex quest, Tom Committa's recent posthumanist novel, The Nature Book (2023), emerges as a significant touchstone. By introducing the novel concept of a 'literary supercut (A Brief),' Committa not only pioneers a new narrative genre but also crafts a fictional realm devoid of human presence. By meticulously curating natural descriptions from 300 canonical Anglophone novels, Committa challenges narrative conventions, shifting the focus to nature descriptions and questioning the perception of humans as exclusive architects of historical agency. This creative endeavor results in a contemplative narrative that navigates what I contend is the 'literary long durée,' functioning as a comprehensive literary chronicle that traces the evolving representation of nature across diverse literary epochs. Simultaneously, it facilitates the observation of the unfolding Anthropocene, revealing its stratigraphic foundation and intricate discursive-affective dimensions. This alignment is further reinforced by Erica Fudge's Anthropocene historiography perspective, advocating for a reinterpretation of historical documents and crafting a 'holistic history' transcending human-non-human boundaries. I argue that Committa's novel prompts readers to contemplate the intricate relationship between nature and storytelling, expanding beyond human history to encompass a broader natural history. As a result, the novel takes on the character of an 'Anthropocene novel,' exploring the interplay of human agency and more-than-human nature while crystallizing as a 'concept art' or '(hyper)object of the literary (hi)story,' meticulously woven from centuries of authors' portrayals of animals, landforms, and weather patterns.

Tales of Carbon. Reading Shifting Cultural Notions of CO_2 with Primo Levi, Tyler Volk, and Kim Stanley Robinson

Amelie Buchinger

As atmospheric CO2 concentrations are reaching 420+ ppm and global mean temperature is rising to 1+°C relative to pre-industrial levels, the climate political landscape is increasingly characterized by a shared consensus that CO2 levels are too high and in need of remediation. Whilst CO2 as a greenhouse gas appears as a matter of great socio-ecological concern, scholarship in the humanities, to this date, has hardly engaged with the subject matter of CO2 and questions of (de)carbonization. In my talk, I will take three literary tales of carbon and CO2 as empirical material to delineate the shifting climate cultural history of (de)carbonization since the late 20th century and – as currently imagined speculatively – to take place over the course of the 21st century: the literary prose of Primo Levi's Carbon short story in The Periodic Table, the popular science writing of Tyler Volk in CO2 Rising. The World's Greatest Environmental Challenge, and the sci-fi novel The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson. Whilst these three tales of carbon differ in genre and style, they share a common literary trope, popularised by Levi and then adapted for different purposes by Volk and Robinson: the narrative journey of a singular and/or personified carbon atom across planetary, plant, and animal/human metabolisms and its intersections with geologic, natural, and human history. Reading these three stories of carbon both independently and comparatively allows to reflect not only on questions of historiography in relation to questions of storytelling, authorship, and different literary forms and how these intersect with notions of environmental change but also facilitates the retracing and writing of the contingent cultural history of CO2 and its cultural signification as it shifts over time. My talk thus contributes to the topic of the conference in a two-fold manner: the question of literary writing (conceived in a broad sense, including popular science writing and science fiction) and how it narrates the complexities of environmental change in relation to cultural change and human history on the one hand, and the reading of cultural texts as seismographic and co-constitutive indicators of climate cultural histories on the other. The question of writing the (hi)stories of CO2 in the Anthropocene becomes here also one of (re)reading its (hi)stories in light of a warming world of continued carbon emissions and still rising atmospheric CO2 levels and of (re)writing the tales of carbon anew.

Between everyday life and tipping points. Diaristic notation methods of time in the Anthropocene

Kevin Drews

The environmental and climate crisis is often described as a crisis of narrative and experience, highlighting the entanglement between geological time and human cultural history. This temporal complexity challenges conventional forms of narrative and perceptions of time. Against this background, the talk will explore how literary techniques, particularly through the diary, can reveal, model and interpret temporal concepts. On the one hand, diaries offer a particular perspective by capturing the intersection of individual lives and historical contexts. On the other hand, the focus on the everyday suggests a return to a 'natural' time that can only be understood in a state of constant crisis. Thus, diaries implicitly or explicitly reflect temporal disruptions. The focus will be on how diaries address the specific challenges of ecological crises, the role of personal perspectives in representing the global and long-term impacts of the Anthropocene, and the aesthetic strategies used to document significant ruptures and disruptions in both individual and collective experience.

Remembering Earth History. Expanding Cultural Memory in the Anthropocene

Gabriele Dürbeck & Simon Probst

Ice, rocks, corals, trees, seeds, fossils, soils: In the Anthropocene, human interactions with such 'natural archives' are key for understanding the changing conditions of historiography and of our cultural relations to the past, more generally. From the vantage point of memory studies, we i) theorize the role of natural archives and their material traces for constructing planetary pasts and ii) discuss examples of how this role is mirrored and reflected in contemporary literature and art.

In the tradition of Maurice Halbwachs' work on the social construction of memory, Aleida and Jan Assmann have shown that human memory cannot be located in the human body or in the brain alone. Dependent on social norms and traditions of remembrance, memory is always embedded into the whole nexus of archival storage, cultural meaning-making, and symbolic representation of the past. As geological and climatological accounts of history gain more and more cultural significance due to climate change and the rupture of the Anthropocene, it becomes obvious that cultural memory stretches not only beyond the human body but also beyond man-made archives and artifacts. Narratives of humans as a geophysical force and anthropogenic climate change are based on scientific and cultural interpretations of geological and climatological traces inscribed into the Earth's matter. Thus, natural archives represent no neutral ground for universal history but are constituted by scientific and cultural practices, which are formed by epistemological assumptions, and collective ideologies, and are deeply entangled with social identities and (neo)colonial histories.

The literature and art of the 'self-conscious' Anthropocene reflects these natural-cultural entanglements of memory. Drawing upon a wide range of examples – from media artist Susan Schuppli to nature writer Robert MacFarlane – we aim to show how these artworks narrate planetary histories and how engaging with them can help us to make the natural-cultural memory visible. To borrow an idea from Aleida Assmann, these artworks function as 'simulations of memory,' enabling a critical reflection on the epistemological assumptions and cultural practices through which Western societies construct their foundational stories in the broader context of Earth history. These artworks, we argue, contribute to a critique of planetary historiography as an important corrective of our natural-cultural memory.

Anthropodecentrism: Opportunities and Limits of Literary and Historiographical Epistemes

Johannes Waßmer

The term ‘Anthropocene’ refers to the epoch in which humankind has become a decisive and measurable ‘geological force’ (Crutzen). This calls for a critical examination of classical perspectives of humankind on its environment. Anyone looking for an approach to the earth in the face of the Anthropocene beyond human use of it must overcome anthropocentric perspectives. This also applies to historiography. According to Chakrabarty, a historiography that reflects on the Anthropocene adopts perspectives beyond the human: “For humanists [...] contemplating the Anthropocene, questions about histories of volcanoes, mountains, oceans, and plate tectonics – the history of the planet, in short – have become […] routine in the life of critical thought” (Chakrabarty 2018, 32). The problem of historiographical anthropocentricity is at the centre of my talk. I am particularly interested in the opportunities and limits an ‘Anthropocene literature’ (Dürbeck/Probst/Schaub 2023) provides for such a decentring of humankind in historiography.

In aesthetic experiences and in literature, the focus is on literary knowledge and subjectivity by means of individual experience, self-reflexivity, non-objectifiability and the sensuality of their phenomena (Mersch 2015, 62f., cf. Bohrer 1989). Historiography, with its saturation of sources, focuses on historical knowledge and intersubjectivity. Nevertheless, there are borderline spaces between the two epistemes: in literary writing such as autofiction or the autobiographical pact or in historiographical methods such as the fictional approach in docu-fictions or counterfactual narratives. For epistemological reasons as well as for science policy reasons, I nevertheless argue in favour of maintaining disciplinary boundaries. Firstly, anthropocentrism cannot be epistemologically escaped by literary means, even in the Anthropocene: Anthropocene literature consists primarily in ‘reading practices’ (Dürbeck/Probst/Schaub 2023, 13; cf. Clark 2015). Literature is epistemologically condemned to anthropocentricity. Secondly, aesthetic and literary epistemes and their narratives are not necessarily linked to scientific and scholarly knowledge. Following an integration of literary narratives into historiography, historiographical narratives could be heavily influenced by anti-scholarly and anti-scientific narratives about the Anthropocene. I therefore do not plead for an integration of literary and historiographical epistemes. Instead, I argue in favour of juxtaposing them and exploring further possibilities of an anthropocentric historiography as well as of literary studies, such as temporality qua chronoferentiality or the list in actor-networks.

History in the Future Tense. Concurrences, Histories, and Epistemologies in Speculative Fiction

Anna Tabouratzidis

Reading for concurrent histories in literary fiction of the Anthropocene is to attend to simultaneity, intersection, and competition. This paper explores the theoretical and methodological affordances of reading for concurrences in speculative fiction by extending the post- and de-colonial impetus of concurrences to include an ecological dimension. This paper focusses on speculation and negotiations of epistemic violence and disobedience in the de-/construction of archives as two epistemic tools and practices in Theresia Enzensberger's speculative near-future *Auf See* (2022). This paper aims to demonstrate that concurrences and speculative fictions afford attending to (violent) contact between epistemic communities, power asymmetries at play, and resulting sedimentation of concurrent future imaginaries. It thus contributes to the "remodeling and effective provincialization of Western modernist narratives that have contributed significantly to the constellation of problems known as the Anthropocene" identified by the conference organisers.

Remembering the Anthropocene: Memorials Beyond the human

Clara de Massol

This survey presentation introduces ongoing research which aims to define and apprehend the developing field of environmental memory studies. The research reflects on the possibilities, challenges, prospects and limitations of culturally remembering (in) the Anthropocene. Located at the intersection of environmental humanities and memory studies, the analysis draws on and surveys a series of Anthropocene-related memorials. This then leads to an examination of different memory agents across histories – past, present and future – interacting as to facilitate an investigation of memorialisation politics under new ecological regimes, within and beyond the human.

The case studies – contemporary monuments and artworks – are framed as cultural memory forms and practices, defined as infrastructures effecting and reflecting societies in time: how we make sense of the world around us in relation to time. The research seeks to push the field of memory studies towards the future by providing an innovative modelling of memorial dynamics. It is established that Anthropocenic prospects of a posthuman future would allow a decentring of limited humanist memory models. As a central idea and organising principle, memory still prevails, but the research probes at the limit of *westerncentric humanist* memory studies to introduce nonhuman memory actants.

Building on the case studies' analysis, it is argued that the immediate humanist-driven reformist solutions to anthropogenic decay and extinction are ultimately politically impotent; they are inapt to sustain or foster radical change in the sense that they fail to generate suitable alternatives. Instead, I propose that, from the waste and ruins of the Anthropocene, other modes of collective survival and extinction could emerge; ones which decentre the human of humanism by instead hinging on a differential multispecies ethos of crosstemporal coexistence. Memory in the Anthropocene might then start with the human but might also end without it.

Writing Planetary History – the Case of the 'Soyacene'

Ernst Langthaler

The Anthropocene debate poses fundamental challenges to history that might lead to a paradigm shift (‚planetary turn'). While mainstream history rests on the modern distinction between humanity and nature, advocates of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch with humans acting as a planetary force call for reintegrating these two domains. As one of the most pronounced voices in this debate, Chakrabarty differentiates the 'global' from the 'planetary'. While the former is an anthropocentric category, highlighting capitalist-driven globalization since about 1850, the latter decenters *homo sapiens* as a relatively young species among others on the 4.5 billion-year-old planet Earth. Though Chakrabarty convincingly argues for history's 'planetary turn', he remains rather vague about how to transfer this theoretical claim into historiographical practice.

As a historian dealing with agro-food globalization, I would argue for a dual strategy of engaging with planetary history. On the one hand, history should reflexively extend its scope to the more-than-human domains of the Earth system (‚planetarizing the historical') and, on the other hand, critically apply its analytical tools to Anthropocene narratives (‚historicizing the planetary'). *Planetarizing the historical* means to acknowledge the Earth system and its animate and inanimate elements (animals, plants, minerals, etc.) as non-human actors, related to human actors through more-than-human networks. *Historicizing the planetary* means to identify, describe, and explain anthropogenic changes of the Earth system through human action, differentiated by class, gender, race, age, and other social contrasts, within more-than-human networks. While representatives of the former strategy adopt the Anthropocene terminology, those of the latter mostly reject it due to its universalist notion in favor of more particular terms. As the most common alternative, the Capitalocene (Moore) highlights the capitalist exploitation of labor and nature as the main drivers of the transgression of planetary boundaries.

This dual strategy involves at least three conceptual challenges to historical research: the multiplicity of time, space, and actorship. The *multiplicity of time* emerges from intersections of planetary timescales, measured in thousands, millions, and billions of years, and human timescales, measured in years, decades, and centuries. The *multiplicity of space* emerges from teleconnections, both human and non-human, that link locations of more-than-human encounters across large distances within the Earth system. The *multiplicity of actorship* emerges from interactions of human and non-human actors, differentiated by the degrees, sorts, and logics of their agency, within more-than-human networks. To meet these challenges, historians

may creatively use already established concepts such as Braudel's layers of time (events, conjunctures, and structures/*longue durée*), Wallerstein's world-systemic relations (core, semi-periphery, and periphery), or Latour's hybrid actor-networks.

To operationalize this ambitious program with more or less limited resources, historians need a clear research focus. The commodity perspective, among others, provides such a focus. It takes a particular commodity as a lens through which abstract concepts such as the Capitalocene can be investigated more concretely. In my project, the soybean serves as a guide through the jungle of more-than-human networks. In the long twentieth century, soy emerged as a key commodity of global agro-food capitalism with a considerable impact on planetary changes such as global warming, species extinction, and water pollution. From this backdrop, the concept of Soyacene (da Silva & de Majo) refers to soy expansions in South America as part and parcel of the post-1945 Great Acceleration (Steffen et al.).

My project deals with a spatially and temporally extended notion of the Soyacene, investigating the contested widening and deepening of soy's planetary footprint in the framework of global agro-food capitalism since around 1870. The *widening* of soy's footprint refers to developments such as the global expansion of the harvested area in Asia and the Americas and recently also in Europe and Africa. The *deepening* of soy's footprint refers to developments such as the local application of the transgenic package of herbicides and herbicide-resistant seeds. Through the changing views of zooming out at the widening and zooming in at the deepening of commodity webs, the planetary dimension of soy's socio-natural footprint becomes visible.

What makes this story 'planetary' is its emphasis on the multiplicity of time, space, and actorship. Regarding the *multiplicity of time*, it highlights the intersection of short-, medium-, and long-term rhythms, ranging from the annual growth cycle of the soybean plant via decades-long agro-food regimes of soy expansions to *longue durée* phenomena such as soy-driven climate change. Regarding the *multiplicity of space*, it highlights teleconnections between regional sites of commodity frontier expansions of soy production and consumption through transregional commodity chains and their institutional arrangements (e.g., international trade networks). Regarding the *multiplicity of actorship*, it highlights soy's interactions with human actors such as nation-states, capitalist enterprises, and social movements as well as non-human actors, comprising allies such as hybrid corn and opponents such as herbicide-resistant 'super-weeds'. This perspective even highlights the multiplicity of soy itself, for instance, its paradoxical role as a protagonist (e.g., as an animal feed for the livestock complex) and an antagonist (e.g., as a vegetarian alternative to industrial meat) of capitalist expansion.

Within the Anthropocene discourse, this story picks up elements of the four grand narratives outlined by Bonneuil. It takes seriously the claim by the dominant *naturalist narrative* that the relation of the human species to the planet Earth has changed fundamentally in the Anthropocene. However, it follows the ambition of the *eco-Marxist narrative* to overcome the universalist notion of the *anthropos* through a more particular analysis of societal differences such as class. Moreover, it acknowledges to a certain extent the human construction of nature, as argued by the *post-nature narrative*. Finally, it takes seriously notions of the ecological footprint, planetary boundaries, and irreversible tipping points of the Earth system, as claimed by the *eco-catastrophist narrative*. Rather than simply adopting one of these grand narratives, it uses them as a reflexive framework for complex storytelling.

Living with the (emerging) dead: time leaps in fossil capitalism

Sandra Maß

One of the first demands within the Anthropocene debate was to link historical and geological time, to integrate multi-temporal perspectives and thus to overcome the disciplinary, i.e. historiographical, limitation to human history. Methodological guidelines for the realisation of this demand are still rare today, and the epistemological difficulties are obvious if one considers only the different units of time in geology and historiography. In this presentation, I will explore the problem with a well-known figure - the 'revenant' - and test whether other concepts of time can be integrated into historical narratives with the revenant.

I want to extend this human-centered figure to organisms, living beings and things, and link it to the history of Norway and the sea. Norway and its waters lend themselves as a paradigmatic space for at least three reasons: 1. because Norway is a special national case of raw material extraction, 2. because the country places the relationship to nature at the center of all national identity constructions, and 3. because the Norwegian literature and film, culture as well as politics, have numerous engagements with water-related phenomena. My assumption is that the revenant thrown ashore makes visible several time horizons, whose respective functional contexts should be reinterpreted.

The history of democracy in the Anthropocene

Hedwig Richter

At the latest with deconstructivism, the linguistic turn and Foucault's insight into the power of knowledge dispositives, historical narratives have been problematized as well. The warning against “Prozessbegriffen” (process concepts) is particularly vehement; Hans Joas even considers them “dangerous”. Nevertheless, the grand narratives live on. There are good reasons for this. Not only do narratives simplify and stabilize power and power knowledge. As counter-narratives, they can complicate, question power and enable revolutions and transformation. In addition, narratives offer security and construct identities, in all directions and with all the uncertainties. “We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” says Joan Didion. Hayden White puts the cart before the horse, so to speak: He welcomes the grand narratives in historiography and points out their basic structure (and beauty) as literary genres. – With this in mind, I want to analyze the history of democracy and consider which plot would be able to integrate the destruction of the Anthropocene and thus contribute to a new narrative of freedom and equality – a narrative of democracy in the Anthropocene. For the history of democracy in the Anthropocene must face up to the fact that it is a history of destruction: mass politicization in the industrialized countries in the last third of the 19th century was only possible because prosperity increased for everyone, because fertilizer use, energy consumption, mobility and material throughput increased. And the great wave of democratization after 1945 cannot be separated from the “Great Acceleration”; liberal democracy was explicitly narrated and installed as a unity with consumer freedom and prosperity. To abandon the narrative of democracy on the theoretical assumption that history is no longer possible: wouldn't that be too simple and historiographically a bit cowardly?

The Earth System Reanimated: The "Environmental Uncanny" in Amitav Gosh's Novel *Gun Island*

Thomas Schwarz

In his 2015 lecture series about the poetics of the Anthropocene, published as *The Great Derangement* (2016), the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh turns against the relegation of the topic of climate change to the literary genre of science fiction (7). The thesis of my presentation would be that it is especially the genre of fantastic literature, playfully used by Ghosh, that provides an opportunity to depict the agency of the Earth System.

Gosh uses the concept of the "environmental uncanny" to explain that "freakish weather events of today" appear as "animated", in fact "by cumulative human actions". These "events set in motion by global warming" have a "connection with humans" because "we all have contributed […] to their making" (32). Ghosh presents the "Sundarbans, the great mangrove forest of the Bengal Delta" as a model landscape where "geological processes that usually unfold in deep time appear to occur at a speed where they can be followed from week to week", or even overnight (5). The author believes "that the land here is demonstrably alive", that it does not just exist "as a stage for the enactment of human history", but that it is itself "a protagonist" (6).

For Ghosh, "the Anthropocene" reverses "the temporal order of modernity", because "those at the margins are now the first to experience the future" that awaits "all of us" (62f.). If climate refugees from the low-lying areas of the Sundarbans migrate to Venice, they are confronted with the very same situation. Ghosh insists that it is no longer possible to "write about Venice […] without mentioning the *aqua alta*, when waters of the lagoon swamp the city's streets". He claims that it is impossible to "ignore the relationship that this has with the fact that […] the men who run the quaint little vegetable stalls and bake the pizzas and even play the accordion" in Venice "are largely Bangladeshi, many of them displaced by the same phenomenon that now threatens their adopted city – sea level rise" (63). The author also warns against an aggressive biopolitics aiming at keeping "climate refugees at bay" (143).

In his 2019 novel *Gun Island*, Ghosh puts his poetics into literary practice. The novel uses the goddess Manasa Devi as an allegory to ascribe agency to nature. Its protagonist is the rationalistic book dealer Dinanath Datta who researches a temple for the goddess in the Sundarbans, built by a "Gun Merchant" in the 17th century after his return from a journey that had brought him to Venice. Reenacting the merchant's 'strange' journey to Venice, Datta comes to the fantastic conclusion that Manasa Devi is "a negotiator, a translator" between "two species

that had no language in common and no shared means of communication" (152f.): "Without her mediation there could be no relationship between animal and human except hatred and aggression" (153). The merchant's problem was his unsatisfiable "quest for profit": He would "recognize no restraint in relation to other living things" (153). Therefore, Manasa Devi taught him several lessons through poisonous snakes and spiders. The plot of the novel also challenges Datta's rationalistic world view with environmental events such as wildfires or tornadoes. The novel's showdown unfolds around a refugee boat in the Mediterranean Sea as a symbol of "inequality, climate change, capitalism" and the "oil industry" (199). Against this background the presentation aims to show how Ghosh's novel skillfully weaves together not only natural and human history, but specifically capitalist globalization and the Earth System's response.

Ghost Trees. A Challenge to Multispecies-(Hi-)Stories

Solveig Nitzke

There is an eerie phenomenon in the coastal swamps of the US state of North Carolina: ghost trees. Huge trees (e.g. the iconic bald cypresses) with faded trunks, without leaves or fruit, stand in large groups in the wetlands like memorials to forests gone by. The death of the trees can be traced back to the penetration of salt water into the estuaries. If salt water is drawn in by the trees, it destroys the cells of the vascular bundles and the trees gradually die. However, it can take generations for such a tree to fall.

The increase in ghost trees is due to the construction and maintenance of waterways and man-made climate change, which is leading to rising sea levels. This means that the ghost trees are visible effects of past human intervention and can be read as harbingers of a future in which natural environments will be completely transformed. These trees are thus potentially data points for climatological statistics, evidence of environmental and technical-historical observations, signals of regional-historical and touristic transformations ("the south" is getting a new face), but they are also an occasion to ask who is participating in the telling of such stories. Literary narrative here becomes a means that is not only able to bring together the diversity of stories, but also makes voices audible that have no place in the methodology of social and environmental history, climatology and ecology texts.

In the planned lecture, I will use the material ghost trees to show how 'arborela poetics' (Nitzke 2020) in fictional and non-fictional texts can contribute to telling history beyond literary texts in such a way that they do not merely humanize more-than-human actors, but become carriers of meaning in their own right. In this way, I argue, a perspective can be established beyond the observation of the collapse of the distinction between human and natural history (Chakrabarty 2009), which does not take the Anthropocene as an opportunity to once again tell of humans as the decisive power, but rather to write histories in many voices and, just as importantly, to learn to read them. In the ghost trees, as I will show with the examples of two novels (Andrew Michael Hurley: Starve Acre, 2019 and Elif Shafak: The Island of Missing Trees, 2021), strands of historical, environmental-historical and literary work converge that would remain invisible and silent without each other. But this is how they contribute to (their) history.

Les évènements historiques dans la literature allemande contemporaine: de la crise du dupétrole à revendication des droits écologiques des peoples minoritaires. Le cas de l'écothriller *Ausgebrannt* de l'écrivian Andreas Eschbach

Nana Toumeni Julior Merlin

The global environmental crisis and the abusive exploitation of indigenous peoples natural resources by foreign powers are not new. These are facts that have also taken place in the past. In fact, it was in the 1980s that the first movements to protect the environment began to emerge, along with the demands for the ecological rights of minority peoples as a result of ecological crises of the 1970s. However, the presence of these historical events can be seen todayin literary works, and precisely in contemporary German literature. While calling on the postcolonial ecocritical approach, the aim of this contribution is therefore to study the historical events in the contemporary German ecothriller Ausgebrannt (2007) by the writer Andreas Eschbach where these are representedin the form of speeches held by the author and his various characters on the oil story in the past and in the present. This leads us to the following questions: what are the historical events represented in the ecothriller Ausgebrannt? How do these historical events influence the collective perception of these events themselves? This work will therefore be structured in three parts. The first part will talk about the various historical events in the novel Ausgebrannt. The second part will show that these historical events expose the interdependence between man and nature and the abusive exploitation of the natural resources of the indigenous peoples by the great foreign powers. The third part will look at the historical events in Ausgebrannt as a claim for the ecological rights of minority people. The results of this research show that this novel can be seen as a vehicle for interdisciplinary, intercultural, intermediary and postcolonial field of work.

Anticipatory historical sources and future-oriented knowledge about the past

Ewa Domanska

This lecture explores the concept of anticipatory history as a transformative approach to historical studies, emphasizing its role in shaping future realities. The author situates this approach within the broader context of the "revival of futurity" in the humanities, a process described by Fredric Jameson as an awakening of imagination about possible and alternative futures. This resurgence counters the previous dominance of narratives centered on the "end of history," as well as the focus on memory and trauma. The lecture argues that contemporary society increasingly requires humanists not only to critically reflect on catastrophic and dystopian future visions but to actively create positive scenarios and micro-utopias that are realistic within specific spatial and temporal contexts.

The author proposes understanding history as future-oriented knowledge and historical thinking as anticipatory thinking, aimed at activating creative imagination and design thinking. This approach challenges deterministic views by integrating knowledge of the past with the creation of historical prototypes, highlighting the potential for alternative futures. The paper critiques traditional historical thinking, including its anthropocentric, Eurocentric, and linear assumptions, by incorporating non-Western perspectives, non-human agency, and insights from the natural sciences. The potential for developing new subfields of history—such as AI history, holographic history, quantum history, and multiverse history—is discussed, alongside the rethinking of historical ethics in terms of anticipatory values like hope and trust.

A key element of this paper is the exploration of anticipatory historical sources—artifacts, documents, and other objects consciously selected and preserved with the intention of shaping how future generations will understand the past and anticipate the future. Unlike traditional historical sources, which are often examined retrospectively, anticipatory historical sources are deliberately created or curated to influence the future interpretation of history. The author highlights examples such as time capsules, which encapsulate the values, fears, and hopes of the present for future discovery. The selection of artifacts, such as tardigrades, meteorites, and coal in the University of Poznań Time Capsule, serves as a case study illustrating how these objects function as anticipates, or precursors of future historical knowledge. These sources are chosen not merely to document the past but to project specific narratives and values into the future, influencing how history will be constructed and understood by those who come after us.

The lecture argues that the identification and use of anticipatory historical sources are crucial in creating a forward-looking history that does not simply record the past but actively

participates in the construction of future realities. These sources serve as a bridge between present knowledge and future generations, providing a means for the past to directly shape the future. By embedding these artifacts within a time capsule, the University posits a scenario where future historians—or perhaps even new species or civilizations—will see how Earth's inhabitants recognized and prepared for the multifaceted challenges of surviving in and beyond their native environment. This act of preservation transforms the time capsule into a vessel of anticipatory history, projecting current understanding and concerns into the future.

The lecture concludes by reflecting on the ethical responsibilities of historians, suggesting that they have an "anticipatory duty" to engage in shaping future environments, particularly in times of prolonged crisis. By merging historical scholarship with anticipatory thinking and the deliberate creation and selection of anticipatory historical sources, the author argues that historians can contribute to the development of strategies for resilience and adaptation in an uncertain future.

In regard of the philosophical "Wahlverwandtschaft" of postmodernism and Anthropocene

Florian Wobser

The Anthropocene discourse is closely linked to that of posthumanism. They have in common, that they aim to overcome something (Holocene; humanism), but are not able to get rid of their "befores". Both have in common that they are spaces of reflection of an "in-between" and this in turn is shared with the debate about postmodernism. Looking back on this earlier debate one can suggest the historical scheme 1960s – 1980s – 2000s – 2020s, which means that the beginnings and the foundations of the postmodernism and the Anthropocene are realized in two steps. The 1980s see the foundation of postmodernism and the establishment of the posthuman concepts. One important current of thought common to both is poststructuralism. In this heuristic horizon I want to have a look at the "Anthropocene", which is a "post-Holocene discourse" that shares many characteristics of the "in-between" of "postmodernism" and "posthumanism". But there are also some differences. The discussion of the similarities and differences is based on the thesis of a "Wahlverwandtschaft" (elective kinship) between postmodernism and Anthropocene. It is self-reflexive in its application of postmodern means on the Anthropocene. Important is, firstly, the theoretical-poetological figuration of a simultaneously de- and recentring of the sense resp. the human, a figure, which is shared by postmodernism and by post-Holocene. This paradoxical simultaneity will also be made visually vivid at least this is one didactical aim. Secondly, the whole context of this talk, will be interpreted, secondly, in a historiographical perspective: When the "historie(s)" actually return(s) or stay(s) important, now, what is the consequence in comparison to the posthistoire of the 1980s?

Moving beyond narratives of 'ordinary crisis' in Lutz Seiler's fiction

Sabine Egger

In her study on *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Lauren Berlant argues that people have remained attached to unachievable fantasies of the good life—with its promises of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality—despite increasing evidence that liberal-capitalist societies can no longer be counted on to provide such opportunities. This applies even more so in the face of climate change. As a result, the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis. Following Berlant's argument that the historical past and present are perceived affectively before being understood in other ways – and based on the understanding that literature aesthetically reflects such modes of perception – this paper will discuss aesthetic responses to collective and individual struggles of adjustment and experiences of 'ordinary crisis' in Lutz Seiler's fiction. Having won numerous literary awards in the past decade, including the highly regarded Georg Büchner Prize in 2023, Lutz Seiler has taken a central place in the German literary field. How do his novels and shorter narrative texts reflect experiences of contingency and crisis in the Anthropocene, while questioning dominant historical narratives? In how far do these literary texts go beyond both historiography and crisis narratives, imagining different models of temporality and memory?