Contribution to the SPECTRESS project:

1. Panel discussion: **The Anthropocene as a Trauma: Thinking with Haraway and Tsing about the Natureculture Continuum**

(abstract)

As rightly argued by Eileen Crist in her article “On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature” (*Environmental Humanities*, 2013), the recent discourse on the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch in Earth’s history, discernibly marked by human presence, has morphed into a discourse which is organising our perception of a world picture through a set of human-centred ideas and prescription. She argues that the discourse not only refuses to challenge human dominion, but also it occludes the possibility of abolishing a way of life founded on the domination of nature. A number of technological and managerial approaches have been proposed that would make our domination sustainable. Whereas Crist focused on ways in which the nomenclature of the Anthropocene promotes certain ideas and positions, I would like to take a closer look at how the dominant concept of the Anthropocene is structured. As I propose and will try to corroborate it in my talk, not only the name of the new epoch that should supersede the Holocene, but also the rhetoric used in scientific, environmental, popular writings, and other media to describe the Anthropocene and formulate its rationale influence our ecological predicament and possible solutions to today’s rapidly progressing devastation of nature.

The main argument of my talk is that even if the Anthropocene discourse is far from being homogeneous it is, nevertheless, constituted by a blend of interweaving and recurrent topics, figures and metaphors. They altogether structure the epoch of the Anthropocene as a traumatic stasis inflicted on our history and the remnants of wildlife by a one catastrophic singularity (techno-apocalypse), be it the invention of a steam machine and the ensuing process of industrialisation, be it the invention of the atomic bomb, the ultimate weapon that may wipe out the entire human race from the Earth’s surface, to name only the most salient projected catastrophes. Conceived of as a breach in the progress of human domination over nature, the Anthropocene invites predominantly technological and managerial approaches,
together with “talking cure” in the form of flourishing discussion on the prime cause and the most appropriate name (pointing out the perpetrator), that will eventually heal the trauma, allowing for further development. At least, this is what the promoters of the binary nature-culture still, and wrongly from my point of view, believe.

In my talk, I will tackle the reconstruction of the traumatic structure of the Anthropocene in the new context of the natureculture continuum and the ideas of sympoiesis (making with), ongoingness, polyphonic biotic and abiotic assemblages, proposed by Donna Haraway and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, in order to demonstrate that what we need it is a redefinition of the concept of trauma. The concept of trauma is as human-centred as the concept of the Anthropocene is. Therefore, both urgently need an in-depth reconceptualization to become operative in our complex, heterogeneous, and contingent times.

Conference paper: Provincializing Trauma: A Case of Mr. Holmes
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In the title of my paper I intentionally refer to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (2000), because I would like to argue that the modernist concept of trauma should be critically and urgently revisited in different, historically and geographically specific ecologies of practices in order to become an updated and more useful analytical tool. As a visible negation of a particular type of human subjectivity and sexuality, causal and linear progress and narration, it is part and parcel of modernity and its conceptual framework. Postcolonial scholarship is strongly committed to untangling these universals. However, it is interested mostly in demonstrating that the origins of liberalism in modern Europe have been commensurate with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and imperial politics. It leaves psychoanalysis and trauma beyond the scope of its main interest.

In the context of postcolonial studies, the paper offers a critical reassessment of the modernist concept of trauma, through a close reading of Mitch Cullin’s novel Mr. Holmes(2005). The novel shows a new, post-Second World War incarnation of the fictional detective who not without a reason has been recognised to be an embodiment of modernism. Aptly intertwining Holmes’ recollections of his recent travel to Japan devastated by atomic bomb and much older
events, particularly his last unsolved case from the year 1902, Cullin depicts dynamic and ephemeral assemblages of human and non-human elements that resists any form of rationalization within the frame of the modernist concept of human subject and the logic of linear progression. In this way he not only reflects upon the modernist concept of collective and individual trauma but also insists on a necessity of its redefinition.

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