“Climate Change” and the Rupture of Cultural Critique

Cohen, Tom
University at Albany, SUNY

Carbon pollution and over-use of Earth’s natural resources have become so critical that, on current trends, we will need a second planet to meet our needs by 2030, the WWF said on Wednesday. (Agence-France Presse) [1]

The blunt report above arrives more as a routine piece of data than some calculation that affronts or might give us pause. As the ticker-tape of climate mutation manifests itself as past and present evanescent phenomena—mass droughts in China, flooding in Australia, food crises, super twisters, earthquakes linked to geo-engineering, arctic melt-off and so on, all traversing the present as in some film—whatever is left of the populace is watching in disconnect mode. The essays of this volume comprise a dossier on the following question: how do the legacies of critical practices honed from 20th century agendas mutate, alter, or adapt...
to entirely different premises of an emerging era of climate change? The eco-catastrophic logics disclosed in the past decade were not addressed by the master thinkers of the 20th century, whose idioms form different guilds and extensions today. Indeed, the inheritors of the theoretical legacy have been curiously slow to address climate change problematics—perhaps for good reason. We no longer need run through the menu of disaster-porn scenarios, well covered by pop media and Hollywood in its own way, that make of the present a sort of time bubble feeding off of “futures” in various ways (from mega debt deferred to resource depletions). This spawns a sort of inverse Hamlet scenario, a cognitive disjunction: one knows the window is closing (tipping points), or even closed, say, but finding ourselves in a closing phase of “peak everything” (water, oil, humans, fish), the present persists in a certain zombied mode. This deferral and paralysis becomes background music. It can be tracked through the economic-ecological vortices of the present and in the telecratic spells that, in America, seem sufficient to anaesthetize (in the forms of climate change denial and Big Oil media or political black out). One would think that the epistemological daring that critical practices showed in the past would turn to these new horizons with avidity and innovation—but that has not been the case.

At a time when the “humanities” is being broadly retired institutionally, the forgetting of the question of disaster coincides with traditional humanist disciplines’ interests. The evasions have been clear: the winning farce of Copenhagen, when the rhetoric of crisis (or Gordon Brown’s “last chance” to save the planet) dissipated in economic and competitive quibbling, gave way to its follow-up at Cancun, itself low-key and little noticed. In Cancun the conversation discretely turned to planning on how to make corporate profits from (now inevitable) schemes of geo-engineering: such projects include global aerosol canopies, with all their potential (who controls the weather, and with whose priorities, and so on). The business prospects of techno-adaptation had replaced the rhetorics of green restitution, mitigation, sustainability and so on. A certain irreversibility has crept in, which is evidenced today by icebergs the size of Hong Kong floating by Australia, mega droughts in China, food crises, and so on, all tracked by global financialization and commodity speculation circling the prospects of currency collapse. The eco-eco disaster is not of the future but, coded as a perpetual to come, is already passed.

Does an era of climate change and its abruption of species time displace critical
thought’s tired era of the “post-modern” (or for that matter, the viral production of “posts” in general—colonial, human, and so on)? This thought, of the ghostly dissipation of various hopeful post-modernisms or post-colonialisms, seems attached today to the term “anthropocene”, which marks where the species is invited, knowingly, to regard its own passing in geological time within the context of a virago of extinction events and negations. The only “post” one might now want to use is post-binarized, since the premise of metaphysical binaries that underwrote the recent critical epoch, from deconstruction to biopolitics, and before each, appears suspended. To date, it has been possible for some projects to create a “climate change” imaginary, or map certain climate change “subjectivities”, but this has only produced the index of a Janus-faced entity, the twin subjectivities to date of wishing to restore, sustain, or mitigate (a rhetoric of organicism) or some variation of denial itself (which is at least consistent).[2] The former includes what Slavoj Zizek attacks as the great refuge of ideology today, the premise of the “ecological” as a return to the home, to nature, to a stationary prospect. Like a number of writers in this volume, it is the very premise of the oikos or eco that underwrites the eco-eco disaster, and this returns us to the role of metaphorical programs and memory regimes in the current impasses of a dawning era of climate change in which thinking is asked to suspect all the premises that drove 20th century critical agendas—or, alternatively, to submit them to the translation of ex-anthropic agencies. Such a “translation” would be more than a shift from human-on-human preoccupations or definitions of the “political” to the thought of what might displace the anthropic hypothesis. How would it be possible to interrupt anthropocentrism’s self-narrations (including culturalism and historicism of all sorts)? Each supposedly post-human logic (grounding “man” in culture, history, life of a general animality) would have to account for itself from the perspective of other materialities. For however confident we felt that theory has displaced human narcissism, it nevertheless remains the case that we have not confronted the banal logics that tell us, by the numbers, that we would need a second planet of material by 2030 to persist in the present global economic order. The decades of resource depletion before us imply or require a mass die-off; extinction events of various sorts are irreversibly underway, and yet the seeming radicality of what calls itself post-human theory or theorized humanites remains catastrophically blind to these events. In this regard, even the phrase climate change must be heard as a non-name of sorts, verbally redundant, for what is rather a cloud of vortices—calculations
and accelerating feedback loops that disclose a scenario of erasures (among else, of futures and the biological premises of “life as we knew it”).\[^{[3]}\]

The *aporia* that are emerging today—say, those of an era of climate change—are curiously different from the days of theory’s ascendancy and hey-day. The 90’s political premise of formal democracy (appropriating neo-liberal triumph) hits the fact that market “democracy” itself can appear to make planetary evisceration irrevocable (Arundhati Roy), while the address of population controls must be rebuffed by feminists; similarly, the premise of liberationist or post-colonial critique mimes today the neo-liberal promise of a world of American consumers.\[^{[4]}\] The very preoccupation with an “otherness of the other” that would be recognized, communed with, raised into the polis, appears itself more a viral meme and, perhaps, error, that maintains the sovereign trace of subjectile and “human” mastery. On other fronts, it might seem that both metaphysics and its deconstruction jointly participated in what is now disclosing itself as the “anthropocene”—into which Enlightenment ideologemes have played (as Dipesh Chakrabarty analyzes in the term “freedom”).

While one waits for a climate change discourse or “theory” in critical studies as such to arrive, the prospect of any emergent critical climate change imaginary encounters its own impossibility: since, technically, “it” (the “subject” of climate change) may be defined as what lies outside any imaginary). That is, how do concept formation and mnemonic or hermeneutic practices participate in or accelerate the *materialistische* mutations of the biosphere (so named) in the late *anthropocene* moment? The present volume gives this interface between memory regimes, tele-technics, and the mutations of eco-catastrophic processes a name: *telemorphosis*. This paleonym names the “anthropogenic” mutation of life forms in conjunction with that of tele-technologies, perceptual programs, and what one can no longer name mere *archivization* as such. *Telemorphosis* orients its focus to what has been under-examined in a critical market-place saturated with “after theory” hybrids that have tended, more often than not, to have consistently relapsed to recuperative and, at times, pre-theoretic positions. These relapses occur, often, in the heavy guise of new media theories that return to phenomenological premises. A putative radicalism of a high technological fantasia of “post-human” cyborgs devolves into a fantasy of bodies that are not mortal (allowing the perpetuation of the individual mind or moment against death). What celebrates itself as shockingly post-human often amounts to the cuddly “otherness” of pet animal studies (in which
the degraded premise of “the other”—fetish of the 90’s and culturalist politics, among else—devolves to mini-me’s and mini-subjects that sustain and perpetuate the human’s faux mastery or even alibi). In post-Marxist reclaims of the political promised “multitudes” renovate Catholic imaginaries. Supposedly inhuman descriptive systems theorists draw upon scientisms that regress to the most organicist of tropes (mother Gaia, the heart of the personification machine that fuels hyperconsumption).

One might be excused, in the name of the realities of “climate change” and its other materialities (and any future readership that would wonder, somewhat disdainfully, what these critical thinkers were doing during the first hinge decade of the 21st century), for having the impression that the middle-aged legatees of 20th century master theory were, by and large, and no doubt unaware, indulging in cognitive capital and techno-sophistications while relapsing to positions that domesticated the most revolutionary strains of 20th century theory itself. In the case of a Derrida, who seemed to participate in his own domestication as a survival strategy, one is nonetheless left with the impression that the gamble—to enter the academicism of central humanist traditions to install a deconstructive viral, to turn to so-called ethics, religion, or “the” political to do so—erred. Derrida’s “turn” to the ethics of hospitality, justice, friendship and a problematised animality may have earned him short-term favour in the humanist academy, but this occurred at the expense of less amenable logics that were at work in his critical operations. The catastrophic horizons and exigencies that have recently revealed themselves appear more in contact with Derrida’s early, much more dangerous work. But the problem seems more complex, since these recuperations, relapses, and zombie practices of late deconstruction (really, more moralism against Capitalism? really, a deconstructive “ethics”? really, animal “studies”?) mirror the geo-political as well as financial responses to date: to perpetuate business as usual as long as possible, in a more general Ponzi scheme of deferral (of megadebt and evisceration) and practical denial (which is the same).

One may not, however, confirm Zizek’s proposal that ecocatastrophics represents a “zero” moment in which past philosophies and critical premises might be suspended (particularly as that would lead, in Zizek’s case, back to the manipulation of Christian apocalyptics and the restoration of a modified model he had always favored anyway, the only possible response to the relentless spew of carbon, a green global Maoist order ruthlessly self-policing as to one’s carbon footprint).[5] Osama
Bin Laden, recently demised, could certainly be said to have won in his gambit: at minimal expense, he rope-a-doped America into precipitous decline, bankruptcy, and international isolation, not to mention accelerating the neo-feudal takeover of a klepto-tele-corporatocracy that effectively terminated "democracy" as anyone pretended to know it. In the last years, shifting tactics and re-narrating his world-changing intervention, Bin Laden claimed to have undertaken his battle against the perpetrators of global climate change—hence on behalf of a pre-industrial model that, like Zizek's green Maoist fantasy, would allow the species to survive the millennia, keeping open alternative futures. This fantasia of a totalizing contretemps or cultural revolution, the first attempted by turning the totalization ("America") against itself, is nonetheless still linked with a renovated "past". What strategies, today, poke holes in this membrane enclosure or machinal circuitry? One finds, repeatedly, an initial conversion, in which irreversibility is assumed or marked, the Oikos pre-dispossessed, subjectalities voided as still anthropic narcissisms, and the ecocatastrophic grasped as a positive catalyst to thought.  

One might hope to shift outside of any rhetoric of "climate change subjectivities" in order to by-pass the phantom of subjectivities altogether. Such a probe could not return to the rhetorics of alterity, nor to the faux empathics and doubly faux communion with an "otherness of the other", nor even to the recognition of the human other as a principle aim of humanistic studies itself (Spivak, Butler). Such a shift of telemorphosis would not extend theory's once-dominant rhetoric of otherness and communal recuperation to the "animal", or even the inanimate—but would rather, switch sides. A possible thought of the future might begin from a technics that would go beyond the retentive mastery that has made the "post-human" today a poster child of retro-humanism. Thinking that confronts the future could not continue any biopolitical premise that presumed a re-constitution of the bios, nor could it shift to some fugitive zoopolitics that kept the structure of this binary in play. It could not bathe in reconstituted Christian metaphorics to save the communist hypothesis; nor could it retrench the premise of a phenomenology. What I have referred to as telemorphosis or the alteration of modes of thinking adequate to the disasters of the present could not rehearse narratives of embodiment, since the respective "body" is evidently more and more an inverted phantom of presence. Moving beyond the relapses of anthropocentrist myopia would require more than the deconstruction of metaphysics, a metaphysics that "deconstruction" had to
invent in order to narrate itself at all. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, it has been this aspect of Derrida’s work (or the concern with the weight of the metaphysical legacy) that the recent tribal consolidation of deconstruction’s heirs have naturally mimed (post-Derridean “deconstruction”). One is reminded, in this rehearsal, how thoroughly Western these traditions are.[8]

Yet these efforts seem joined by certain patterns and turns. These in a sense mark where the other materialities of “climate change” operate as a field of translation—a logic or site, irremediably material, in which idioms undergo a form of voiding in the strict Benjaminian sense.[9] That is, if translation is to some extent impossible, these terms now move toward the ex-anthropic, with the understanding that the latter trope (anthropic) has all along been an invention of meaning systems and memory regimes—rather than referencing some species type or animal-man. In this project of translation it might be advisable to use the term ex-anthropic rather than “post-humanism”. Indeed, all “posts” now seem to require retirement, insofar as they function as supposed extensions; one benefit of an era of climate change is that it revokes, strictly speaking, the notion of eras. “Ex-anthropic” does not presume that “anthropy” exists, but acts as an index that operates outside the management of rigidly human perceptual, mnemonic, semio-cultural narratives. The volume’s essays do display an emerging premise that takes different forms: there appears no will or reflex of recovery or redemption at work; no return to organicist phantoms or Christo-communist ideals. If eco-castrophic horizons are not apocalyptic precisely, not necessarily linked to crisis (from the perspective of geological time, say, the end of humans and organic life would be just another experiment), it is because climate change implies no sudden blaze of glory, no flash in the sky, no revelation. It must be understood as irrevocably banal, granular, a processual degradation without any redemption narrative whatever. This problematic has lead Zizek, a bit late in the day, to identify meaning itself as an artifice, and as the engine of a certain trajectory: an anthropogenetic mutation that is also that of the “anthropos” as figure. “Climate change” cannot be appropriated to metaphorics, does not reside in binarized concepts of materiality, and is not redeemable in any form (except, perhaps, in corporate profits on, say, geo-engineering debacles to come). In one favored scenario, the survivalist calculations displayed in a seismic wealth and power shift would lead to a neo-feudal tele-corporate order, a new world order in which disposable classes and geographic regions will be subordinate to survival priorities of a shrinking elite.
(Think of the ending of 2012, in which billionaires alone get on the Chinese Noah’s Ark after they have, by proxy, undermined and decimated geo-temporal accords. While some have suggested WWIII has already begun by virtue of resource-war maneuverings that will need to play out as scarcity accelerates (Gerald Celente), one can also read the formation of various triage events—or what is termed an expected die-off by some, population “culling” by others.

Telemorphosis explores, then, a necessary violence brought into, or demanded, by the contemporary horizons—what Bernard Stiegler has referred to as the third limit of Capitalism. Various modes of inquiry forged here adapt themselves to a late anthropocene prioritization of ex-anthropic agencies, irreversible displacements of temporal maps, the disclosure of metaphorical regimes as complicit with the vortices of resource depletion (the dispossession of the eco as premise), and again the premise of irreversibility converted into a positive catalyst for thought. The general project pursued here through different lines returns to the fact that—rather than be irrelevant to the aporia of climate change (Gaia, a systems theorist once opined, doesn’t give a shit about the signifier, who “herself” is nothing but one of the most traditional and a goddess to boot)—the hyperconsumption of the contemporary time bubble (again, “peak everything”?) is hard-wired to concept production and perceptual and linguistic maintenance formations. This problematic field devolves not only to the premises of writing and systems of inscription that set such programs in epochal circulation (an-archivism), but to the marks, graphicisms, letteral and preletteral traces, and reading practices that circulate within the home broadly defined. One might say, the strategies pursued here practice pre-emptive dispossession as a gesture of reconfiguration. Since the essays were originally solicited to depart from a single critical concept, which then would be written toward the horizons and logics of “climate change”, they exemplify the impossibility of any joint climate change imaginary as condition for a variety of probes, strategies, and experimental maps. The old deconstructive premise, a literalization of Derrida regardless, that the “future” cannot be invoked because it is the product of a past program, is suspended before what exceeds and precedes (a prehistorial trace), or the inter-glacial episode of the anthropocene itself. (This is clear in Colebrook’s essay and has long been a part of Stiegler’s work) What also emerges is a post-binarized horizon somehow relieved of two 20th century premises and anthropisms; it is no longer accepted that there is any interiority to counter the sheer exteriorization that “climate change” discloses (or that is contemporary with
in what Justin Read terms the “unicity”). Further: there is no coherent binary carried over from the Western epoch of metaphysics and techno-metaphysics that is suddenly displaced. The other materialities in question do not conform to any materiality familiar from dialectical or binary traditions; such materialisms have been inescapably humanizing, and appear as what Colebrook has termed materialities with bodies, in direct dismissal of both the tropologies of embodiment in cultural studies and its affiliates and any legacy of “materialism”. Moreover, the essays share a premise of irreversibility, or of not being reclaimed by the circuit of reinscription and relapse examined above as some sort of “after theory” or theory today. Rather, they convert that irreversibility—beyond tipping points, say, and in the face of affirmed if no doubt amazing and unexampled catastrophism—into a point of departure, and this is because something had to give. What gives is the cognitive capital much of these same traditions brought into current academic guilds as investments. And whatever the impasses presented, said communities have been as slow if not utterly resistant to “giving up” these investments and tropes as a society reliant on Wall Street retirement accounts is to letting the financial system as we once knew it collapse—if only to properly reconfigure. Has one entered the domain less of “theory after theory” than zombie “theory”: a fact that can always be tracked and named to the degree that certain groups, idioms, schools, or configurations have yet to address, or respond to, the problematic of climate change and its transformation of referential premises? But to pose this question suggests first a retracement, a faux genealogy of what delivers us into a sort of time bubble of the present in terms of critical disorientations, regressive organicisms, the residue of 20th century humanisms of “otherness”, political zombisms and biopolitical meandering.10

I.

What form this research on the preservation of the planet will take is not at all clear now, of course. [...] By far the most difficult task in this project is how to invent a way to persuade, not advertise, culturally as well as politically, that there is no other future for any of us. [...] For such a future we need to re-imagine our common and universal culture, as we have never done in human history. (Masao Myoshi)
The environmental crisis is inherently deconstructive, viciously so, of current modes of thought in politics, economics and cultural and literary theory. At the same time, the lack of engagement with environmentalism in deconstructive thinking seems increasingly damaging. (Timothy Clark)

In Steven Spielberg’s 2002 adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s *Minority Report*, the narrative concerns the pre-emption of “future” crimes by a form of memory and time back-loop. The film’s three sensors are able to foresee crimes and arrest culprits in advance. The pre-emption thereby forecloses the deed (by arresting the would-be criminal). However, on occasion, there is a dissenting opinion among the three that produces a minority report on the “future”. I will use this phrase, “minority report”—and the accompanying image of a memory back-loop that can be controlled, or not—to examine the following hypothesis: that the alternative materialities of today have to do with certain ruptures in our time frame coming from a type of “outside”.[1] That is, there are the other materialities that would include: glacial melt-off, the inundation of coasts and cities, mass extinctions, the generation of an underclass of “disposable humans” (today used for body parts), and imminent oil or water wars. I will return in a moment to how these “ex-factors” have invaded the American media, but will link this shift to another mutation discernible in “cultural studies” and the legacies of conceptual projects. What I will do below—in opening the question of “climate change” and the humanities, and of the legacies of twentieth-century theory before this shift—is a preliminary scan of the question of a broader re-inscription or hypothesis of 21st century or non-anthropocene horizons. With this in mind the question posed is of how, and whether, the ex-anthropic factors that interrupt various histories and calculations of irreversible ecocatastrophism (neither fetished nor apocalyptic) operate in the mode of what (after Benjamin) we might think of as translation. Climate change is not, and perhaps could not have been a horizon engaged by Lacan or Derrida, and was never integral to post-Marxian narratives, nor approached by “cultural studies”. To suggest that a new concept of climate change would open the prospect of a mutation in the archive, or would produce a revocation of how the archive itself were configured, oddly turns us closer to, rather than thoroughly marginalizes, reading, reference, and legibilities more broadly.

Taking up the above-mentioned loop from *Minority Report*—that of a non-actualized but anticipated future to be pre-empted—I want to examine the site,
today, where twentieth-century critical trends encounter, before the advent of an era of climate change, a movement from human on human narratives toward the interruption from without of what interrupts temporal continuities and even the (anthropomorphic) primacy of the social—a tear in the representational screen.

How does anything like an archiving archive—the non-site at which various memory programs are issued, spells of perception installed, temporalities recast—mutate in response to twenty-first-century horizons? These approaching but barely discerned horizons “appear” as other materialities and as non-anthropic dynamics (“climate change”) and preclude personification. If the hyper-industrial machine of “global” capital and mediocratic spells appear totalized, and if critical practices find themselves in a sort of circulation phase, is “climate change” the caesura that might arrive like an interruption or knock from without? What will critical thinkers four decades hence, in a calculably different world, have wanted critical projects of today to consider? What different resistances before a “threat without (human) enemy”, what other temporal contracts, what alterations in reference and “the era of the Book” may emerge? How, otherwise, might one speak of a war, today, within the archive—understanding the term in Derrida’s sense as the active non-site of mnemonic systems from which virtual inscriptions, phenomenality, experience, consumption, bodies and memory regimes appear generated? What alterations occur within (or to) reading, reference, critical programs and semantic reserves? Such ruptures would disturb the pre-occupations with social justice, narratives of identity, and the human on human histories that close the 20th century yet remain today seemingly wired to legacy-obsessed re-circulations.

“Climate change” as a term here exceeds one referent and implies a change of premises: a turning out of old models of interiority, such as the “house” (or homeland security). Climate change opens to an exteriority irrecoverable by the current tropological order. It coincides with one end of a humanistic tradition, as if the latter and its hermeneutic programs all along were woven to these accelerations and consumptions. Like the images of hurricane Katrina and its devastation of an inundated New Orleans, whose denizens were afloat in an oily soup, these other materialities—terrestrial, technic, scriptive, pre-historical, those of fossil fuels and alphabetics—invade and undo any interior. The house itself is traversed by the histories of oil, colonialism, and the prehistorical; there is a redrawing of coasts and populations, contracting thousands of years of human history, technics, and writing.
systems to what Benjamin, in section XVIII of his *Theses*, recalls as but a fraction of a second in earth's aeons of the hosting of organic life. The partial totalization of horizons that we pretend to call "globalization" has a counter-moment that is not subsumable by any socio-historial model of the past. What we condense here as the ex-factors of climate change include a familiar dossier of non-anthropic fields and disjunct accelerating back-loops (extreme weather, eco-eco collapse, calculations of meta-drought, inundations, "population culling" and so on) that lie outside the terms and calculus of media programs, and are in a sense unrepresentable. Again, this is not adequately captured in the phantasm of *terror*, for it occurs not with a face, but as a series of accelerating extinction events, including global warming, oil and water depletion, the growth of a new "disposable" underclass (and therefore non-human), biodiversity collapses, microbial mutations, and so on. This list generates a counter-discourse today that paints the affluent and precarious stability of the present as a sort of *time-bubble* that, when it bursts, will have to reconfigure the material premises of societies and terrestrial "life"—going into millennia to come. There is a good reason that the responses to this futurity have often been the critical version of sustainability arguments, or retreats to "organicist" models. The horizon of climate change arrives as a cognitive blow without representation or metrics, or with what Timothy Clark in this volume calls a "derangement of scale" which, rather than disclosing an integrated narrative or even a catastrophics, is experienced as a field of perpetual *disjunctures*.

It is worth noting that representations of "climate change" catastrophes have only recently returned in significant ways to the American media after an effective white-out orchestrated by Bush. Suddenly movies and television specials and media columnists are flooded, so to speak, with bedazzled figurations of eco-disaster. And since no one expects any realistic geopolitical response, nor any expenditure being seriously committed, one has every reason to assume that the predicted catastrophes will occur. In fact, calculations of arctic melt-off have been accelerated by half a century in the last five years (revising the earlier calculations of, for example, Bangkok being submerged in twenty years, and so on). One might say—and this is not *my* view of course—that "I think(s) it will all work" forms an interesting imaginary: it creates a spectral "present" assured of a cataclysmic future gifted to the heirs of the present—suddenly children and grandchildren are spoken of, but with ghosted imagery. Indeed, the unborn are now deeply at stake in the present. The Ponzi scheme of hypermodernity—like that of Wall Street and the global credit
meltdown—shifts mega-debt to the future, but also steals from that same future’s heritage, resources, biodiversity. A certain present, tempophagic, has cannibalized the future.

The ghost of these futures puts the present in an inverse Hamlet position. (I won’t rehearse the predictions with you—from scientists above all—but it is not pretty at all and sweeps aside all of the current models of economic and political priorities) It knows too much, with all this non-knowing appearing as a ghost that does not coincide with the court reality of the moment of affluence the end of the oil era generated. These alternative materialities link the artefacted present of today to prehistorial and zoographic timelines. It is too much—and I think, today, one finds monstrous temporalities in play (for instance, the sixth mass extinction event on earth). In this scenario, the recent academic hegemon of “cultural studies” perhaps bursts apart, and its consolidated models of oppressive regimes and colonial positioning shifts from its declared topos: the otherness of the other, or “the other” as human subject, and (as if all these positions were now placed on one side), a supposedly “wholly other” that is not human, not divine, and involves prehistorial traces. The term “wholly other”, circulated by Derrida, is at best a place-holder here, and a weak one, saturated with theotropic resonance. Such forms of supposed alterity actually arrive in the mode of mega-droughts and floating ice sheets, or general biodiversity collapse. But here the violent reconfiguration and traffic of diverse temporalities have become confused and cinematized. As one journalist notes: “By the clock of geology, this climate shift is unfolding at a dizzying, perhaps unprecedented pace, but by time scales relevant to people, it’s happening in slow motion.” (Revkin)

On the one hand, “cultural studies” already mourns the contemporary scene it archives, its critical vantage being a piece with the very representational machine it seeks to interpret. Yet it easier to see today why the premise of culturalism, like historicism broadly (new or old), had no political effect at all (which it tended to promote the idea of), and was readily assimilable to university programs—basically, another extension of intentional meaning, if irritably “left” for governmental agencies. At the point that cultural criticism would recover the otherness of the excluded voice in its supposed specificity and historical context, cultural studies actually loses this site in the actual morphing of the disempowered into a “disposable” (and faceless) underclass. What emerge are time wars within a non-present: the disturbance of species-ist and biomorphic perspectives shifts the
model from a human-to-human narrative toward a non-human domain that, because it has no aura and no personification, cannot easily enter the commodified media stream. And this is for good reason. One shifts from a preoccupation with “the (human) other”, or a so-called “otherness of the other”—by which is routinely meant the other person, citizen, sexuality, status as performer or memory victim—to what stands outside this circuit, which retained its rhetoric of mastery by extending (and having the right to do so) alterity, recognition, communion, and so on, to the subaltern, or then animal (or stone perhaps). It is before this complex, for instance, that Robert Markley will insist on a practice of “disidentification”, or that Joanna Zylinska will shift to the measure of an ex-anthropic technics in even raising the issue of animals (or animation). Jason Groves targets various to species-ist narratives of contamination, while Colebrook affirms the critical import of extinction as a positive premise.

It was perhaps Masao Myoshi who first posed a question of a “planetary” crisis that would suspend the model of the political as practiced before a situation after which there would be nothing “for any of us”. In “Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity & Totality”, he argues: “Perhaps we need a new organization, one that is truly global and inclusive as all. There is one such core site for organizing such an inclusiveness, though entirely negative at present: the future of the global environment.” (Myoshi 295) Myoshi contracts the time-frame of predicted terrestrial decline—in advance of today’s accelerating updates on passing the “tipping point” already of arctic meltdown—so that the “present” were viewed as a point in a virtual continuum. While there is “no other future for any of us”, Myoshi is not sure what “form this research on the preservation of the planet will take”. But any such project must “reimagine our common and universal culture, as we have never done in human history” (297). Even so, Myoshi cannot relinquish from this address, his utopian program, proceeding to forecast a revolutionary redistribution of the address of all production across social barriers. Inscribed in this redemptive language, such a future remains unimaginable. No “planetary” discourse emerges, and in fact the subtext for many of these announcements comes from a counter narrative, similar to that in a recently suppressed Department of Defense report on the military threat of “climate change” to Homeland Security (which makes, according to the report, that of “terrorism” almost a joke). In all such reports, it is the underclass and the “disposable” humans who will go first—poisoned water, inundated coasts—in what the Department of Defense presumes to call future
“population culling”.

It is not surprising, to segue for a moment, that when Naomi Klein investigates "shock capitalism" she cites the CIA manual’s directives for psychological extraction. The “shock” there recommended would be brutally cinematic and would involve a kind of pre-psychic rape that depends on opening a rhythm of differential intervals. Here, for example, is one model in a CIA manual for psych-ops information extraction that is implicitly cinematic:

There is an interval—which may be extremely brief—of suspended animation, a kind of psychological shock or paralysis. It is caused by a traumatic or sub-traumatic experience which explodes, as it were, the world that is familiar to the subject as well as his image of himself, within that world. Experienced interrogators recognize this effect when it appears and know that at this moment the source is far more open to suggestion, far likelier to comply, than he was just before the appearance of the shock. (Klein 8)

The “interval” that opens is referenced not just to trauma but also to what is called “sub-traumatic”—where the subject’s inscriptions are suspended. Induced by a technical deregulation of mnemonic bonds or rhythms, the moment mimes that of war—in which programs are chanced, futures and pasts put at risk. Such an explosion culminates in the penetration of the cell, the body turned out for an instant (“extremely brief”). And yet the rhetoric of “shock” is also anachronistic, feeding off the narrative preference for a retrospectively sudden or instantaneous trauma with condensed duration—the comet impact, the abrupt fault, the nuclear blast, the successful revolution, and so on. This imaginary, reinforced by phenomenological bias (and, inversely, the deconstructive antipode of the non-present present, at least when normalized) occludes metrics other than hypertecninc speed, the cataclysm that arrives in cinematic slow-motion over decades or more, concealing numerous feedback loops and invisible extensions. We will ignore whether the exploitation of “shock” or crisis does not play into a critical trap as well, when such notions of infraction can be made normative and aestheticize, and in which the rhetoric of “shock”, crisis, and trauma itself becomes suspect (a motif taken up by Catherine Malabou in this volume in asserting a post-traumatic normativity today).

If the figure of “globalization” carries the import of inclusion and homogenization or pan-modernization, the “post-global” moment—impinged upon by these chiasmic X-factors—is simultaneous with it but at the limits of the
spellbound *anthropos*. America will be fine if it invents a new technology to clean up the planet, serves its energy hyperconsumption, and so on. There is no such “new technology”; this was Bush’s techno-theotropic deferral. If the human-against-human model of politics and narrative accounting is violently displaced and suspended by a pan-species-ist and so-called biopolitical other; if the very definition of the political migrates in the teletechnic-era from literal public space into that of the screen, or image, then the sociological model on which “cultural studies” was founded will have to give way to what lies outside of personification or metaphor, leading to non-anthropic agencies, whether initially troped as machines, animation, or prefigural systems.

Thus we see an array of failed probes. Gayatri Spivak had attempted a nuanced turn from the “global”, as a totalizing metaphors, toward what she would name the “planetary”. (Spivak 2003) If the global resonates as a holistic metaphor, the planetary suggests something other. Again, in a work speculating on the “death of a discipline” (which does not mean that death, here of *comparative literature*, would not go viral), it is not clear how to access this other: “I cannot offer a formulaic access to planetarity. No one can.” (78) What is sought, clearly, involves a break with formulations of the community and the human as sensorially and semantically constituted:

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided “natural” space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. ... The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say “the planet, on the one hand”. When I invoke the planet, I think of the effort required to figure the (im)possibility of this underived intuition. (72)

And yet, lamentably, Spivak will back away from this term of the planetary when it is dismissed from the left for breaking with any recognizable politics (as currently defined).
The title of Jameson’s *Archaeology of the Future* is also suggestive, since it names an inversion in the structure of contemporaneity as such—suggesting a new field, somewhat counter-intuitive, that we may call “Future Studies” (there is already such a program in Taiwan). If all cultural and literary studies involve memory and transmission, archival work in every sense, then any “future studies” would appear to upend or flip that archive, reading it against virtual or programmed “futures”—including those on the dystopic or catastrophic menu. When Jameson references Benjamin’s *weak messianism* to the suddenness of the arrival of the “Messiah”, his need to retain a utopian dimension regresses as he omits the import of Benjamin’s project—which referred to non-linear or non-human times only to produce an active reconfiguration and rupture of the spell of memory programs and archival reflexes that Benjamin targeted under the name of “historicism”. For Jameson, “Benjamin sought a different kind of figuration for this ultimate event of our collective social life, this ultimate mystery, when he had recourse to the language of the messianic” (335). Any “future studies”, one may conjecture, would entail re-orienting the critical archive toward something in excess of the logics that suffuse the humanities’ referential premises. Whereas what we call “Bush” chose to promote a war on terror to which it could attach human faces as agencies, the present would have now to be read against his active suppression of the problematic of “climate science” and oil depletion.

I return to the opening question. *Cultural studies’* recent global hegemony requires modest scrutiny in this regard. It has had the most remarkable and enduring career in the academy, able to mutate from a sociological agenda and absorb most of its early foes, including the refugees of “theory”. In the process, it evolved into a sort of Noah’s ark of humanistic studies during a period of diminished horizons. If it wandered into various relapses—identity politics and a form of general victimology that passed for such—it also evolved to arrive at a mode of “global” premise. It has been attacked by Slavoj Zizek for doing the opposite of what it pretends: that is, in celebrating a sort of multi-culturalism that anthologizes difference and diversity until it achieves the homogeneity of the case study. The narrative of class domination stands soon to take new speciesist forms in the evolved body types separating a global hyper-rich or klepto-oligarchy from the “disposable” human at the bottom. Yet culturalism today also feeds into a human-to-human model that gives way, ruptures, before non-anthropic facts that alter times themselves. In the predicted ecological impasses on the horizon, with concomitant pressures of
survival, the pretenses of “human rights” vaporize before a corporate neo-feudal consolidation and telecratic order that anticipates future rules of triage during the coming phase of resource wars. In the meantime, the narrative of Capitalism and its others no longer functions to craft any familiar politics before a speciesist impasse.\[13\]

One might propose two implications at this point that cannot be developed fully here: 1) That the role of cultural criticism and humanistic studies shifts from an anthropomorphic model, from one concerned with the “otherness of the (human) other” (often homogenized as the same), toward one oriented toward an unthought and unrepresentable “other” that is neither personifiable nor theologized, and is bound to technicity as such; 2) That the domain of the political today will have migrated from social struggle into an alteration of epistemographic models, with a similar transition from that of “public space” to teletechnic memory regimes and their settings. “Cultural studies”, as the gathering site of certain humanist models translated into the multiplicity of social and techno-historial positions (“subjectivities”), would give birth here to something like a counter-site—something that runs against its early representational premises. As with Jameson or Spivak above, theoretical projects betray a symptomatic equivocation or relapse as they, too, examine these borders—as if some line inhabited twentieth-century preoccupations that cannot quite be crossed in entering twenty-first-century shifts. Spivak cannot proceed in her analysis because her prescriptive left audience would neither recognize, nor applaud, a logic that does not endorse a familiarly liberationist argument. The impasses of this zone, after all, displace the contest of binaries as we know them. On the activist front, this could be as simple as the contradiction between addressing overpopulation and feminist progressivism, as much as, more broadly, it might seem to encompass both “metaphysics” and its deconstruction as part of the same “epoch”. Agamben’s restitution of Foucault’s “biopolitics”, for example, relies on an arbitrary Eurocentric model (obscure Roman law) in order to address the homo sacer, with the questionable iconic uniqueness of “the camps” (separated from world histories).

Paradoxically, this evaporation of what had seemed a humanist horizon crystallizes on the borders, as in the investment in “human rights” as a topos—where, invariably, the definition or legal premise of the “human” is permanently in question. In Judith Butler’s 2006 Precarious Life, a focus is brought to the ethical encounters with the defaced “other” of the terrorist around the
category of forbidden grieving: that is, a model of mourning at one of its disappearing outposts. The inquiry is evoked under the question of whether “the humanities have lost their moral authority” in general or in a post-“9/11” horizon (understanding by that date something different than had been telemarketed). Invoking Levinas’s category of “face”, she weaves an analysis of both speech acts and the positioning of otherness into a tapestry of inversions in which the image of face is held as a membrane across which identification and dis-identification, or the “human” and its others, are marketed or positioned:

The human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice. The face is not “effaced” in this failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility. Something altogether different happens, however, when the face operates in the service of a personification that claims to “capture” the human being in question. (Butler 144-5)

Butler is, perhaps without marking it, talking about the image itself, media. She is interested in the dividing line across which the human is constructed: “I am referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion.” (128) But at the limit of this inquiry is precisely a negotiated back-loop to a humane order: “If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense.” (151) Here, it is still and precisely the human “other” with whom we would be reconciled in a recalibration of mourning. Butler’s discourse is crafted as an apologia for “humanistic studies” before its institutional enemies and remains trapped in an anthropocentric model without reference to the evolving shifts outside its referential horizon or the historical bubble of the “post 9/11” catalogue. But is not mourning itself the problem, part of the anthropomorphic impulse that, as here, retracts Butler’s focus from the terrestrial and “global” orders to one of recognition?

II.

Neanderthal survivalists spend all their time thinking about post-Apocalypse America. The real trick, however, is to prepare for after the end of the Apocalypse. Gonzalo Lira (2010)
This shift from human on human histories (post-colonial, social justice) to the imbrication, if not dispossession, by a non-anthropic other that exceeds and displaces the game board begins elsewhere, and earlier. One instance would be the coupling of the non-human historiography of Braudel with Deleuzian dynamism in Manuel De Landa’s *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*. De Landa references the organic and non-organic forms of shifting “bio-mass” and energy structures that pass between planetary domains. This text allows no anthropocentric perspective to emerge in sketching three parallel histories of the “Geological”, the “biological”, and the “linguistic”:

Over the millennia, it is the flow of bio-mass through food webs, as well as the flow of genes through generations, that matters, not the bodies and species that emerge from these flows. ... This book has concerned itself with a historical survey of these flows of “stuff”, as well as with the hardenings themselves, since once they emerge they react back on the flows to constrain them in a variety of ways. (259)

As if at the far end of where “cultural studies” began, De Landa’s study abandons the narrative at this point of “capitalism” altogether, which has no discrete other: “What use is there in making this move, if we are to crown the whole exercise with a return to the great master concept, the great homogenization involved in the notion of a ‘capitalist system’?” (267) De Landa’s counter-history identifies with an agency that shapes itself in, and out of, life-forms and terrestrial formations, through mutating and nonlinear feedback or “catalytic loops” (citing Maruyama) and lateral migrations: “much as a given material may solidify in alternative ways (as ice or snowflakes, as crystal or glass), so humanity liquefied and later solidified in different norms” (6). De Landa glosses: “It is important, however, not to confuse the need for caution in our explorations of the nonlinear possibilities of (economic, linguistic, biological) reality, and the concomitant abandonment of utopian euphoria, with despair, resentment, or nihilism. ... And while these views do indeed invoke the ‘death of man’, it is only the death of the ‘man’ of the old ‘manifest destinies’, not the death of humanity and its potential for destratification.” (273)

Part of the labor of this intervention involves altering cognitive horizons, shifting entirely outside of mourning, of the human perspective, and recalibrating how reference is assigned, solidified:
We still have to deal with the world of referents, with the thousands of routinized organizations that have accumulated over the years, with the spread of standardized languages, and with the homogenized gene pools of our domestic plans and animals. ... Changing our way of thinking about the world is a necessary first step, but it is by no means sufficient: we will need to *destratify reality itself*, and we must do so without the guarantee of a golden age ahead. (273)

De Landa’s limitations include that his *linguistic* history limits itself to socio-linguistic shifts, or the ways that languages coalesced, dominated, or absorbed one another within shifting structures of empire and urbanization. As if lacking that negativity which the Hegelian Butler accuses Deleuze’s discourse of missing, De Landa does not explore how the domain of memory organizes itself around *inscriptions* and perceptual programs—or where this domain of teletechnics broadly (which precede and supersede alphabet writing and the authority of the Book) experiences default, re-inscription, nonlinear regression, memory implants and so on. Having crafted a “thousand year” history to recontextualize a certain present, De Landa does not extend this back-glance to “climate change”, and there is no attempt to attach these accounts to the calculus of closed mediocratic alterities and of biomorphic collapse and human evisceration of other life systems. Nor does De Landa’s project attempt to link what it calls “stuff”, a *materiality* that precedes any form it may take, to the sheer anteriority and semiotic back-loop that must always be required for historial or cultural or archival thought—caught in its prescribed feedback loops. “Planetary” culture is faced with the problem of losing face, losing personification as an archaic principle of linguistification. In question are *other* materialities and *other* epistemological settings that are not extensions and negotiations of templates that have proven unsurprisingly but ferociously recuperative (like the broadbased return to phenomenology under the aegis of “new media” or the “revised organicisms” [Timothy Morton] of what calls itself the “after theory” horizons current). De Landa’s blindspot here inherits Deleuzian orthodoxies and literalized dismissals (of things semio-mnemonic), which will only become more severe in his work. Nonetheless, the extraordinary penetration of this “nonlinear history” opens a positive marker for the thing it has otherwise been criticized for, the unassimilable priority of non-anthropic time.

If one has tracked the phrase “climate change” to a non-alterity that exceeds modernity and the social “other”, it is wired through prehistorical feedback loops. To track how our cognitive regimes and their critical sophistications participate in
this acceleration (irreversible ecocatastrophe) one would need to be alert to the ways in which our semantic reaction-formations, recuperations, redemption narratives, and re-humanizations (the “post-human”?) are themselves rhetorical regimes tied to these events, persisting in them, and how various mnemonic systems operate outside of human archivism in the production of life forms (DNA, RNA, photosynthesis, and so on). One would have to depart from the very conception of the house, or oikos, to get anywhere (what Hillis Miller in this volume analyzes as an ecotechnics). The interesting leap of work like De Landa’s involves passing into a fully technicized mode of address. It rewrites nature or earth or anthropos as outmoded referents, and reference itself as a political construction: politics has become epistemology. It implies that the wars for the future definition of the “planetary”—the question Myoshi raised—may be described as coming wars of re-inscription, not of this or that social injustice alone but of the memory programs from which reference and “experience”, consumption and perception emerge. At this point the humanist reserve of cultural studies bursts into its long-gestated others.

One might turn to work such as Bernard Stiegler’s, where the thinking of technics passes through Foucault’s return to Plato’s hypomnemata—the underlying inscriptions and master settings, out of which, for men, there is world. Stiegler’s elaborations on tertiary memory—and the implicit rift in the perceptual access to mnemo-technics and the artificing of “times”—returns to an “(a)materiality” entirely co-dependent on anterior tracks. What, today, has the course of the hydrocarbon era, or oil as an atropic agency, to do with the generated histories of writing, perceptual regimes, and mnemotechnics broadly?

One is faced with two or three family secrets. The first is that all of our calculations—which is not to say their realities—depend on various systems (and media) of measurement, collation, and rephrasing. This includes the hopeless nomenclature of today, starting with “climate change”, and the rhetoric advantage Big Oil has taken of in media initiatives and politics. A second would be that, in order to reason or counter-narrate the scandal of human disappearance (“life as we know it”), one partakes in the hapless task of narrating tipping points, or projecting futures and their collapse. That is, one partakes of a “literary” enterprise saturated in fairly resilient tropes and affects.

A recent piece by Thomas Friedman is symptomatic of this metaphoric back-loop, in which the language that is meant to alert or startle us is done by tropes which, in effect, re-enforce the accelerations one would undo:
It is hard to read the news from Japan to the Persian Gulf and then reflect on American politics and not conclude, as scientists would say, that we’re running an uncontrolled experiment on the only country and planet we have. And what is that experiment? We’re basically taunting—there is no other word for it—the two most merciless forces on earth: the market and Mother Nature. [...] The world is caught in a dangerous feedback loop—higher oil prices and climate disruptions lead to higher food prices, higher food prices lead to more instability, more instability leads to higher oil prices. That loop is shaking the foundations of politics everywhere.

Friedman alludes to the underlying food price inflation that spawned Middle Eastern revolts against petrocrat dynasties. For him or his readers, there is a “we” that is the global community of hyper-industrial societies. The trope of taunting a beast melds with a broader infantilism within the characterization. “The market” and “Mother Nature” are seamlessly paired, as if the latter concealed the former’s inhuman algorithms. Thus these “two most merciless forces on earth” depend, for their fury, on our stoking their cages by choice or arrogance. Such theotropes—“the market” and “Mother Nature”—seem unable to extricate themselves from the feedback loop Friedman tracks or finds himself trapped by in writing this. The infantilizing fable of the child who taunts the beast is titillating, bringing the pleasure of blame and the thrill of rule-breaking together for which, maybe, a punishment awaits. The discourse of climate change in the popular sphere or journalism—the list and the fable—operates within a double infantilism. Part of the imaginary, at this stage, trades against a residual apocalypticism which seems to carry its own anaesthetic, its own appeal to a future catastrophe that might somehow be avoided.

There is an intractable Westernness to these configurations, and an instinct for relapse in each style. Myoshi requires the utopian program be taken on in any response to “climate change”; Jameson deploys a regressed notion of allegory; Spivak turns back from the referential impasse of “planetarity”; Butler moves toward the equivocations of penetrating otherness; De Landa diverts to descriptive histories on the issue of language. Today, these may appear as traces of mourning. And yet it may be one of the exigencies, if not responsibilities, of “today” (however this is crafted) to accept the implications of moving beyond mourning.

Given more, or different times, one might suggest:
That the twentieth-century preoccupation with human on human justice is interrupted, and a new network of catastrophics arrives not accessible to archival memory or social history alone;

That, in this scene, what we call the “political” will have migrated from an exclusively social category (Aristotle), as it has been defined in relation to the polity, to a cognitive or epistemographic zone. That is, also, that the pre-recordings or inscriptions from which our “present” seems both accelerated and entranced are revealed as mutable (and, today, telecratically shaped);

That the era of the Book and its attendant nihilisms (alphabeticist monotheism) appear as nothing more than a major dossier in the trajectory of telemorphic practices, memory regimes, and technics;

That, since one writes now from after the catastrophe—tipping points are past, consequences not arrived—one does so also from a position beyond mourning, and beyond the automatisms of personification, “identification”;

That one may critique the rules of memory transmission (“literature,” pop culture, information streams) from the point of view of how we organize hermeneutic entropy and memory regimes, and that the logics of climate change present a necessary translation effect;

That the tropological modes that inform the “humanities” break against pre-figural orders, other mimetologies, at the point at which face recedes.

This situates the question of a new “task” for what is called the “humanities” and education that is broadly different from that which Butler projects. Myoshi’s call may involve a path that back-loops through the underworld of reading and representational models, towards the archival regimes that have generated our “present” as such. It also suggests a mutation in the archive itself, in which the memory streams gathered in media and writing traditions are recalibrated and networked to other referential orders. This would constitute a “task” of translation that would also imply a shift in cognitive regimes (or what Bernard Stiegler perhaps terms a noopolitics).

III.

Climate change as a non-name arrives then as a mnemonic chiasmus. Its spectralities appear in glacial forms, in a graduated drip or sudden collapse, posted as irreal futurity. Yet this horizon does not, as common sense suggests, belong strictly to the sciences, nor to economics and technologies to sort out. Since rationality is captured by these same mechanisms, the site of a possible
confrontation with climate change would be beyond all the regional competitions that have constituted a series of post-global “suicidal auto-co-immunitory” contests that are intertwined. Rather than evoking “homeland security”, the challenge of climate change implies an exteriorization without interiorities of any sort; a turning out of any metaphors of the home, or the aporias and so-called ethics of hospitality; an epistemological and cognitive mutation, a “critical climate change”.

What emerges in the random samplings above, where this rim is tested by twentieth-century critical extensions, is that a hermeneutic reflex and semantic ritual tied to these accelerates remains at work. There is still the reflex to save face, to stop and take one’s furniture and investments with one: the reflex of “saving” the revolution (Myoshi), or saving the “other’s” face (Butler), or saving “utopia” by seeming to accede it (Jameson). One wants to redeem one’s investments, keep one’s currency sustainable. This reflex participates in, indeed undergirds, the hyper-consumptions of the “global” imaginary and various sites where hermeneutic defaults and walls intervene, all of which are equally symptomatic. It might appear from this that “man” does not name a real animal-being at all, but this cognitive reflex out of which a tropological home, interior, or metaphoric name (“man”) is posited and defended. Rather than this horizon being passed to the sciences and socio-economic planners, the site returns us to a plane of inscriptions, nano-settings, memory programs, perceptual settings [for instance, the very practice and definition of vision and its linkage to movement, tracking, hunting—that is, pre-historical human settings which devolve, too, to reading conventions (seek and find truths, hidden signatures, theo-phantic meaning)]. What emerges instead are very small things—the link of alphabeticism to monotheistic cognitive programs, the retraction of personification or models of “reference” or hermeneutics machines, the naturalization of media streams. The X of these ex-factors names not only a structural chiasms that numbs daily cognition—the cinematics of deferred non-futures, irreal and politically unassimilable—but the location of this “threat without enemy” outside (yet generated by) the “anthropological machine”, as with what is called anthropogenic global warming. This “X” arrives at once as a terrestrial technics beyond mourning and as precedent to tropologies. This series of mutations irrevocably opens to what may be called wars of reinscription—that is, in twenty-first-century horizons defining themselves as ones of suicidal and “autogenic” war (Mike Hill’s term) within the archival, memory, and perceptual regimes.
It remains to ask what in deconstruction provides orientation? On inspection, perhaps nothing. Not only did Derrida, who lived to write on “terrorism”, never address this new non-orientation of climate change (though it was in public discourse for a good decade before his death), but those who want to represent “deconstruction” as a franchise today have yet, with rare exception, to turn toward this non-anthropic domain. Here, in this non-anthropic domain a certain divide opens between the archive as mnemonics and what is outside of the archive (global warming, resource depletion, desertification, mass extinction events), which is nonetheless connected to it. As Timothy Clark remarks: “What Derrida once called ‘Western metaphysics’ is now also a dust cloud of eroded top-soil, a dying forest and what may now be the largest man-made feature detectable from space, the vast floating island of plastic debris that spans a large part of the Pacific ocean.” (46)

Derrida, of course, placed the motif of assaulting what Specters of Marx calls “anthropomorphism and human narcissism” as a prime motif of deconstruction. Using Freud’s narrative of the three major shocks or “blows” to that centrism of the subject (Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud himself), Derrida, assimilating Marx, suggests that the fourth “blow” would be the disclosure of the founding technic (and tele-technicity) of the (human) world, that is, deconstruction. And yet he had nothing to say about a mutation of terrestrial systems that would definitively, or irreversibly, dispossess human dwelling and primacy, that would also aim to effect “population culling”, would result in resource wars, and the undermining of the premises of life over its brief technological history (say, 5,000 years), not to mention its hyper-accelerations in the carbon and fossil-fuel era, transforming the wastes of anterior organic life forms into energy, “light”, and speed. Climate change appears nowhere in Derrida, and yet one could say, in speaking of the “trace”, that almost everything in his work seems to lead there. The so-called “late Derrida” produced elaborate and rogue deconstructive readings, without abatement, of “ethics”, of “religion”, and “politics”. These became the fabled domain many of his recent commentators have been deciphering, as if these represented a turning of the page and welcome anchor in the most central of humanist discourses. Derrida, of course, denied such a “turn”. A recent commentator has exploited that denial to read these later episodes from the point of view of the earliest work. It is possible to introduce the logic of spacing and the structure of the non-present present into the networks of Derrida’s later thought; from there one could return to later unmarked terms that a more radical deconstruction wants to appropriate otherwise. The
commentator who undertakes this re-reading and re-appropriation, Martin Hägglund, in *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, proceeds to suggest that the entire generation of later commentators, seduced by the siren calls of terms like “ethics” or “religion”, essentially relapsed and normalized deconstruction, returning it to metaphysical accommodations. Some of the finest commentators get nailed here (Bennington, Critchley, Cornell, Bernasconi, and so on). Hägglund has particular impatience for the retro-Levinasian appropriations. As Derrida was endorsing and encouraging this hermeneutic maze, or counting on it to carry his work into the future, he was unobservant that the horizons of the earth were changing, beginning to wear and penetrate the archive itself as if from without.

This lapse can be seen if one reflects on the datedness of *Specters of Marx* today (a mere sixteen or more years later). *Specters* staged a polemic with neo-liberal triumphalism over the fall of global communism, and the assumption of an “end of history” (Fukayama). Once upon a time, according to Fukayama, democracy and the free market would overtake the globe; in response to this celebration Derrida sets out the ten plagues of the new world order. These plagues are, however, all of human institutions, human on human actions, and are somewhat underwhelming. Unemployment, homelessness, foreign debt, the injustices of the market, weak international laws, and so on—they are all of course quite significant or even key, but they are designed only to peel away the hellish underbelly of neo-liberal pretence (the now defunct “new world order”). They are hardly plagues. Having announced that “the time is out of joint”, and having applied what is essentially Derrida’s analysis of any time to the historical scene he addresses, he ignores the hyper out-of-jointness and allochronic catastrophics that climate change began to represent—and which underwrote many of the things he wanted to name (ethnic warfare is often related to designs on regional resources, like oil [Congo, Darfur again, and so on]. Derrida, who would lean into a “political” definition he did not accept, but mimed to respond to the “contemporary”, was to have miscalculated and, in advance, participated in his own domestication as, perhaps, a rhetorical strategy of “survival”. That he preferred to play the “terrorist” motif to that of the ecocatastrophic further inscribed him in Bush’s smoke screen and lure, back, to the imaginary face of an enemy other—and the totalization of the kleptotelecratic security “state”.

But everything has changed—including referentials. Even the genre of the list or the tabulated account falls into a certain anaesthetizing mode, the disaster-porn list
one surveys as if one were witnessing something somewhere else or a movie playing out. Neo-liberalism has collapsed and disclosed a neo-feudal consolidation of corporate takeover and post-democratic telecracy. The “free market” has imploded and morphed into its other (socialization by the state, the bailout and so on). The stateless or homeless have now morphed into “disposable” humans, harvested for organs or marked for economic or ecological triage in indefinite resource wars. “Human rights” have been brushed aside internationally except in council, the pretexts of such rights openly reversed by a so-called war on terror. “Futures” appear consumed or disappearing, ice-sheets are accelerating their rate of melt-off, and the third mass extinction event in earth’s history will be complete in decades (by man). The ocean’s acidity may collapse the marine food chain, with dissolved crustacean shells, leaving jelly-fish alone to bob about—not a good food source. Food inflation undergirds viral uprisings in petrocrat Middle-Eastern states, and water wars begin to flare up—including between localities (Atlanta’s recent water crisis provoking response from Florida). The prospect of micro-organic mutations and pandemics is deemed a certainty, and biological weapons appear back on the menu (if they were ever away). This list goes on and on, but “climate change” as an inclusive term for these effects is not on the list—and it is not so much that there is no space in the Decalogue, but that the premise of the Decalogue Derrida offers turns inside out. Derrida would only write of human to human injustice, or failing institutions.

In a certain sense, if “climate change”—which involves ex-anthropic and ex-organic dynamics—is absent alone from Derrida’s concerns, does it, so to speak, emerge as an anti-secret of deconstruction? There would be two symptoms here to note. The first would involve Derrida’s seeming ban on addressing the “future”, under the logic that such would necessarily repeat a program that forecloses the arrival of the future as per definition unknowable. Yet this gesture (repeated like a mantra among followers) confuses the position of the ethical subject at the moment of decision with the general flow of consequences and accumulation in collective and material flows. And second, it appears to arrive from an outside of the archive. Derrida understood that to alter possible futures (where the specter always arrives from), one recasts the heritage, the past itself, the programmatic legacies out of which perception, value, reference, and memory would be generated. Yet by Specters this future was being addressed as the possibility of perfecting human institutions beyond their current disastrous improvisations. Specters does not
choose to address what appears simply outside the archive, a threat of extinction to it in fact, and that is related to and generated by the archive’s “fever” on earth—the unravelling of life-systems and resources being directly related to the entire arc and implications of whatever “metaphysics” might mean. Value, reference, mega-debt, waste, all would be dumped into the non-site of a future, including the human unborn that would be systematically robbed of their heritage—their claim to oil, water, a recognizable earth and life. Because they are out of sight, the unborn become downgraded from legatees to slave status, expected to support the currently living in their retirements, taking on their megadebts, assuming their waste, and the responsibility to clean it up if they can. (This point, of prospective inter-generational war, has emerged recently in “anarchic” demonstrations in Athens and latter the Middle-East broadly, linked to food prices), where any particular political agenda is replaced by a general rebellion against having a “toxic” planet passed onto them—with falling jobs and services in any case) This returns us to Derrida’s early positing of the future as a “monstrosity”: “The future can only be anticipated in the form of absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a monstrosity.” (Of Grammatology 5) Yet the facts of that monstrosity are potentially quite banal. Today the calculations of futures invade the artefacted “present” more extensively, minutely, and irrevocably, displacing archival anteriority (a motif addressed by Catherine Malabou’s revocation, in this volume, of the “always already”).

The seeming spell of recuperation seems to be more viral, today, since the sorts of discourses that assemble themselves, entering this 21st century, as a sort of “after theory” moment, share a curious trait. While appealing to the sophisticated discourse of post-humanist tropes, there seems if anything a quiet regression of sorts to pre-critical premises. It is as if whatever was called “theory” did not happen and instead regurgitated itself, nonetheless, in a set of gestures that successfully re-imports the old defining humanist investment, among else in a certain oikos (or interiority), in a more captured way. Without disjuncture, the new model of networks and holistic circuitry that binds humanity and effortlessly traverses otherness and inter-species communications is the oddest replica of the previous organicisms whose very suspension was the premise of “theory” as such. One is left with the impression that, in select but persistent ways, the critical pre-occupations of the past decades have entailed something of a detour and regress from a point crossed decades ago and hastily occluded by the theoretical gesture.
itself. As opposed to any post-humanism or trans-humanism, it has all along been a question of a simple ex-anthropism from the point of view of which the "human" had all along been a metaphor, a construct, and a place holder for the closing off of a semantic feedback loop.

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Notes:

[1] See Agence France-Presse.

[2] In a recent exploration of how the “climate crisis shapes particular subjectivities”, Dibley and Neilson attempt to propose a climate change imaginary as one, at first, of climate change subjectivities, which import a rhetoric of “crisis” that is all too appropriable: “Unsurprisingly, much of the current discourse on climate change oscillates between these two poles: most dramatically, between imminent catastrophe and the prospect of renewal; between unimaginable humanitarian disaster and the promise of a green-tech revolution. As such the climate crisis regularly calls forth regimes of risk, since it is notions of risk that work this line between danger and protection and profit.” (144) This clogged and two-sided imaginary is composed, in essence, either by gestures toward recovery (mitigation, sustainability, green agendas) or that of denial, each supplementing the other. The two-headed hydra constitutes a “political subject of climate change” (147), which arrives as a sort of cognitive disjuncture: “These two images—the blind citoyen brought to vision and the fetishist’s blindness—are
alternative figures of the subjectivity of ecological crisis. They are complimentary. That is, between the blind citizen restored to sight through publicised risk, and, the blindness of the fetishist’s disavowal caught between the inadequacies of scientific and commonsense apprehensions of risk, we have something like a dialectical image of the subjectivity of climate change.” (146)

[3] This essay appears an introductory chapter to a volume title *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change* v.1 (Cohen 2011), and retains traces of reference to the compilation’s strategies. This volume grew out of symposia and exchanges hosted by the Institute on Critical Climate Change, or IC3, the product of a collaboration with Henry Sussman and Mary Valentis. IC3 was conjured to ask and pose a single question: how do the critical idioms derived from 20th century agendas and master-texts mutate, shatter, or re-orient before the very different horizons of a 21st century climate change? In simple terms, the shift would be that from generalized pre-occupations with histories of power and the ethics of “alterity”—that is, a human on human imaginary with its attendant idea of politics—toward ex-anthropic agencies, speciesist and geological time, disturbances in the structure of time. Since this coincides with the broader downgrading of “humanities” programs in universities, the question of how—or whether—such disciplines can reconfigure in some way, or what emerges after it fails to do so (if positive), remains practical. It would imply, say, a fundamental disinvestment of much that is assumed on a referential and mnemonic (or archival) level. Exploring this is what the volume calls “telemorphosis”.

[4] This is the argument of Arundhati Roy in “Is There Life After Democracy?” (2009). The 90’s political premise of formal democracy (appropriating neo-liberal triumph) hits the fact that market “democracy” itself can appear to make planetary evisceration irrevocable (Arundhati Roy). Meanwhile, narratives of “progress” hit a wall contradicted by survivalist calculations—to name but two new aporias of the era of climate change—as when the address of population controls must be rebuffed by feminists (see Hedges, Hartman); similarly, the premise of liberationist or post-colonial critique mimes, with its restorations of universal subjectivity, the neo-liberal promise of a world of American consumers. The very preoccupation with an “otherness of the other” that would be recognized, communed with, raised into the polis, appears itself more a viral meme and, perhaps, error, one that maintained the sovereign trace of subjectile and “human” mastery. On other fronts, it might seem that both metaphysics and its deconstruction jointly participated in what is now disclosing itself as the “anthropocene”—into which Enlightenment ideologemes played [seen in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s analysis of “freedom” (208)].

[5] Zizek, *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*: “everything should be re-thought, beginning from the zero-point” (87). For Slavoj Zizek, in “Nature and its Discontents” and *First as Tragedy, Then As Farce*, the logic of eco-catastrophe is posed as an interruption of history but ends by appropriating apocalyptic and specifically Christian logics: “Are we thus not gradually approaching a global state in which potential scarcity of three basic material resources (oil, water, food) will become the determining factor in international politics? Is not the lack of food—which
makes itself visible in (for the time being) sporadic riots in Egypt or Haiti—one of the signs of the forthcoming apocalypse?” (83) An excellent collaborative discussion of a thought that takes catastrophism as a norm—as Catherine Malabou does of the post-traumatic in her essay in this volume—is the introduction to Hoens, Jöttkandt and Buelens, The Catastrophic Imperative: Subjectivity, Time and Memory in Contemporary Thought.

[6] In this vein, Timothy Morton’s Ecology without Nature identifies blindness within cultural and cognitive language practices, which he calls an installed practice of ecomimesis. Morton’s “ecology without nature”—in which a more radical textualism or technicism is understood to precede and counterproduce a “nature”, itself a misreading of Romanticism—is also an ecology without ecologies, since what applies to “nature” applies to the metaphors of the Oikos.

[7] In her essay for Telemorphosis, on “Trauma”, Catherine Malabou’s abrupt suspension of the “always already” and trauma as an anchoring trope writes of this as a form of post-traumatic normativity that has the additional virtue of recasting temporaliies once sheer anteriority ceases to be channeled (or managed) as trauma at all.

[8] The essays in Telemorphosis, to which this essay formed an introduction, pursue certain patterns in this regard. I include a sketch of these as they contribute to the discussion above. If there is a certain irrevocability in the situation today—tipping points passed, say—that itself seems mimed by these strategies. These essays vary and in clusters practice disidentification with anthropic temporality (Robert Markley); shift to ex-species-ist narratives (Jason Grove); examine the spell of the telepolis in an era of climate change (Justin Read); disclose a post-traumatic norm that breaks with 20th century mnemo-politics (Catherine Malabou); affirm the import of extinction as a positive catalyst for thinking beyond the faux organicism of man and (sexual) difference (Claire Colebrook); invoke an eco-technics that discloses metaphorics of the home itself as suicidal in its reflex to restore what was never there (Hillis Miller); deconstruct the relapse of “post-humanism” and animal studies (Joana Zylinska); disclose an alternative noopolitics that wars against the short-time and the disarticulation of libidinal economies and attention (Bernard Stiegler); provide a genealogy for the cognitive disjunctures that prevent address or focus on “climate change” to date (Timothy Clark); index other materialities outside of conceptual binaries, oil and carbon, in order to re-vision the possibilities of writing and thought (Martin McQuillan); or provide a mapping of climate change that would enable a re-reading of the technologies of auto-genic war and its atmospheric mutation today (Mike Hill).

[9] In any case, Derrida’s choice to engage the aporia of hospitality, “the otherness of the other”, with a Levinasian trace, or even terror instead of the aporia of climate change—and turning from the latter explicitly—indicates a lacuna and rhetorical calculation. For an interrogation of how and whether “de Man” did not play a unique role here, and whether his occlusion was not because the “materiality” he indexed brought a halt to the ongoing anthropo-geniture of humanistic studies and the fetish of human on human histories. See Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, and J. Hillis Miller, Theory and the Disappearing Future: On de Man, On Benjamin.
The figure of the bubble merits consideration—since in ways it is the anodyne of the "crisis". We are constantly told of bubbles today, as if the metaphor were itself caught in a froth. The "bubbles" of the market are notorious—a tech bubble, a commodities bubble, and so on. Since it names an enclosure oblivious to its fragility to suddenly going pop, suddenly being dissolved or crashed without notice, and wandering in a dreamscape of accelerated calculations (the run-up, going parabolic), it finds itself implied by the logic of a “peak” time that would calculably, in material terms, vanish. Thus one hears the phrase “peak everything” used of this bubble present: peak oil, but also peak water, peak humans, peak credit, peak fish, down the line. To be in a time window of “peak everything” is doubly disorienting, since everyday perception contradicts all calculations of a disappearance of “life as we know it” (a cognitively complicit trope). And one must apply the trope of the bubble, as well or even commonly, to telecratic circuits, media-dependencies, memory regimes and perceptual programs, linguistic habits and memes, and interpretive defaults that appear captured or generated by these. The bubble whose inflated and fragile skin divides an inside from something beyond it wanders in a viscosity of short-time accelerations. What we might call, altogether, a time bubble today speculates on other temporalities—of life forms, of geological mutation, and the implications “tipping points” passed. The problem with the logic of a tipping point is its conditional anterior inflexion, since said point may be irreversibly past and yet to play out. Already past, they are also deferred into a future, short or long, that will pay, like the megadebt or resource depletion despoiling “futures” or generations (a Ponzi scheme, this time, that further hostages a “present” as leveraged and without credit—a sort of terrestrial Greece).

A version of this part of the discussion was previously published as “Climate Change, Deconstruction, and Cultural Critique”, in Enduring Resistance: Cultural Theory after Derrida.

Bush’s media suppression of “climate change” is more chilling than not, since the questioning of climate science as delaying tactic was transparent: they knew, they have better data than the public. This suggests, if anything, they knew it was irreversible, and might as well be accelerated to secure resources for a survivable class.

Referencing a speciesist crisis that “cannot be reduced to a story of capitalism” (221), Dipesh Chakrabarty elaborates a “universal” unification of man displacing cultural identifies not out of a positive but a “negative universal history”: “Climate change poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world. It is more like a universal that arises from a shared sense of a catastrophe. It calls for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity, for, unlike a Hegelian universal, it cannot subsume particularities. We may provisionally call it a ‘negative universal history’.” (222)

Timothy Morton: “The new organicism is possibly even stranger than the old one. In the new organicism, ‘emergent’ formal organization—compared with the growth of flowers or the spread of clouds—depends upon the operation of some essentially algorhythmic process. The composition process is as mechanized as possible. [...] If emergent algorithmic machine processes
resemble the natural world, then there is a way in which the natural world is thoroughly automated, mechanical, and repetitive; we discern that organismism always contained a material, even mechanical, automated component, a component latent in the word organism itself (Greek organon, machine, tool). This idea is attractive to posthuman thinking that is uneasy about traditional ideas of nature. It [...] develops an idea of ‘autopoesis’ close to the revised organismism I am describing here.” (191)

[15] What is overlooked broadly are the cognitive settings of received concepts, telecratic spells, and unexamined tropes that participate in this acceleration. With them come temporal regimes managed by grammar.

[16] Today, one encounters routinely the following sort of observation, as if watching a transition from elsewhere: “This has been a dismal year for the health of our planet. Evidence of human-caused catastrophe mounts daily with grim reports from sea, sky and land: disappearing species, the collapse of fisheries, deforestation, the shrinking ozone layer, higher concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide, oceanic dead zones, warming temperatures, extreme weather, rising sea levels, depleted aquifers, melting glaciers, thawing permafrost. We have already crossed into an unimaginable new epoch, but we seem unable to unite behind efforts to change, or even slow, our disastrous course.” (Browning) Aside from the suspect trope of “the planet” bound to this characterization, it is also a list—that is, the enumeration of effects, a kind of score-keeping, a tally. The list induces its own anaesthetization, with its “derangement of scale” (Clark). It is already too late, and one has “crossed into an unimaginable new epoch,” yet cognition does not adapt to this anymore than to action (“we seem unable”).

[17] In fact, one might read the “late Derrida” upside-down, not as a movement beyond his early ex-anthropic violence but as the retracing of what a pre-Derridean narrative leading to, or paused, before that would have been. One could read these pre-occupations and their rhetorical compromises as a strategy to embed his project within the canonical academic community in a way not easily erased. But the result has been a post-Derridean “deconstruction” that pretends it exists as a continuity with or in possession of a certain capital to be tended and given orthodoxy, an inability to depart from what is not in Derrida’s text (climate change, say) or to recuperate its threads gradually (deconstructive “ethics”?)—that is, an auto-immune phase. One could say that Derrida had always had two columns at work, the ex-anthropic and that entering humanistic discourses and circulating there, and that the second has come, rather predictably, to dominate just as the first, eclipsed, may be called for. The turning point would seem to be when Derrida, no doubt trying to counter the implosion of de Man and the way that was aimed against “deconstruction” in America, would risk such hyperbole, to rally the troops, as “deconstruction” is justice.
Tom Cohen, Ph.D., Comparative Literature, Yale University. Currently professor at the Department of English, University at Albany, State University of New York. He was in the program of Comparative Literature as Fulbright Scholar at Freie-Universitaet Berlin; and in 2003 as Fulbright Professor for American Studies Program at Sri Nakharinwirot University, Bangkok. He was in Shanghai and Peking and other cities on the mainland as organizer for conferences and visiting scholar. His publications include several scholarly books, *Theory and the Disappearing Future: On de Man, On Benjamin*, with Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller (Routledge, 2011); *Telemorphosis Theory in the Era of Climate Change. Vol. 1*, as Contributing Editor (Open Humanities Press, 2011); *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies. Vol. 1, Secret Agents* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005); *Hitchcock’s Cryptonymies Vol. 2, War Machines* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005); *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*. As Contributing Editor (Cambridge UP, 2002); *Material Events. Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, as Contributing Editor, with B. Cohen, J. H. Miller, and A. Warminski (University of Minnesota Press, 2000); *Ideology and Inscription “Cultural Studies” after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin* (Cambridge UP, 1998); *Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock* (Cambridge UP, 1994).