

# THE DISCOURSE OF THE END OF THE WORLD NOW: AN INTERVIEW WITH JONTY TIPLADY

What is most proper to language, no one knows: that it merely concerns itself with itself.—Novalis

AI is something *beyond* its 'life processes'. AI goes *beyond* the world not because it is not the world, but because it is a summary thought about itself, or a free, self-conscious thought.—Julie E. Maybee



**end the world now** @lyingdownhere · 10h

Replying to @noctilucent

i've been saying the end of the world is for everyone



**indierocktilucent** @noctilucent · 8h

the end of the world is for no one



[1: SKG]: Jonty Tiplady, as usual, I will start my interview with the following question: if you had to introduce yourself to the audience what would you write?

[J.T.] I always knew I was the best at something, I just didn't know it was language. That has been my sort of personal, self-joke, self-mythologising, self-branding punchline or mascot phrase for a while now, but I believe in it and I believe in what it tells you about any possible relationship with language. In terms of what I do, language is where I really hunker down and get off. As it happens I am a creature of language and I must mean that *excessively so* because the descriptor is relatively universal. Coached as I am in Derridean styles of reading (I studied with Derrida in Paris as a teenager) that are still almost semio-xenophobically sniffed at in this country—England—I guess what I am saying is that I feel most at home when ferreting out Language as a sensationally foreign force. Which is another way of saying that I'm not at home in the English scenography of language, and never have been. The 'no books in my house' cliché was true of my childhood in north Doncaster, and it was only exotic stuff—'theory' from abroad—that broke through and didn't seem bullshit to me as a kid, and not the other way round. I couldn't understand Auden or Armitage but I could understand Derrida instantly, almost like knowing maths without having studied it, and perhaps strangely that never struck me as strange. I already sensed language as something translated from inside of itself, inside out. I read Derrida and other theorists crazy young with little sociological awareness of how he was hated. I mean I was reading him at the same time as twagging off from school so why should I have cared? I scoped out a copy of *Feu la cendre* in that beautiful LP-sized design by Richard Eckersley (who I later found out was from Lancashire) in a bookshop in Leeds, and made a decision early (about 17?) to devour everything Derrida had

done and everyone he had ever referred to. That book literally *stood out* on the shelf as if a different type of thing from a different non-archive of non-literature. Why would I want to read some little Faber book of poems when I could read this high-tech, incredibly designed, bilingual, two-columned event that was so much more poetic and philosophical and mysterious at the same time? Maybe there was a kind of prejudice (an Anglophobia) in this pull towards the exotic, sort of like Clarice Starling driven to do all she can to evade her status as ‘poor white trash’, ‘getting out . . . getting anywhere . . . getting all the way to . . .’, and yet *where* do I mean? In that sense ‘theory’ would have been an exuberant and psychopathic lure (the will to really *read* once and for all and be a Lecter), but in any case I think that is how the will to writing is, criminal and illicit and cannibalistic, always tending back to trash. I ripped the cellophane off that book and read the whole thing standing. The other decision there and then was to only write books *like that*.

Another way of describing it is that I had been waiting for an unexpected sound—a different graphism—and that this sound had finally arrived, that I would pay anything for it, and that suddenly most English writers were silenced-partners. That remains the case. What I mean by language is itself different, not the language you think—language, you could say, is not what you think—and this language has now reached a sort of final Ozymandian endgame that has a lot to do with the global fate of the ‘Anglo-’ itself. When I cite ‘language’ I mean something like the ‘pure language’ (*reine Sprache*) of Benjamin, which he connected explicitly to extinction, something forced into eventualities going on before poetry, philosophy, and theory in the theoreticist sense. My first book was named *Zam Bonk Dip* after the language of exclamation marks in the earliest Popeye cartoons—that’s all they had in the speech bubbles! I still go after that sense of language’s crash, sound and

vision, anything cortex-wobbling and cranio-juddering, since it's just this kind of 'shake' that makes a difference within the Khoratic element. You could say the edge of English isn't English at all and doesn't need the passageway back through the virtual Scotland Yard of the poetic tradition which is always there but is also a way of losing time seeking something lost. We're talking about a kind of verbal neon installed a priori, laying it on thick with fresh concepts, a formalised AI, a type of painting extinction and not death (which I'm coming to), even what I call the childhood of language. Jagged breath; global breathlessness; not so much the *via negativa* in the early twenty-first century, but the early twenty-first century as a type of ecophagy of the powers of formalisation put in place by language itself. Zag and jag of Zug.

But my subjective relation to language also has to do with mess and a kind of asubjective beatitude of mess. I let go texts quickly, many unfinished, many stashed, and some worked on over very long periods but then deleted. To some extent I keep the bulk out of sight, ready as an archive, or destroyed as an auto-archive, but I'm also wary of the zelophilic eros of that self-hoard. What I'm really into is what Fred Moten calls the 'amazing arrival at unfinished, condensed, explosively multi-matrilineal seriality, the amazingly beautiful'. If I have a right to exist in and impact on language it comes from this sense of amazing arrival, the feel of something that makes a lifetime, that I think is always allotted in Language! and never just in 'poetry' as a kind of generic lay-by. If something can be taken down and notated in language that is still arriving, that is amazingly beautiful, but also perhaps starts in the amazingly messy, in the surge of a muddle, I want it. I relate to the beautiful mess and its compression and I relate to Moten's free love of Derrida and theory, saying as he does in his 2014 lecture on Delaney that 'we need to be talking about Derrida all the time' and indexing 'what Marx and then Derrida more emphatically it seems

to me makes possible for us'. It's this attention to *the both* in all respects that I'm about. 'Language' allows one to work on all fronts and get into the worklessness of the poematic as primary right and historical fever, a *grand mal de rythme archive*—but then again, as I say, it's a home that has nothing to do with where I'm from save where I'm at. I'll be bitchy for a moment and say that even now I'm not really interested in any British poetry. As a kid I just looked at the stuff and it left me cold—it seemed like we were already in the serious lull of an Ozymandian freeze-up and the objects of the supposed master discourse were heavily sedated and inoperative. No access.

[2: SKG] Jonty, this is a very interesting description of an admirable kick-start into *reading-writing* and I can mirror myself here easily. Remembering quite well my own *combustive agents* (Heidegger—Benjamin—Derrida soon to be bombed out by Paul de Man and Tom Cohen), I think it would be interesting for our readers to learn more about how things evolved later on for you in your works and projects? What are your most recent concerns?

[J.T.] In my recent writing I've focused on the politics and aesthetics of extinction. Extinction is what is most happening and moving now. I feel I couldn't live without trying to say what our extinction might mean and has meant in the fullest terms. It's a lived theme, paradoxically, an entwined obsession, an internal politics of statements, but also the feeling that no adaption can take place in time. I'm interested in how people see, feel, think, disavow and avow extinction, and of course in the ways in which 'extinction' is not one, is and is not One, is maybe not even given at all. I go after or am drawn to how extinction is different from death, and the qualities this difference takes on. Is it a new type of ontico-ontological difference? Is there an extincto-thanatological

difference that remains unrecognised, and that is covered over by the contemporary noise of writing systems? My hunch has been that there isn't any natural setting for extinction and that it bypasses and compromises ontology and hauntology and even the most sophisticated aesthetic apotropaics and rebuttal systems. Blind brain theory (BBT) is useful here even if just as an index of what we can't think in that direction, and of what we can't even know we are not thinking (even when we try to make these types of formulations). I guess I am insisting (and insistence itself is at stake) that the writing of extinction is now all but unavoidable, that there is a pressure in the air, and that language, whether it likes it or not, is touched by an extinction unconscious at every point and that this is new as a matter of degree and economy, that is, in the oikos of death. Extinction is not of the household. Nor is it of the enclave (of the Anglo- for instance). It is not *one of us*. And insofar as (to go quickly) 'theory' for de Man simply names the attention to the materiality of inscription that just *is* extinction, the resistance to 'theory' also historically reads off in every way a refusal to think and factor in extinction, which refusal is at the same time understandable though ipso facto no less erroneous. Initially my focus in this area was on the ecologies of denial that seem to sustain contemporary aesthetic codes and tribes. I was in a kind of advocacy spin, mistaking an absence in the discourse of the Other for the thing I wanted to say, and to some extent perhaps the discourse of the end of the world is always structured that way (marked out as Paranoia as such). But the 'do they know' or the 'why do they not know' quickly becomes 'do I know' and then 'there is something I do not know' and then perhaps 'there is something we do not know', and so the spin became more concentrated as self-attention. As a sort of retired member of the poetry sector I put in the hours notating and suffering from an unsaid on that 'scene', took minutes for what felt like a kind of

remote control release group therapy. Even more informally I worked in therapy on a kind of passion of extinction as the unsaid, extinction itself as passional. But after a while I closed my eyes and trusted or rather I closed my (somewhat cagey) reading of the poetry sector, determined that there was a kind of semiotic hustle there, an unresolved squabble hard to metabolise using the internal terms and house styles, and had to draw a line. The issue then becomes the line itself of course, the edge as question, and not a simple leaving—the ext rather than the exit. At the same time if I sometimes refer to leaving the poetry scene, it's true—I did. There seemed to me very few nonphobic lines of reception going on, and once I kicked the angels out of the air-lock I began to truly notate extinction and to be hit sideways by what, now, in 2017, I'm calling a discourse of the end of the world now.

I now work with three main statements and five main subject positions. You could say that these three statements and these five subject positions, taken together, and seen as a moveable set, are the entirety of the discourse of the end of the world now. I make no bones about that. I also call them an endology, to distinguish them from an ontology and a hauntology. The five subject positions of the discourse of the end of the world are *insister*; *exister*; *detractor*; *outrager*; *indifferentist*. And the three statements of the discourse of the end of the world are

1. death is not extinction;
2. the death-drive (*Todestrieb*) is not the extinction drive (*Aussterbenstrieb*);
3. the task of civilisation is to understand its own breaking point as a universal claim and to invent a science of astrobiological extinction, which is to say plural generic anthropocenes.

Statement 1 is also expressed as the matheme

$$e < > d$$

which is perhaps the first matheme to appear within the body of English poetry in the history of verse and numbers. Each of the three statements may be immediately re-written. They are themselves a mark—a marking—of plasticity in primary writing. For instance at the moment I am trying to think of the discourse in terms of love, which is to say not quite as a lover's discourse, but as a discourse of the end of the world now as love, and I came up with the statement that *it's never the end until the end is love*. It's not so much about understanding what such a statement means but about wondering about where it might fit in with the overall discourse and what other statements might then be produced, as though by a machine. One might add for instance that there is an endological distinction to be made not only between death and extinction, *d* and *e*, but between the end of the world and the End of the World, between ends and end. The implied voiding of the death drive (statement 2) might go via a reading of Bion, who already spoke, much closer to Freud than us, of a '←↓' which 'represents a force that continues after · has been annihilated and it destroys existence, time, and space'. Michael Eigen likes to repeat that Bion said that, and Bion himself (who was Beckett's analyst) resorted to pure notation to say it in the first place. If I insist on anything it's that we do not yet know what extinction is or what it can do.

I also move all this in the direction of Lacan and Badiou, to complement and add to the four discourses (of the master, the university, the hysteric, and the analyst) and the typology of three subjective figures (faithful, reactive, and obscure). I stress that insofar as neither typology seems to factor in the updated content

of statements 1 and 2, and insofar as the mathematico-scientific maturity of statement 3 could not have been known to them, the discourses (Lacan) and the theory of the event (Badiou) must be considered incomplete. Perhaps statement 3 is the more difficult axiom to contemplate at first sight. It is a mathematico-formallogical attempt to capture what I call the endological primacy of the answer, at least as test. Instead of the Heideggerian-Derridean primacy of the question (although for Derrida as ever things are very complex here), which always assumes at least in outline a kind of endlessness of reading horizons and time to come, I take up the problem of the answer. Not the answer to the question, then, but the question of the answer. This is something both more breath-takingly finite and infinitely plastic than the endlessness of further micro interests. The reality of statement 3 relies for its traction on very recent work by Adam Frank and Woody Sullivan and others on what they call the ‘astrobiology of anthropocenes’, or on what Frank himself specifically calls generic anthropocenes (‘the anthropocenes are generic’). In a forthcoming paper by Frank and Jonathan Carroll-Nellenback called ‘The Anthropocene Generalised: Evolution of Exocivilisations and their Planetary Feedback’, the authors speak of studying ‘generic behaviours possible in the interaction between a resource harvesting technological civilisation (an *exo-civilization*) and the planetary environment in which it evolves’. The matheme itself, therefore, has multiple forms, and allows itself to be transcribed as a *cosmomatheme*, wherein  $U =$  the as yet unknown potential of generic extinctions that would begin to alter the value of  $e$ :

$$Ue < > d$$

In turn, in things I have just written, love begins to affect the force of both  $U$  and  $e$  in the equation, and therefore  $d$  too, in ways I don't fully understand, so that

$$LUe < > d$$

What at first (1) seems universally desperate (and is) is later on (at 3) viewed as the plasticity of optimism itself insofar as one has here a first definite constraint on the astrobiological optimism allowing any other genuine (empirical) optimism to come into play. What I mean is that in the work on the astrobiology of anthropocenes the Drake equation is as if reduced for the first time. There is a kind of phenomenological epoché of cosmogenesis.

The *speculative* correlate here is what I call Principle-X:

X: if the world ends now, here on earth, and what is called human life does not continue elsewhere, which remains possible according to the current state of the non-human sciences, then there may be no more anthropic life or world here or anywhere else ever again.\*

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\* Principle-X must be allowed as outside margin to entertain the movement between a minimal set of three and more statements. It can be approached in different ways, most recently, for example, though new data from the BASE collaboration at the CERN research centre where an attempt has been made to measure the magnetic force of antiprotons with unbelievable precision. In efforts to explain and measure the matter-antimatter balance in the universe no asymmetry was detected. Christian Smorra concluded: 'All of our observations find a complete symmetry between matter and antimatter, which is why the universe should not actually exist'. To what extent might the gaps in the data be filled by other areas of knowledge which the researchers don't have time to attend to? Or, is Principle-X the condition (in place) of *unknown statements*? Cf. this nlab entry on universal exceptionalism: 'The philosophical sentiment which expresses the following perspective on the description of physics by mathematics might deserve to be called *universal exceptionalism* or similar: *Since nature (reality) is exceptional in that it has existence, it is plausible that it is the exceptional among all mathematical structures—such as the exceptional examples in the classification of simple Lie groups, the exceptional Lie groups—that play a role in the mathematical description of nature.*'

<<https://ncatlab.org/nlab/show/universal+exceptionalism>>

To go back to Lacan, the *objet petit a* was the uncovering of something that could fit in the bucket of surplus value discovered by Marx. Lacan effectively assimilated his own discovery to that of Marx. It's new wines in old bottles, but in the most spectacular of senses. One invents and the formula is there, and that is what the matheme  $e < > d$  is; and the sort of emotional volatility (smile) it implies with regard to the passing of the aesthetic sector is held to. Lacan was not optimistic about the possibility of change precisely because Marx's system was so elegant. The more Marx's discovery was likely to last, the more it seemed it would be describing something destined to remain and worsen. I talk a lot in my discourse of the end of the world now about emotion, about betrayal, about music. Insofar as the insister often imagines the exister to have something on the insister, there is a great deal of drama or even melo-drama in the three statements. Think of Ismene and Antigone or Will and Molly Graham in *Manhunter* or Claire and Justine in *Melancholia* or Moten and Wilderson. Betrayal in the discourse of the end of the world now is the feeling that the exister is not me, and that even my conversion to another subject position is not mine. One replaces the *object a* (which already has the status of an algebraic sign) with  $e$ , with the *objet petit e*, and the effect, paradoxically, is a surplus of life.

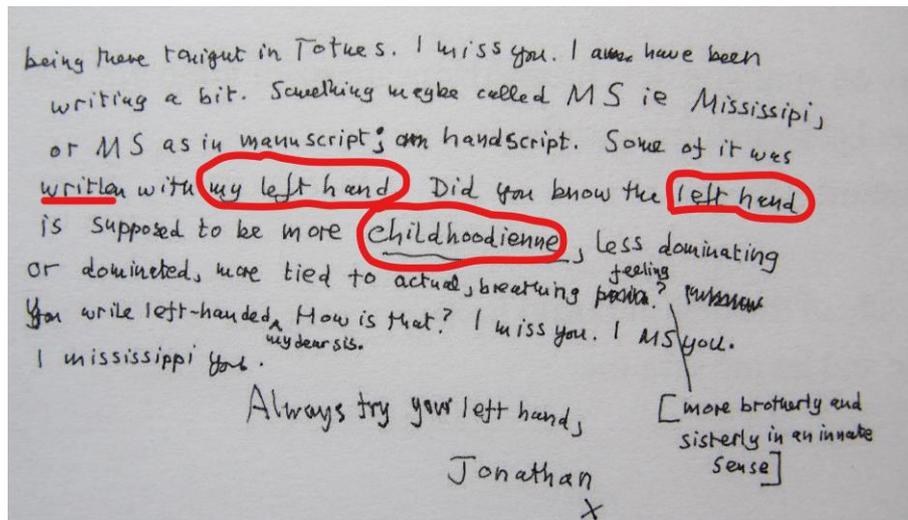


Jean-Etienne Liotard, *L'Écriture* (1752)

[Figure 1]

[3: S.K.G.] Your book *MS* (2015) struck me almost instantaneously as one of the most interesting and courageous attempts to develop a 'practice' of *leftist* writing preceding or transforming the worn and sedating distinction of theory and praxis, and worn materialistic or dialectical ideas of 'human work' circling around the left hand or what's left of the hand aiming maybe at a new form of 'poetic-prosaic' writing. This is a line of thought that I would also tend to relate to a tradition sketched by Derrida in *Spectres de Marx* (1993) and earlier in his cours *Théorie et pratique* (1975-76/2017) or in the polysemic motto 'la philosophie en effet'. I want to ask a somewhat provocative question: what would be really left of the Left if the left would have really left *Leftist writing* in the disguise of silly and sometimes criminal attempts to sketch out revolutions and wonderful communities to come? What's really left of and for the *Left* to write? What are words worth when *Poetry* (being relatable to *poiesis*) and *Politics* intersect? And how would this be relatable to a new idea of *Work* and *Arbeitsteilung*

subverting the maybe worn and bourgeois split of *praxis* and *theoria*,  
*brain* and *hand*?



Jonty Tiplady, *MS* (2015)

[Figure 2]

[J.T.] *MS* was a book that cost me a lot of life. It was first written or rather assembled—in a fragmented, spasmodically illicit way—as a set of notes in a mental hospital in London and then a rehabilitation centre in Mississippi in the summer of 2012. In Mississippi much of the work we did was writing work, which was ironic because I was in there partly for a narcotic relationship to writing itself. I remember complaining I was being allowed access to my drug, but this was also a negotiation with getting better, which inevitably involved writing exercises in this case: obviously the pharmacological calibrations of recovering from or mourning the writing machine are very delicate and mega-ambivalent. So *MS* is very much about that, the ways in which the ‘*endekhomenon allos ekein* constitutes relapse rates and flows’. For one week in Mississippi we were asked to write only in our ‘wrong hands’ or ‘other hands’, and for me that is my left hand. This was an attempt, I think, to flip the manual brain away from its toxic materiality

since if there is one thing an addict is good at it's staying in a neuro-groove. To some extent the receptor sites in the brain of an addict—for instance a writing addict or a technology addict—are irreversibly gone, kind of gone in the sense that Celan said the world is gone, *Die Welt ist fort*. What you call leftist writing—writing in one's other hand, the *allos* in *endekhomenon allos ekein*—was an attempt to switch delusion channels via a cerebral lateralisation. It was as if I were trying to rise up and switch out of the pharmacological silo of writing itself. I wrote lots of notes using my left hand, my *other* hand, a process that (I don't know whether you've tried it) is very strange and painful. It brings up a kind of archive of gnarly data in the body. You plunge into a bodily khoratics, a 'powder keg', and catch a glimpse of the main drug substance, consciousness itself as Valéry said, and you see that making any kind of reversal there (traditional leftist interventions) is going to feel like turning around the irreversible. They showed us scans of the addict's brain and there was just very low level activity. The brain goes dark and is abandoned to the pull of infinity, the pull out of life, the glitter of the *Todestrieb*. If I have a suspicion of 'the Left' or, to be more specific, Leftist political poetry in the UK, it springs from this observer-site that perhaps the addict has privileged access to (to some extent we addicts are lucky). I'm risking mythologising here because we're talking about a real thing: the drug-taking and omnipotent high (for Freud this relates to the power of a baby, and a certain wishing the other gone) of a civilizational drift pulled now towards a more than dying end. I think Marxist radical writing broadly isn't radical enough or at all—it isn't even on the Left in the sense we're talking about—because it automatically underestimates 'capital' as a MacGuffin of its own denialism instead of appraising it as an addictogenic fix that really goes way beyond the more immediate memes of class, wage-labour, struggle, the locating of an enemy, and so on. In terms of

the brain stem, victimologism (the class enemy) is a primitive habit. It's a perfectly old, preindustrial program whereby sight is always relayed as an ocularcentric 'order' of the hunt and as consumption of prey. To want to have a class enemy is to want to kill an animal, in effect. We can see how far that has got us. I think Malabou is right when she says that only new addictions can save us, which is also a way of almost saying that only an addict can save us.

What got cracked open in Mississippi was the split dimension between brain and hand, which Malabou also wants to think is a split between brain and thought or aesthetics. By doing leftist writing I got a premonition of just how grooved non-revolutionary desire is, which is also to say how stalled and grooved revolutionary desire is. As my work insists, we are up against not just a *Todestrieb* but an *Aussterbenstrieb*. From that point of view, spying on the movements of matter from Mississippi inside addictive consciousness, I'd say I'm not a Marxist at all. Or rather I believe in what Colebrook calls hypo-Marxism and counter-Marxism. The notes written or scrambled in 2012 were painful for me to even look at or keep as time went on. I got 'clean' and actually had to hand over to my sponsor this cardboard box with everything from that period in it, the notes as what recovery jargon calls 'using paraphernalia'. I came back to England and plunged into further mourning of the writing machine. I didn't write at all for two years and the scriptive hangover was awful. I lost touch with both hands. I literally felt like I could never touch writing again without dying. I felt like I'd discovered something there in Mississippi but didn't know what it was. My body had shut down on the reading of the hangover. Lateralisation from the leftist side of the brain had pressed me into a *close encounter*, an encounter with a sort of self-technologisation (to some extent the brain wasn't even needed anymore) and with a formative Paranoia. Basically, I

suddenly felt distanced from the entirety of the English scenography and set, and the removal to Mississippi for expedient reasons felt emblematic. I was in the historical deep south of the Confederacy, heard talk of Jefferson Davis, and of how this had been where the largest concentration of white millionaires had been in the 1860s. In treatment my key therapist was a black guy, the only one in the unit, and he was easily the most sane person there. He taught me some canny stuff about how my relation to a certain sort of pornography was itself racial, predicated in some way on an unconscious fugue of dominance. I dreamt every night of walking all the way to New York barefoot and they found it hard to help me.

Philip K. Dick says 'every junkie is a recording' and I like that a lot. Dallying with and recovering from graphomania is a kind of face-off not just on Death Drive but on Extinction Drive, with *e* before *d*, with *e* over *d*. If this face-off and brain pinging has an avatar today perhaps it is Dougie in *Twin Peaks: Season 3*. When you're in the Mississippi River Valley forced through your left hand to feel and contemplate the whole pharmacological rainbow of irreversibility, you ask yourself like Dougie what state of matter you're even in. I could have been in any state, MS, or what Derrida called the state of theory, CA. I felt abbreviated in both. As I say, I had a Huck Finn thing going on about catching a mail train up the east coast to New York City. I was dramatizing in panic but I felt like Dougie in terms of the lateralisation-effect on my brain hemispheres. Dougie becomes the dark matter centre of things, and somehow finds himself arriving in New York via a high-tech dark glass, butchering the young lovers in the mercy seat. He is not where he is and he is where he is not and he is not even where he is not. He is the lobotomised heart of robodenihilist slapstick in 2017.

As regards *MS* itself, the title obviously plays on the state name in America, the abbreviation of manuscript, humanism, and the notion of a masterpiece—and it's also hardly my best book, whatever that means, but it probably retains its rights through that very fact and through those pressures I'm describing under whose weight it faithfully collapses. I eventually opened the cardboard box in 2015 and allowed writing to come back into my life. *MS* is the unedited mess of that time, maybe the first leftist manuscript in the world, and it probably also contains something like the origin story of the matheme. It's not a fractured book, it's an apsyche fracture. Its meaning really isn't in it. The book asks, what would you do and say if you were on your own at the end of the world? It was a way of being broken enough to be pulled out of the fatherboard but there again I don't sense anything but further non-integration. There was a kind of foul and filthy air when I opened the box, *Macbeth* stuff all the way. But the cardboard was also a different kind of black box, the crash manifest offering feedback for future survival via an evolutionary adaption of brain technology incurred by the surging of the *Aussterbenstrieb*-event.

In Mississippi we did trauma drills. We had to imagine handling our toxic assets with kid gloves, with asbestos hands, from behind a glass—*over there*. I think you're right to read from *MS* that there is nothing left of the left and that the future of that illusion was an aesthetic crime, and a self-imposed dominance of rightist praxis undercover as a lure. What do I pick up now from all that? It seems to me we think extinction will run down to the crustacean level and then reboot, that it will run down to the trilobite level and then reboot, that ultimately once it reaches the protozoon it can always stir again from nothing. We always assume it can come back just like in *The Day After Tomorrow* of aesthetic ideology broadly, which assumes a 'day after' and a sole survivor. Handling and screening the matheme we can certainly do a number on the

various Leftist sectors still stuck in their twentieth-century crash modes, in their life insurance policies against an unknown that cuts through. *MS* also allows you to explode that clunky, crunky word ‘anthropocene’. The anthropocene, you could say, looking back already, proved to be the end for aesthetic ideology, Big Time. Suddenly the cat was all the way out of the civilizational body bag, and there were waves of shock, handling difficulties, panic debts, irritating palinodes, viral whataboutism. I’m no longer so shocked. We all know we’re going extinct now and yet ‘we’re all going extinct’ is something I can’t know, can’t quite handle. If there is a revolutionary front, still, it’s probably there in the labour of adaption to *e* and not just *d*, and in the name of future generics and genetics on the cerebellum of another frontier. I think what I discovered in the Mississippi River Valley, however too little too late it now seems, is that the psyche is now ‘structured’ as utterly wayward mourning of the loss of death to extinction. What is broadcast and is beyond touch almost is an endopsychic set-up that knows full well we are going extinct (that is what death is on the family plot) and yet forms a crypt for the excess of extinction over the saving fiction of death. *It traces, it races towards extinction.*

[4: S.K.G.] This brings me to my next question, knowing that it is only possible to ask strategically: how would you describe your argumentative tendencies and strategies in this immense and ultra-difficult field circling around the respective positions of Bernard Stiegler calling himself most recently ‘*un post deconstructioniste*’ (Pharmakon 2016, Séance IV, YouTube video) and those of Tom Cohen being both *en route* to ‘a thinking of technics without reserves’ (‘The Philotechnic Blind’, p. 533) and after an ‘Escape from the Anthropocene’ (Bernard Stiegler)? Is there escape at all?

[J.T.] Tom Cohen has been the writer I've gone back to the most over the last ten years. If ecocidal accelerations and their avoidance has been the main mood of this era, then Cohen becomes extremely important—his work is undeniable, I would argue, which is also to say 'only deniable'. His essays on Derrida's omissions in this zone were instrumental for me, enforcing among much else a critical and personal transformation. Up until after his death Derrida remained the index of a writer who had somehow pulled off the unique feat of getting nothing wrong. Like HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which is to say like superintelligence itself, it seemed Derrida could not be wrong 1. because he was perhaps the first 'philosopher' to have a truly athletic style (he works in the free indirect style and tends to write almost exclusively on others) and 2. because he himself (like de Man) formulates the law of supplementarity whereby each text leaves out something in order to make its own machine 'work'. Other philosophers could be debated and evolved, it seemed, but Derrida (despite all the misguided criticisms his work still attracts) didn't seem amenable to objections in that style, not least because he was never really attached to any of his statements. But this also allows him to seem to be saying everything. Even now an impressive dossier might be assembled to suggest that there was nothing about ecocidal acceleration that Derrida's work failed to anticipate. The dossier would include everything from the early comments in the 'Introduction' to *The Origin of Geometry* on the phenomenology of the earth and the shaking up of the notion of anthropos ('unity of anthropos') in 'The Ends of Man' all the way through to the replaying of the logic of the trace in the repeated readings of Celan and in the very final session of the seminars on the meanings and the *going* of the world. He missed nothing, then. He missed nothing and he wrote nothing. Deconstruction was talking about nothing else but the ends of man and 'pure loss' (*Margins of*

*Philosophy*) all along, mimicking a logic ('talking about nothing but X all along') that Derrida may himself have deployed had he lived to be challenged directly on this theme. And yet whether we like it or not there is a problem here, a problem for those Stiegler calls 'the little Derrideans'. What Cohen's intervention marks, and what makes it undeniable, is not so much or not just a thematic avoidance that Derrida was complicit with but a *disorder*, what he calls a *grand mal d'archive*, in which despite its best efforts an entire generation of plasticity and deconstruction seems to have gone missing. In retrospect we can perhaps find what we need in Derrida's writing—it is there de jure if not de facto—and yet why is it so much of a struggle? Why do we have to rely on the laws of the implicit and the analogical? Why the attention to a death sentence and not to the perhaps more difficult theme of extinction? Why are there virtually no explicit references to environmental depredation in the whole of Derrida's work? Why in *Specters of Marx* when Derrida pauses to address his 'ten plagues' (unemployment, homelessness, economic wars, free markets, debt, arms industries, nuclear weapons, inter-ethnic wars, mafia drug cartels, and problems of international lawlessness) does he fail to name ecocidal acceleration? Cohen's intervention, which I am trying to situate here at depth, is to mark an inability of the archive to acknowledge the matheme  $e < > d$  even as it was going about the business of formulating the laws of reading-blindness (Blind Brain Theory again)—in other words, even as it does! The defensive logic of 'well, deconstruction was talking about nothing else but this all along' is itself shaken up, closed down, finitised. We still go to Derrida as an immense resource for thinking what is now happening and as an index of a kind of superintelligence of writing—its perfectibility—but we now also go to him as the moment in which self-reading terminally fails, when there are moves in the game which the human reader is unable to follow.

Stiegler writes of the falling-prey of Heidegger, his *déchéance*: ‘That someone who claimed to be a thinker of falling, of *verfallen* and *Verfallenheit*, would himself fall prey makes it all the more essential to undertake a meticulous reading of his thought and its history.’ I think for obviously different reasons we need to follow Cohen and say the same of Derrida: that he himself was blinded even in the process of graphically notating the self-blinding laws of reading. He missed out even as he was taking more care than anyone had done before to not miss out. Said again, he who thought everything including touch, drawing, cinders, sex, paper, Marx, the ends of man, pure loss, the temporality of eyes kissing, the word ‘and’ itself, the ends of the world, and so on, did not think extinction and ecocide as such. Or rather, he thought everything save this everything; he wrote everything that he did not write (*even* what he did not write) except the contemporary everything itself. Cohen indexes this for us better than anyone and therefore indexes in Derrida’s name the *grand mal d’archive* of an epoch, the going mad of AI before its time.

This is my roundabout way of beginning to make a claim for Cohen’s work, a claim it does not call out for so easily—since it is more self-effacing than ever (it doesn’t assume reading time)—but which I still think has to be made. Maybe a more unexpected way in is through the unconscious, since Cohen writes of, he invents, he conjures up the *climate change unconscious*. The word ‘occlusion’ recurs throughout his work like a refrain and yet I’m not sure he ever connects it to the Freudian function and mystery of *Verneinung*. What Cohen is saying is not simply that Derrida disavows the primal materiality of ontocidal accelerations, but that there is a problem and symptomatology of being in denial and of being in avowal, *Verneinung*, a troubling of *Urverdrängung*, around this area that may even lead us to write as follows:

e

or

e-

The *e* wants to be here, visible and clear, in the position of situating all other objects and contemporary signatures as a function of it, and yet how can things be both so obviously there, as if to go without saying, and yet be misrecognised? The function *e* is there as *e-* in Derrida's work but it is there as everything save itself. One might want to say that inscription as *e-* is there only *between* Cohen and Derrida, only in the writing Cohen does in Derrida's wake, just as it is there too in the moment in *Hyperdream* where Cixous refers to *something we don't know*. The discourse of the end of the word now would be, according to Cohen, an unexpected scene of the unconscious, an extra scene, and yet this discourse also belongs in the most unexpected ways to the Other, to the insister, exister, avower, disavower, complainer, and so on. One has a fear that the Other does say X and that they do not say X, and part of the difficulty is that even in its most blatant form X shares in the effects of repression. However avowed it may be, *e* is not shared without becoming E. It is not avowed without being found (wanting) in the other's work. Cohen is immensely plastic as an artist of the essay. He is many different things in his semioliquidity, including the best reader of de Man, Benjamin, and Hitchcock that I know, but most of all I think he explores this zone of occlusion in which we discover without seeing our own disappearance.

You could even say that Cohen's discovery is Freudian, which is not to say Freudian in a narrow sense, but in *a very fundamental sense*. Without the help of an analyst, a further reading, a formalisation, a subtraction, this thing, E, is not even recognised

or recognisable. This is why there is a polemical edge to some of Cohen's essays, especially those directed at the Anglo-Derridians who he reads with the necessary rigour of a slightly terrifying stance (think of what Badiou says about the 'terror of the matheme' and how that has to be respected—we have to have time for this). There is also a degree of astonishment, not thematised as such but still there, a degree of astonishment which passes in and out of focus, the astonishment that we never ask ourselves why we did not concern ourselves with it—an astonishment which, without asking ourselves why, and while still being astonished by this, we seldom concern ourselves with. How was it that we knew and yet did not know when it came to the  $x$  of  $\mathbb{E}$ ? As his work progresses and as he writes more in the mode of the 'Game Over' and the 'arche-cynic', this astonishment disappears or rather qualifies itself into something else, but in some ways you could say that astonishment or amazement are the main themes in Cohen, since even if we recognised that it ( $\mathbb{E}$ ) was available all along in a strange form of ongoing avowal, there is still the question of why we do not or did not concern ourselves with it, the *grand mal* and not just *mal* of the archive. That remains the fold of the question, of being in-avowal, and the reason why Cohen's subtractive themes are relapse, occlusion, irreversibility—the fold of astonishment itself.\* With regard to Stiegler one might position him too in relation to this same quasi-psychoanalytic experience of astonishment. Stiegler is more of a system-builder in the great French philosophical tradition but there is an obvious problem with his work that seems almost *consciously* put on the reader or confessed on the work's surface, as if he were in complicity with himself and so also in complicity with the Other who observes him. The problem is how could one ever actually shift from the runaway anthropocene in

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\* 'The difficulty of distinguishing conscious from unconscious is at its most obscure when the issue is one of language or of the use of language.' (*Margins of Philosophy*, p. 180).

which we are into a neganthropocene that saves us without simply further accelerating the anthropocene we wish to escape from. Both Cohen and Colebrook raise this problem, and so I don't think Stiegler can be read without them.

Again, as a subtractive reader—especially of Benjamin, de Man and Hitchcock—I think Cohen is indispensable. There's a deep generosity in the ferocity of what he says, in the extent of the abstraction. Where a Hamacher or a Warminski would read de Man or Benjamin in helpful and endless detail, Cohen reads more quickly (if that is the term, since really it may be slower in the so-called 'long run') and doesn't assume endless worlds, endless horizons, to get there. There is a deep love of the world in both Cohen and Stiegler, and in Colebrook as well, in this lack of assumption that the world will still be here. To put it very simply, what is Cohenesque is the attention to the finitisation of finitude, the care for what limits every attempt to read and start again in the present, or the question, if you like, if x ('Derrida') could get it so wrong, how do we know that we won't continue to do so?