

# Spokesvultures for Ecological Awareness: An Interview with Timothy Morton

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**P**ROFESSOR TIMOTHY MORTON, Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University, delivered two lectures at the University of Manitoba in the winter of 2016: the first as the Sydney Warhaft Distinguished Visiting Speaker for the Faculty of Arts and the second as the keynote for the Faculty of Architecture's Atmosphere Conference. The lectures were titled, respectively, "On Ecological Touching: Knowing (as) Intimacy" and "Escape from Mesopotamia, 12,000 Years Too Late," the recordings of which are available on his blog, [www.ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com](http://www.ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com).

Professor Morton is author of *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (Columbia, 2015), *Nothing: Three Inquiries into Buddhism and Critical Theory* (co-authored with Marcus Boon and Eric Cazdyn, Chicago, 2015), *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minnesota, 2013), *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Open Humanities, 2013), *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard, 2010), *Ecology without Nature* (Harvard, 2007), seven other books, and over one hundred and twenty essays on subjects ranging from philosophy to food politics. He is also an active scholar in the field of Object-Oriented Ontology, the ooo school inaugurated by Graham Harman, Professor of Philosophy at SCI-Arc, Los Angeles.

**CAITLIN MCINTYRE**  
is a doctoral student at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Her doctoral research focuses on Irish modernism in a circum-Atlantic context, exploring modernist literature as an aesthetic response and resistance to the space of the plantation. In addition to graduate work, Caitlin has also served as a candidate for the Green Party of Canada and is a farm-animal rights activist. Her article, “‘We are all animals:’ James Joyce, Stephen Dedalus, and the Problem of Agriculture” is forthcoming in a special issue of *Humanities*.

During his visit to Canada, Professor Morton graciously agreed to be interviewed by Caitlin McIntyre and Dana Medoro. McIntyre and Medoro are also animal-rights activists, working to ban the use of intensive confinement systems in Canadian animal agriculture. They started reading Professor Morton’s work a few years ago, initially having been thoroughly intrigued by his concept of agrilogistics: the “dark uncanniness” of the Anthropocene, as Morton defines it, through which the entire surface of Earth has been placed at the mercy of human agricultural existence, no matter how many other species die for it, no matter how crushing it becomes for fellow humans.

In the interview that follows, Professor Morton discusses and expands upon many of the ideas that make their way into two of his recent books, *Hyperobjects* and *Dark Ecology*, from agrilogistics and *Dasein*, to gluten phobia and Marxism. The interview was conducted in person, over beer, and showcases not only Morton’s philosophical reflections but also his warm, wry sense of humour.

**TIMOTHY MORTON:** Agrilogistics is a violent understanding of capital-N Nature, against which the notion of human progress defines itself; domestication, agriculture, civilization—the claiming that these systems exist outside of or opposed to something called Nature. I’m not proposing we un-domesticate animals and return to a pre-Neolithic state; you can’t escape civilization. It’s violent to endorse that, a kind of Pol Pot ideology, in which everyone wearing glasses is now suspect, as if we can bomb ourselves back to the Stone Age. What we need to notice is that we never left the agricultural system that started twelve thousand years ago—when “human civilization” began—and we never left being animals ourselves.

This is where something like gluten becomes a kind of evil! Two-thirds of Americans are gluten free and they don’t understand why. It’s the next magic bullet, announcing: “The evil is in the gluten. Get rid of the gluten and everything will be fine.” This new phase is worse than the Atkins diet: the get-back-to-the-Paleolithic diet (and pay no attention to your heart attack). This gluten thing is more intense, though. We’ve all decided that everything in our life will be okay if we have no gluten—or if we can upgrade the Roundup. That is, we think we can get agrilogistics right and return to a functioning-smoothly of the world, which never existed in the first place. At its base, this is all a desire to get rid of ambiguity—to get rid of the paradox that the world is always a functioning-malfunctioning thing. Everything is broken. The lure of the idea that when things smoothly func-

tion, then the dark parts disappear: this is a metaphysical trap. Because if we think things are all smoothly going along, they are only clicking in our own little anthropocentric timeframe.

Everything is always malfunctioning and the Romantics knew it. William Blake says, “The cut worm forgives the plough,” because from the worm’s point of view, this is not a functioning system. But the worm doesn’t really care, forgives it. Worms are totally down with how everything is a bit broken. But we don’t see from the point of the view of the worm. Everything has *Dasein*, everything is shimmering. That’s my way of putting it. And that’s what I truly believe: that everything is shimmering without mechanical input. That’s my ontology. In other words, we are solid because we are shimmering—paradoxically, or not. I am the spokesvulture for that: “Everything is shimmering, caw, caw!”<sup>1</sup>

CAITLIN MCINTYRE AND DANA MEDORO: Do vultures sound like that?

TM: I sound more like a crow, I suppose.<sup>2</sup>

Anyway, you should Google “There is no classical world.” You’ll find all these physicists trying to figure out whether the quantum stuff is for real. “We can prove it,” they say. They perform an experiment with a tiny mirror that sends out blue and red light, and they cool it down until the red light disappears, until radiation cannot possibly be emitted. But the infrared at the cool-down point persists. “Lo and behold,” say the physicists, “we observe this!”<sup>3</sup> Come on, I say, of course quantum things are happening, and this is why you’re solid, paradoxically or not.

CM AND DM: Let’s talk about Object Oriented Ontology and race.

TM: I’ve got a PhD student working on it. She’s walking through a minefield, but it’s so very intuitive: black people as objects, a connection forged in slavery.

DANA MEDORO is an associate professor in the Department of English, Film, and Theatre at the University of Manitoba. She specializes in American literature and is currently in the process of completing a book on Poe, Hawthorne, and the early nineteenth-century abortion debates (forthcoming with University of New Hampshire Press). She is also an animal-rights activist, particularly on behalf of farm animals in intensive-confinement operations, and has published in the field of critical animal studies on this work.

1 On the way to the interview, we had spoken of our shared admiration for vultures and for Tibetan Buddhism’s funeral ritual of cutting up the dead and leaving them on them mountainsides for vultures.

2 Vultures do, in fact, sound a bit like crows. Go to the audio archives online at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Macaulay Library for their collection of bird sounds at [www.macaulaylibrary.org](http://www.macaulaylibrary.org).

3 To view this experiment, go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pktWhH6m\\_DM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pktWhH6m_DM).

CM AND DM: We don't agree with the criticism that 000 is a jump over such topics, a bypassing of race or gender or sexuality, in order to think about rocks, for example. 000 is a place to start from, a way of thinking that then allows you to return to those subjects. It opens up these questions, doesn't foreclose them.

TM: Open it all up and allow it to breathe. I'm now writing about patriarchy more and more, as a result of thinking about 000. Working with Graham Harman, I discovered that I'm an exploded version of Luce Irigaray. The person I most like philosophically is Irigaray. What I say about objects, she says about women. I'm such a fan of Irigaray. The thing that really blew me away was early 1970s feminism, but in graduate school you had to be a late 1980s cultural Marxist.

It was a French feminist who coined the term "ecofeminism": Françoise d'Eaubonne, in *Le féminisme ou la mort*, which was published in 1974. But the American ecocritics weren't talking with the French ecocritics, because, I think, they didn't want to be associated with some kind of hippy ideology. The New Left did not want to talk about hippies. No Marxist will ever admit that he or she ever hallucinated, ever went off on a rainbow-coloured trail. Let's make that clear.

If we want to speak for the earth, the slime of the earth, we should look at hallucinations, aboriginal notions of dreamtime, and consciousness experiences like that. Look at what it teaches us: What is real? What is a hallucination? Why do we think? *Because* we hallucinate. Why do we hallucinate? Because we ingest plants. Why do we ingest plants? Because we co-evolved with them. That's how we came to think. In a way, plants *are* thought. Thoughts are hallucinations that we believe are real.

*Boys on Acid: A Brief History of Western Philosophers*, that's the title of the book we should write! Foucault took LSD; Sartre tried mescaline, then argued that the default sensation of enjoying your embodiment is nausea. But, that's an avoidance of pleasure. He sticks his hand in the jar of honey and recoils.<sup>4</sup> Why? Because he's afraid of the pleasure, of giving into it, which the French feminists then connected with a patriarchal fear of women.

<sup>4</sup> Sartre writes, "These long, soft strings of substance which fall from me to the slimy body (when, for example, I plunge my hand into it and then pull it out again) symbolize a rolling off of myself in the slime" (610–12).

CM AND DM: The grow-op guys had it right all along. There's a moment in *Hyperobjects* where you imagine the end of agrilogistics in the grow-op guys' projects.

TM: Thoughts are hallucinations that we take for real. Consuming things (such as plants)—for no reason other than the pleasure they give—goes way back to before the Neanderthals. Enjoying yourself for no reason is logically prior to utility. So, anti-consumerism needs to be tweaked a little. There's some chemistry in consumerism. Some enjoyment of the non-human being you just bought (like a bottle of Coke) for no reason whatsoever. Not because the Coke bottle told you to, but for no reason whatsoever. At least it's one entity you're allowing to have power over you. You allow it to talk to you. It may not be a spokesculture, but you allow it talk to you.

CM AND DM: Your work is very critical of fossil-fuel consumption. Could you speak candidly about working at a university where you are critical of an industry connected with it. Is it sometimes difficult?

TM: I need to have some kind of sticker for my version of hypocrisy. "World's #1 Hypocrite."

DM: I need a sticker like that too. Monsanto is on my campus.

TM: It results in hilarious, awkward moments. One day, I attended a discussion about the film *Crude*.<sup>5</sup> We were just sitting down to watch the film—across the street *literally* is Chevron—when they sent a guy over on a bike, with a specially made, colour glossy brochure on all the reasons (according to them) why the movie is incorrect. It was put together just for us. I thought, "You really care about what we're thinking. Good!" It was so funny. We knew Chevron was nervous by the sheer fact that the guy on the bike was heading over to tell us we were wrong.

Everyone is a hypocrite at this point because of interdependence, because everything is interconnected. I can't get my politics and ethics completely correct. If I'm being nice to bunnies, I'm not being nice to bunny parasites. There's always something missing.

<sup>5</sup> *Crude: The Real Price of Oil* was produced by Joe Berlinger and released in 2009. The website [www.crudethemovie.com](http://www.crudethemovie.com) includes links to the *Berlinger v. Chevron* legal documents.

CM AND DM: You're not being nice to carrots.

TM: We can't go all the way. The biocentric way. We can't. Someone said at Irvine once that the AIDS virus had just as much a right to exist as a person with AIDS. Really? It's really okay not to want your friend to die of AIDS. It's okay to want that virus to die. So, it means that everything is hypocritical. "Everything has a right to exist" is necessarily hypocritical. Because if rights are based on the notion of property, and everything owns something, then what is being owned? What's the object they've all got? Because now we're talking about everything. It's a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of rights discourse. I'm not criticizing animal rights. I'm saying that these rights need to be localized to a particular time and place and that each rights discourse has particular limitations.

It's better cognitively, too, to feel like a hypocrite than a perfect cynic.

CM AND DM: Yes. And better than perfecting obfuscation, which proponents of industrial agriculture have gotten down to a fine art. We enjoy the arguments among vegans, for instance—especially when they discuss being speciesist themselves. It means that hypocrisy is not incompatible with compassion; we are all speciesist because it's not possible to be otherwise. What about the insects killed for crop agriculture? We need to keep the edge of our thinking like that. It stops us from going all the way to the dark side, where things are ostensibly pure, where obfuscation and industrialized agriculture go hand in hand—where violently caged animals are described as being well cared for.

TM: Vegetarians are always called out for hypocrisy. "You wear leather shoes," they say. "So do you," I reply. "Spot the hypocrite" is the way we've been trained to be right. But that is over. If you realize you're in the biosphere, there's nowhere in that system to achieve the correct Archimedean place to leverage everything. Hypocrisy is also hypocritical. So, we have to be straightforwardly hypocritical.

CM AND DM: You know, Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* addresses exactly this issue, in which a black artist makes a beautiful gate for a plantation owner. He wants to work on his craft and he needs to feed his child. So, he's stuck in this horrible hypocrisy. It's such an interesting novel, always showing how there's no pure outside to this inside.

Because we want the intensive confinement of farm animals to end, we have to concede to the system to a certain extent, arguing that meat

production can still exist (but without the cages). We get accused of gradualism; allowing some middle ground, though, also messes with the power system. We meet big agriculture on their turf and take it out from the inside. It took us a long time to get out from under the labels, from being hurt by them.

TM: It's that zero sum game: if you're doing x, then you're not doing y. Actually, you just have to get off your backside.

CM AND DM: It's also a kind of passive resistance: infiltrate, and sit there like objects in meetings. Things start to move around us. Shifts occur.

TM: Like the weird interactions between academics and oil people. For example, there's a guy in environmental engineering at Rice who has teamed up with some guy in Shell. They want to figure out how to dismantle the grid this way. One way they do it is by paying farmers to not farm and allow their fields to return to indigenous plants. They're not trying to make reality into a perfect world. It's simply better than not doing anything. And just because it came out of the Shell guy's mouth doesn't make it wrong.

This is crucial because we're in a totalized neoliberal world. We are all in it. The people in the politburo are also trying to dismantle it. This is a twelve-thousand-year project, so it might be okay to take little bits of it apart—given that it is so gigantic, so vast. You need to give yourself a break. I'm interested in psychologically and ontologically cheap ways of discovering and making things, like subverting what is now an all-pervasive energy grid. There're these German towns that are totally off the grid: just turned of the oil pipes into them and went from there. I like that tactic. Subscendence. Collapse down. It's based on an ontology wherein the wholes are actually less than the sum of their parts.

Think about megacities, sprawl. They're always *less* than the sum of their parts. You can't find them, can't locate their edges, because you're always looking in the wrong place. Pointing to "Huston" or "Atlanta" and asking where are they really? The trouble with "the whole as greater" begins to involve cynical reasoning—lures us into thinking that something is too big and that we're helpless before it.

The biosphere is ontologically smaller than any one thing. It's something to care about. And we can care about it on a small scale. Don't cede your power to the idea that we're part of some larger zombie species with which we cannot interfere.

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God should come back down to Earth and get smaller. It might interfere with monotheistic religions, just as Buddhism interfered with Hinduism. This idea of coming down to earth, interfering. It's dope.

CM AND DM: Yes, it's been glimpsed in all religions. Jesus born in a manger among farm animals.

TM: Something on a vast scale *can* collapse into something fragile and physical. And we can see it that way: as smaller ontologically. It's collapsed *inside* the relations between me, say, and a polar bear. Hyperobjects, in that sense, are weirdly small; there are small fragile things that you can fix here and there. You can have a little wind village, for instance, even though we're stuck in the maw of a giant beast and cannot change it entirely. This idea that you should change the beast completely is also saying "And you'll never be able to."

CM AND DM: Yes, the false dichotomy: nothing or everything.

TM: I want to champion the trickster-like Paleolithic beings in dreamtime, where the "law" of the excluded middle is violated on a regular basis.<sup>6</sup> We need the middle voice for speaking, for thinking through the idea of "outside/inside," of "choosing whether you're in or out." We are always in the middle, actually. There is no rigid distinction between nonlife and life. It's an uncanny valley and we're all in it.<sup>7</sup> The true sign of speciesism is that we classify other humans as in or out, too. Speciesism is not simply about despising other beings; it's about despising them because they might be us.<sup>8</sup> We don't have the grammar to speak the environment and really mean it, because we've lost the middle voice. There's no chasm between inside

6 Paleolithic art depicts dancing tricksters, half human and half animals, practising rituals. These tricksters work at the thresholds, where their magic happens. The law of excluded middles follows Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, which states that for any proposition, either that proposition is true or its negation is true. For example, "everything must either be or not be" (Russell 72).

7 Morton elucidates this idea (and includes a diagram of the uncanny valley) in *Hyperobjects*: "In the uncanny valley, beings are strangely familiar and familiarly strange. [...] The uncanny valley, in other words, is only a valley if you already have some quite racist assumptions about lifeforms. With ecological awareness there is no 'healthy person' on the other side of the valley" (130–31).

8 "They look like humans: have bare skin, wrinkles, hairdos. [...] Maybe that's why many people don't like them," says Dr Stoyan Nikolov from the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds about Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*).



and outside. The uncanny valley is actually a flat plain, where everyone exists.

Evolution works that way, in fact. There are loads of human ancestors, not just Neanderthal, et cetera. Thousands. There are no *not* in-between states: dreaming is being between awake and sleeping; being alive is in between being born and being dead; being right is in between being perfect and totally wrong. Not that the middle is a solid, constantly existing thing. This weird in-between, chiasitic region is ambiguous and narcissistic. Through acts of violence, we try to delete the ambiguity and deny the narcissism.

CM AND DM: You use the concept on lameness in *Hyperobjects*, and we'd like to discuss it further, because it is so compelling in relation to the notions of bipedalism and the carbon footprint, as well as of Oedipus's swollen foot and Achilles' heel.

TM: Oedipus's swollen foot was about literally being glued to the biosphere in order to prevent him from doing what the oracle says he will do. So, they nail him down. It's the random discovery by a shepherd that releases him. The cool bit is what the shepherd does; he sees a child abandoned on a mountainside and doesn't want him to suffer. And this is basically Eco-Care 101. But then Oedipus tries to release himself from everything, tries to unfetter himself from the prophecy.

The wrong turn occurs when Oedipus feels the need to stand on his own two feet, which is ultimately the answer he gives to the feminine nonhuman being, the sphinx. The sphinx asks the trickster's question, which involves mystery. Oedipus is the philosopher who collapses the ambiguity, as Goux points out.<sup>9</sup> He causes the sphinx to kill herself. This is the foundational act, the allegory of the creation of the city-state.

Hercules kills the hydra previously, with a sword that is magically able to do the impossible. (Hey, I wonder what that magic sword stands in for, guys!) And he is then able to get on with civilization too. Cadmus slays the dragon just outside of Thebes, where the sphinx is too. Cadmus gets the teeth and plants them, just like ploughshares. So we have here an already militarized agriculture. Agriculture *is* war. If you go to an agricultural museum, you'll see that late nineteenth-century agricultural equipment

<sup>9</sup> Morton references his colleague's work here, Jean-Joseph Goux's *Oedipus, Philosopher*, in which he argues that Oedipus's answer "Man" to the riddle of the sphinx is the violent assertion of human reason over non-human entities and enigmas.

was a prototype for World War I tanks. It is literally war, not just metaphorically. *Actually*. With trenches and all, with nonhuman casualties—and other human beings as well.

CM AND DM: Yes! You're just proving what we've already known!

TM [laughing]: I love confirming people's prejudices and beliefs.

All the language of the myths points to this. The other thing about the sphinx is that she is so obviously a lamassu, a Babylonian mythical beast. This points to Greece's internal agrilogistical project. Greece asserts, "We are the cradle of civilization. Not you. We are the original civilization!" even as they assimilate Babylonian gods and stories. Ecologically, why do they say this? What are they saying? Mesopotamia turned into a desert, and then the Greeks did it all over again. They started the agrilogistical project again: the desertification, the violence. And they recreated the myths to make sense of it all. It's *Agrilogistics 6.0, Once More with Feeling!* Now, here we are, in version 12 or 6.10, the neoliberal version. Upgrade!

CM AND DM: It keeps happening. The bringing of industrialized agriculture to the New World was so destructive. The millions of caged pigs continues on, right across the continent, destroying the waterways, the lakes. We are just aghast in the face of it. No pigs should be on this continent. The shit and the destruction comprise a hyperobject: everywhere and nowhere in direct sight.

TM: And at the same time, there's this weird secret knowledge in the idea of Oedipus's lameness that the whole project is totally impossible. It's implicit. Oedipus's leg hurts. That's the tragic idea of *hamartia*. We know the inner flaw.

You have two choices in a tragedy: you're intellectual, so you try to get rid of it (Hamlet) or you act it out because you're super passionate and jealous (Othello). We know it's wrong—but we do it over and over again. This is *hubris*. And then it becomes *peripeteia*, which is a looping. So, you thought you cut off all the heads of the Hydra, but they've just grown back with new strength (like the new bacteria we're facing). In this feedback loop, we think that if we go through it enough times, then we'll come back to the start and get another chance. That's the interesting thing. *Why* keep doing it again?

Why did we lock into agriculture's concentric temporality? It's an obsessive-compulsive response to a trauma: do it over and over and over

and try to get it right. It's simultaneously an ecological and ontological trauma. We were hungry, and then we totalized it and ontologized our exceptionalism twelve thousand years ago. Something made us feel proud, special. Less hobbled and lame, because feeling so lame-ass was part of the feeling hungry.

Imagine all the little sentences twelve thousand years ago, imagine the ones filled with self-contradictions and loops. And there's this new sentence that says, "This isn't just a sentence. This is for real." It points outside of itself, saying that this isn't just a loop. It pretends it isn't self-referential (which is ridiculous, because it is talking about itself). And the sentence, its basic compelling thought, is this: that the agricultural system is not *just* planning for the next meal, it's *the whole meaning of civilization*. Something like an advertisement stood out—the way we're told that a car is not just a car but a way of life.

Somehow agriculture was about locking onto this one belief that this sentence was the right one. There was something compelling, seductive, about the belief that there was something real outside of the hermeneutic circle.

It seemed to promise: *There really is a world, so you don't have to check in advance. There really is constant presence, despite the way you're getting your thoughts about it.*

You use all of the tools to reinforce that sentence. That's what we've been doing for twelve thousand years. Worldwide global violence followed because it doesn't work. It just doesn't. Global warming happened because we've been nervous and embarrassed for twelve thousand years. We keep telling ourselves that we never wanted to be hunter-gatherers, that we wanted to do more than survive. We wanted to thrive in a way that other animals did not get to do. And we've been reinforcing that sentence about that promise of thriving, how it transcends everything, for twelve thousand years.

CM AND DM: There is something about taking ourselves out of the food chain too. We used to allow vultures to eat us after death. The afterlife was about becoming a vulture (and a vulture's shit). That seems to have frightened us at some point. So here's a theory: the vultures of the ancient Persians (who ate our bodies on mountainsides or in the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence) became the vulture gods in the Egyptian pantheon, which in turn became the angels (with their giant wings) in the later monotheisms. This shift allowed us to believe that we were no longer part of the system, the soil. We could be taken away by these transcendent beings, carried

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off the earth, upward—by creatures who were originally carrion feeders and with whom we probably competed for food. We cannot be carrion; we're corpses or cadavers.

TM: Are you getting this down? This is absolutely right. My own explanation is really about that the sentence and how it clicked, how it seduced us with the idea that “we can escape ambiguity, can be purely separate.”

There was the global warming of the Holocene interfacing with humans in 10,000 BC and we didn't want to admit that we established a system within it simply because we were nervous about being looped in with everything else: with death and weakness and insignificance. We did all of this—this civilization and massive ecological destruction—because we wanted to escape the loops, the contradictory experiences. Agriculture, I contend, was, in fact, a lame-ass solution to a temporary moment called the Holocene.

We then began to persuade ourselves that it was about a huge, descending, fantastic thing from the sky: God, eternity, purity. But what is the cheap explanation: we were hungry. So we totalized it, and it made us feel proud. Because feeling lame and weak was part of hunger.

As Levi-Struass tells us, myth is always trying to compute whether we came from the earth or from ourselves. The latter is so obviously *de rigueur* in agricultural society myths: we came from ourselves, damn it, the agricultural-era myths tell us. We transcended the earth, we told ourselves, and that is the meaning of existence.

It's paradoxical. We have managed to loop ourselves into existing by ourselves. Yet, we're still on earth, part of the earth, etching the earth. Derrida has always said: there's nothing outside of the text. You're writing on a surface, which is made of other beings. The surface is an ecosystem, which is already part of the context, which is part of the text. You cannot draw a line between that and the context, and by context I mean not just human (race, class, and gender)—but *all* the other life forms. Preventing that thought (that we're just inscribed on a physical surface) is what we've been doing for millennia.

CM AND DM: Why? Does the physical surface smell bad?

TM: It's a version of climbing Mount Everest, which is the ultimate imperialistic masculinity: the performance of going past all those dead guys to the top. We started performing, in a radical way, a desire to thrive, to say,

"I'm going to do way more than make it to the next meal.... Screw all the other life forms."

CM AND DM: And you never want to be one of those guys who has been eaten on the way back down. Can never be meat ourselves.

TM: Yes, it's an existential horror. You're always teetering on the edge of the cliff of the agrilogistical construct. But, when you jump off, you realize you're not jumping far at all. It's like Gloucester falling onto the sands of Dover. There was *never* this huge cliff.

We got hooked on a meme, that we decided wasn't just a meme, that it was a reality. If we stopped our maniacal death drive, we'd discover that we'd never left the beach. It's not a tragedy. We were just embarrassed, so we changed it to tragedy. We're lame-ass.

CM AND DM: So, that's what you mean by being lame?

TM: Yes, I admit I'm a bit Californian. So when you speak up for death, you are basically talking eco-talk. When you champion death, when you become a spokesculture for death, you become one for ecological awareness. This is what I mean by dark ecology.

CM AND DM: We have a question about dating the Anthropocene to the Early Modern ships that bring agriculture over here.

TM: That's the fuzziness of the Anthropocene. It has to do with 1945 (the Great Acceleration) being subtended by 1784 (the invention of the steam engine) being subtended by 10,000 BC. If the Anthropocene is a smoking gun, then the smoke goes all the way back. We had to export agrilogistics all over because we didn't want to face that it might be wrong. We're so afraid to face that we were wrong.

CM AND DM: Everything that's wrong with the world is crop monocultures. And animal monocultures. That might sound like madness but we can't shake it.

TM: No it's not madness; it's completely true. It is. The idea of biodiversity is so easy to understand, but you still have to drive through Stockton (a giant feedlot nicknamed Auschwitz for cows) between L.A. and Sacramento. You see it and it's *so* obviously wrong.

CM AND DM: Yes, it's also nicknamed Cowshwitz. And these operations are mostly hidden from sight. These vast confined animal operations. Here's how they're a kind of hyperobject: you might not be able to see it, but you can smell it. They're fucking viscous, and we're inside of the products moving out of them and into everything.

TM [ironically]: But smell doesn't matter, of course. It is ontologically inferior, so if we can't see it, we're all right. Smell means I'm an animal. Seeing means I'm not an animal, for I stand on my own two feet and reinvent myself. Heidegger wrote the manual on this. And you never say I smell that. I "feel you" is okay (especially in California) but not I smell you.

CM AND DM: A question about Marx in ecological theory and philosophy. Eco-theory doesn't want to stop using Marxism. What do we do about Marx, because he's so invested in the human at the top of the apex, arguing that estranged labour reduces human to animal and thus reinstating the hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> Is Buddhism how you ended up avoiding the traps of Marxism?

TM: How to put Marxist in ecological context where we know humans are not any better than pigs? Right. Marxism is incorrect in the big picture, especially in the labeling of anarchists in a pejorative way. Perhaps we need a sort of "full communism," as long as it includes bees and monkeys and all that. The problem with Marxism is that it declares that the worst of architects is better than the best of bees, because bees are only executing an algorithm. Marxism doesn't see bees as planning like a human does.<sup>11</sup> The problem is that it keeps looking to what the human exhibits that is intelligent. But what is this intelligence? Where is this imagination? I can't find it. How am I imaginative and bees are not? How do they not plan? How do you know that you're not just executing an algorithm too?

Certain kinds of Marxists react to this issue surrounding species being. There's a difference between species being (which is another one of these metaphysical things) and species as a hyperobject that I can't point to, in which I am and am not a member of this gigantic species that is destroying earth simultaneously. What we need to realize is that Marxism is another

<sup>10</sup> Mel Chen writes, "Marx hinges the human struggle with alienation precisely against 'the animal'" (*Animacies* 47).

<sup>11</sup> Marx: "A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (14).

form of corelationism, in which there's only data (and so how can we tell that there really are things?) Aristotle upgraded through modernity, upgraded to look cool. This thinking that there's a gap between data and reality, so there is no reality, unless I decide upon it; I'm the decider. I get to say it, especially as a Western white male.

CM AND DM: And well fed.

TM: Marx thinks that he figured it all out—he turned it upside down. It's not a transcendent subject who decides; it's human economic relations. In corelationism, there's the subject and there's the universe; there's spirit and then there's the universe. In Marxism, there are human economic relations and the universe. It's a form of reductionism, but upwards, and everything defaults to the human decider. Everything defaults to the human: will, *Dasein*.... And *Dasein* is the most interesting one. So, if Heidegger says: *Dasein* is logically prior to the human; therefore, then, a lizard could have *Dasein*, dude—and in a meaningful sense. And so could a rock, man. Just accept that everything has *Dasein*. Biscuits have it.

All you have to say is: *Dasein* is not human. Everything is shimmering between existing and non-existing. Objects too. Marxism will fail, unfortunately, because it's ontologically incorrect, because the anthropocentrism is deeply hardwired.

It has to be anarchic groups. It has to be you, you, me, Ginger the trout, Carol the polar bear, and a cookie—we'll form a little reading group. That's the stupid, lame-ass level it really needs to be on. Silly and small. We're just little tribes, walking across Africa. Get over the big, big, big structure. Just get over it.

Sentimentally, I'd like a communist version of that, like Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney playing on the piano together, like the black and white keys in harmony. But there would have to be a piano, and I don't believe there is. It's just a bunch of keys lying around. It's good to come back come to Marxism, to ask: What is it? Do I really accept it?

CM AND DM: Yes, he says some cool things about the soil.

TM: He does. Everyone seems to forget that bit. "All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility" (Marx 555). Many people don't want to know about that part; it's too

dirty. Hegelian Marxists are cooler, they think. So they go back over the same points, solving the puzzle over and over again (like a Rubik's cube)—which is why every Žižek book is the same. You have to go through a lot of moves because it's so embarrassing to say simply: *We exploit Mother Nature*, or however you want to put it (even in some corny way, which can also be true). We try to get away from that at all costs because tenure depends upon sounding very sophisticated.

CM AND DM: Corny is good. As long as it's not GMO corn.

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