

**STRANGE DWELLINGS**  
**AN ECO-DECONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO ECOLOGY**

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**Abstract**

*A rupture has occurred—something is no longer quite as it was. Our current environmental crisis, climate catastrophe, has left us floundering without words for after three decades of popular ecological writing and decades more of scientific studies nothing has yet been done to avert our path from its terminal arc. It is a weird occurrence for our words seem insufficient, our categories incapacitated, and our understanding too flawed to comprehend it. Yet, it is a disaster which has already occurred—it is a disaster which we live in the midst of and yet still lack the language with which to speak. The greatest danger of such an epoch, according to Blanchot, is that, out of convenience, we use an outdated and unsuitable language to attempt reconciliation. Rather than attempting to apply logical and nominal systems and concepts to a catastrophe, which is catastrophic precisely because it obsolesces such ways of thinking, a new mode of thought, of language, is required if climate catastrophe is to be properly understood and addressed. Utilizing the texts of Roland Barthes, Karen Barad, Maurice Blanchot and Timothy Morton, as well as the weird fiction of H.P. Lovecraft, I intend to demonstrate not only the pitfalls of our current agrilogistical approach to climate catastrophe, but also a potential eco-deconstructive alternative that would allow significant change to occur.*

**1. Weirdly Catastrophic**

It is 8:15am—and a gardener, an unwitting and unwilling witness, looks towards the sky: a lone plane flies overhead. The early warning had sounded, but it had been lifted not even fifteen minutes prior—the operator was correct; only a few planes were expected, merely reconnaissance. In less than forty-five seconds, *Little Boy* would detonate over Hiroshima, creating an apocalyptic landscape which can only be rendered in language—a mere approximation—by the most severe religious iconography. Our gardener, in those forty-five seconds, existed in a suspended state: still-living but bereft of life—the encounter of death: «an encounter between what is going to arrive and what has already arrived» (Derrida 2000, 64). The bombing of Hiroshima was, to our gardener, an event of infinite consequence, yet he lacked the ability to have recognized it as such. It is 8:15am and the *Enola Gay* makes its final flight overhead—we find ourselves encountering death once more. The Japanese, unaware of the threat of atomic bombs—and ignorant of their very existence—could not have predicted, nor protected against, *Little Boy*. They lacked a language with which to speak of atomic bombs: no warning, no *sign* was sufficient. On the one hand, we find ourselves in much the same position as our gardener: lacking a language with which to speak of climate catastrophe—forced, in desperation, to cling to the existing, outdated modes of communication, of *signification*—we are unable to recognize the threat, let alone avoid it; on the other, the *Enola Gay* and her crew comprise a sympathetic cast: after the bomb detonated, the people vaporized, the landscape glassed, and history ruptured, the crew of the *Enola Gay*, looking upon the mushroom cloud and its antecedent inferno, knew not what they did—for just as our gardener, by now either annihilated or reduced to an irradiated, still-walking corpse, lacked a language capable of uttering the disaster of what had already occurred so too did the crew, being unaware of the nature of their cargo, act as an unwitting and unwilling agent.

Of the bomb—singular to the point of namelessness—Blanchot (1995a) notes «that it is but a sign, a crude sign, of the extreme peril that necessarily marks the passage from one time to another, and perhaps from history to a trans-historical epoch» (180). A passage, in other words, *out of the world*: «When [...] one has at hand the material power to put an end to this history and this world, one has already departed historical space. The change of epoch has occurred. This can be simply expressed: henceforth the world is a barracks that can burn» (179-180). Understanding either the bomb or climate catastrophe as signs, however, is not a diminution of their profound significance—the sign does not trivialize those two unspeakable conflagrations, nor does it preclude the (perhaps) greater horror suffered by those nonhuman victims of the countless nuclear tests whom lack name *and* tomb. In truth—as if truthfulness here is possible—it is an imperative for the (impossible) remembrance of those victims for whom simple reverence defiles. It is a sign—not of «the unwonted development of energy and technology’s domination» but rather of «our refusal to see the change of epoch and to consider the sense of this turning. [...] The danger is perhaps solely provoked by our *old language*» (181) —and furthermore it is our very responsibility towards the Other which demands that a radical change occur: «my responsibility for the Other presupposes an overturning such that it can only be marked by a change in the status of “me,” a change in time and perhaps in language» (Blanchot 1995b, 25). We find ourselves stuck within an old language, incapable of any sufficient—any *significant*—utterance: *the bomb*, a name without naming, is a *refusal* to name; it is an admission of guilt and a demonstration of shame: *the bomb* is the alibi of the West, evading responsibility—it is the silence of the erasure. The current ecological disaster similarly escapes, in its significance, a name—of course it has many, but none feel sufficient: *climate change* seems too sterile to properly convey the horror of the changes; *global warming* simply feels unnuanced, it speaks and names the general trend and reduces it to a mere average; *climate catastrophe*—etymologically originating from the Greek *katastrophé*, meaning an over-turning—despite its philosophical and intuitive accuracy, still fails to conjure the unthinkable horror which awaits us; climate catastrophe escapes any categorization, rendering the very project of categorization, of distinguished-divisions, obsolete. In recognition of the central importance of an *overturning* in rethinking our approach towards the ecosphere, I will refer to the current environmental crisis as climate catastrophe. The *bomb* and *climate catastrophe* are therefore signals that something has occurred which cannot be reckoned—an event, perhaps even Blanchot’s *disaster*.

An event which escapes speech, evades signification while impressing upon us its singular significance, and denies any attempt at categorization is ultimately *weird*, for it is a «signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now out of date» (Fisher 2016, 13). Climate catastrophe not only challenges the structure and values of the capitalist system, but more conceptually it transgresses the fundamental referential horizon which humans have held for millennia, and which constitutes the bedrock of our culture for it calls into question the essential relationship with, and difference between, human and animal life; and, through an irruption into this obsolesced order—this *nomos* and *logos*—it demands such an overturning that, as Blanchot (1995b) says, a change must occur «in the status of “me,” a change in time and perhaps in language.» Timothy Morton (2016) names this primordial imagining of the world *agrilogistics*, for our world was invented «within this twelve-thousand-year “present” moment» concurrent with the advent of agriculture in Mesopotamia. More explicitly, agrilogistics names «a specific logistics of agriculture that arose in the Fertile Crescent and that is still plowing ahead. Logistics, because it is a technical, planned, and perfectly logical approach to built space. Logistics, because it proceeds without stepping back and rethinking the logic» (39-42). Agrilogistics constitutes that underlying drive to, as though a virus, re-produce itself *ad nauseum*, refusing to «see the change of epoch and to consider the sense of this turning»—it is the *old language* that traps and endangers us: we have never set foot outside of it, beyond the field and furrow.

Morton (2016) imagines agrilogistics as a response to a certain primordial fear and anxiety regarding the lived-experiences of early hominids; prior to the advent of agriculture, we bipeds

operated no differently than other omnivorous species—which is to say that it was virtually meaningless to distinguish between humans and nonhumans, between nature and culture; such a split «is a product of agrilogistic subroutines, establishing the *necessarily violent and arbitrary* difference between itself and what it “conquers” or delimits» (43). Our anxieties during this precarious period were most ancient and primordial, for «the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown» (Lovecraft 1973, 12). We, in our makeshift hovels, caves, or primitive and motely canvased tents, feared the unknown; we feared the darkness of the night for, without the revelatory light of the Sun, our vision could betray us to a stalking predator lying in wait; we feared the uncertainty of the hunt or unseen fluctuations in the season which might deny us food; we feared the chance that, upon returning to fecund grounds, the nourishing stream might have run dry. Thus, «agrilogistics promises to eliminate fear, anxiety, and contradiction—social, physical, and ontological—by establishing thin rigid boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds and by reducing existence to sheer quantity» (Morton 2016, 43). It is in the creation of these boundaries which first set humanity—now, for the first time, able to be distinguished from *mere* animal life—on the path whose terminal arc we now face down. *Cattle*, a noun and improper name—for with it you can denote one or many—«speaks to this immensity and to a too-easy ontology humming away in [the agrilogistic] background» (44) for it can refer to either the nonhuman victims of agrilogistics or the victims of the Holocaust; it is the name of the agrilogistical Other. Rendering agrilogistics obsolete, climate catastrophe is not capable of being thought or understood by any «humanistic analytical tools we currently possess [...] because they are themselves compromised products of agrilogistics» (43). The significance of this cannot be missed: rendering agrilogistics, *father* of all logical and nomical systems, obsolete necessarily results in the obsolescence of his children: *ecology can no longer be relied upon*.

Therefore, my intention in this article is threefold: (1) to define and problematize the *ecological mode of writing* as I see it, (2) to suggest an alternative mode of inquiry opposed to agrilogistics and its resultant logical and nomical systems, and (3) to sketch, as a consequence of this alternative, a foundation of a new ethics capable of signifying climate catastrophe in a meaningful way. Towards the first goal, I will primarily utilize Roland Barthes’ conception of *mythologie*, Timothy Morton’s concept of agrilogistics and his eco-critical approach to Nature, and Freud’s writings on PTSD in order to demonstrate that not only is the contemporary ecological mode of writing ineffectual in producing change, but that it is actively harmful in this regard. Thereby demonstrating that a new mode of writing and thinking is required, I will then introduce the concept of *transhistorical chaomancy* as an alternative to ecological inquiry. Transhistorical chaomancy is inspired by close readings of Maurice Blanchot’s “On a Change of Epoch,” Karen Barad’s recent work in quantum field theory and *spacetime mattering*, and H.P. Lovecraft’s weird fiction in the light of the late Mark Fisher’s work on the weird as well as certain parallels between Blanchot’s language and the themes of weird fiction. Lastly, I introduce the concept of *mythical oikomancy* which is derived from the practice of transhistorical chaomancy and the signifying power of myth. I propose both transhistorical chaomancy and mythical oikomancy as eco-deconstructive alternatives to ecology which are capable of producing the effectual changes in our perceptions of ourselves and of our eco-sphere necessary to evoke our responsibility to the world and its non-human inhabitants required to avert the worst of climate catastrophe.

## 2. The Ecological Mode

There is a naturalist—perhaps even a Romantic—writing in her idyllic woodland cabin, far from any centres of industry or cities. She came here to escape—fleeing toxic industrialism, parasitic social media, and the mundane, Kafkaesque existence she was previously subjected to each

unending day. She has come to find Nature—and, as if a descendant of Emerson, to reflect upon man's bond with Nature, his place within it, and his self-reliance in its shadow. As she writes, however, something causes her pen to waver, her desk to shake, and her mind to wander—ground has suddenly broken for the development of high-density apartments on the adjacent property. She begins to despair: Nature has been superseded, forced out, destroyed. Soon the artifice which she so wished to escape will re-emerge—omnipresent, it profanes the virginal wilderness. She continues to write—to despair—not of Emersonian self-reliance and immersion within Nature, but of the impossibility of such a thing. In short, the world she knows no longer exists. Is this not the state of all ecological writing today? The realization that Nature, that thing which surrounds and supports us, has ended emblemizes all ecological writing in the Anthropocene. However, not without purpose—the aim of ecological writing is to hopefully engender meaningful change towards the mitigation of climate catastrophe. Yet, after more than three decades of popular ecological writing, and decades more of scientific studies, nothing has been done to avert our path from its terminal arc. The ecological mode of writing—a compromised product of agrilogistics—through its reliance and reproduction of the myth of Nature and its simultaneous and sustained disavowal of Nature and the assertion of its ultimate untenability, as emblemized by reducing Nature to a rhetorical device, has demonstrated itself to be singularly ill-suited to engender any meaningful change towards our relationship to the environment; rather, through its unique method and style, it creates a kind of ecological trauma in which the Natural world both immanently surrounds us and is constantly at risk—perhaps even already destroyed, a mere dead vestige—producing in the reader a sense of nihilistic apathy which does nothing but drive her to despair, ensuring damnation.

The ecological mode is a function; or, in other words, a mode of writing—according to the French semiotician Roland Barthes (1995b)—is the product of a certain historical and cultural development and therefore contains its own historicity, linking it to the «great crises of history» and thereby rendering it «an act of historical solidarity» with those crises and cultures (35). The ecological mode, thus having a twofold link, is bound to both Nature—or, rather, the *mythologie* of Nature—and the Anthropocene as its great crises. Its function, to elaborate slightly, can be considered to be threefold: (1) explicate the ecological processes which affect, or which are relied upon by, the environment and climate; (2) Our role in *disrupting* these processes; and (3) suggesting potential strategies for raising awareness and mitigating climate catastrophe. The object of the ecological mode is therefore *climate activism*. However, a mode of writing—insofar as it is also a mode of signification and thereby a *myth*, as understood by Barthes (1995a)—«is not defined by the object of its message, but the way in which it utters this message» (94). While the ecological mode is primarily concerned with the mitigation of climate catastrophe, that cannot be said to be its object; rather, its object is the manner in which it *signifies* these things.

The ecological mode thus utilizes two methods for signifying climate catastrophe: the *literary* and the *scientifico-social*. The former appropriates the concept of *Nature* in order to generate an *ambient poetics*—i.e., «a way of conjuring up a sense of a surrounding world»—which enframes the reader in her world according to the Concept (Morton 2007, 21-22). While the latter—taking the ambient poetics of the literary as its conceptual or referential ground—appropriates scientific narratives of knowledge, such as empiricism, endeavouring, through the mere *statement of fact*, to move us to change. Moreover, according to Toadvine (2018), the ecological mode is essentially eschatological—the suspension of life felt by our Japanese gardener, watching that infinitesimal and whistling speck fall from the *Enola Gay*, and our naturalist's despair at living in the midst of Nature's annihilation constructs «our present as suspended between prehistorical catastrophe and anticipated extinction» (53). The ecological mode appropriates the apocalypse as a familiar narrative which «underwrites environmentalism's efforts to “save the world,” and the religious overtones here are not irrelevant. Whether expressed openly as fear of the future or disguised as nostalgia for the past an eschatological vision of the world is essential to environmentalism» (51). Toadvine refers to this narrative as *eco-eschatological* and deems it phantasmal for it is «a tale that

we tell ourselves about the future that reflects our investments and anxieties in the present and that consequently constructs our current identities and institutions» (51). A fable, in other words, that has no basis in reality outside of culturally significant texts which have existed since the advent of messianic or apocalyptic religions. Therefore, it is only a certain conception of the world that is at risk, «the world *as we know it*, the total horizon of meaning, value, and possibility within which our lives unfold. In other words, what is at stake is “world” in the phenomenological sense» (56). Moreover, the ecological mode conforms to a fundamentally Romantic ambient poetics of Nature, which Timothy Morton (2007) testifies to occupying three positions within symbolic language: «First, it is a mere empty placeholder for a host of other concepts. Second, it has a force of law, a norm against which deviation is measured. Third, “nature” is a Pandora’s box, a word that encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects» (14). Nature, as expressed in Goethe’s aphorisms, perfectly mirrors Morton’s claim:

NATURE: We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her. Without asking, or warning, she snatches us up into her circling dance, and whirls us on until we are tired and drop from her arms. She is ever shaping new forms [...]. Everything is new, and yet naught but the old. We live in her midst and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays us not her secret. We constantly act upon her, and yet have no power over her. [...] She is vanity of vanities [...]. We obey her laws even when we rebel against them; we work with her even when we desire to work against her. She makes every gift a benefit by causing us to want it. [...] She has neither language or discourse; [...] She is an eternal present. Past and future are unknown to her. The present is her eternity. [...] She hides under a thousand names and phrases, and is always the same (Goethe 1869).

Firstly, as a *mere empty placeholder*—an *empty signifier*—Nature contains within *her* a complex multitude of concepts that signal a vast historiography of cultures: the *eternal feminine*, *divinity*, *oneness*, *infinity*, and so on. Goethe’s use of Nature is hopelessly Romantic in this aspect: he conceptualizes Nature in both the Christian tradition—signalled by his biblical references and Nature’s *immanence*, *ineffability*, *omnipresence*, and *omnipotence*—and the Pagan tradition: imagining Nature as infinitely *fecund*—as *profuse*—as the eternal feminine: as *her*. The latter conceptualization—the *feminine myth* of Nature—has lost much popularity recently; what is left, remaining only as an unconscious vestige of its origins—superseded by Artifice. A supersession which was heralded by Huysmans (2001) in *Against Nature*:

Artifice was considered by Des Esseintes to be the distinctive mark of human genius. Nature, as he used to say, has had her day; she has finally and utterly exhausted the patience of sensitive observers by the revolting uniformity of her landscapes. [...]—has not man for his part, by his own efforts, produced an animate yet artificial creature that is every bit as good from the point of view of plastic beauty? Does there exist, anywhere on this earth, a being conceived in the joys of fornication and born in the throes of motherhood who is more dazzlingly, more outstandingly beautiful than the two locomotives recently put into service on the Northern Railway? (23)

During the turn of the century, in the midst of the French Decadent movement, Artifice stole the feminine myth from Nature—to reiterate: «myth is always a language robbery» (Barthes 1955a, 118).

Contrarily, the latter conceptualization—the *omni-myth* of Nature—still predominates much of the world. As it concerns the ecological mode, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Tsing 2015), the *omni-mythical* concept reveals itself in the very first line: «It was a still-bright evening when I realized I was lost and empty-handed in an unknown forest» (13). She posits herself as *present* within Nature—yet it is a Nature which, although unspoken, is jeopardized: the difficulty of her task, finding mushrooms, stems from disorientation she feels as a result of a barren, lifeless

Oregon forest. Nature is, to emphasize its true omnipresence, found even in its absence: «The ground was dry and rocky, and nothing grew except thin sticks of lodgepole pine. [...] But here was Kao with his bucket and stick, poking deep into clearly empty ground and pulling up a fat button. How could this be possible? There had been nothing there—and then there was» (13-14).

Secondly, as a *normative force*, Nature and the *natural* signifies goodness, or purity, while Artifice and the *unnatural* signifies evil, deviation, or impurity—this aspect of Nature is particularly relevant in popular culture today as the consumption of commodities perceived to be *natural* has been fetishized to an extreme degree over those perceived to be *unnatural* or artificial. In other words, Nature defines the *natural* and the *aberrant*—the *consecrated* and the *defiled*. Nature's normative force is appropriated by the ecological mode in order to *judge*, *denounce*, and *prescribe*: we are judged and denounced for unnatural practices or for practices which *pollute* and the sentence demands that we *return to Nature* so that we may resume a harmonious existence. If it may be recalled, the second aspect of the ecological mode itself enforces this normative conception: a *disruption* always assumes a deviation from the norm, the *natural order*. The ancestry of this aspect of Nature, according to John Sallis (2016), is commensurate with the entire history of the Western tradition: as far back as the Cynics happiness was predicated upon a return to «acting in accordance with nature» or, in other words, using Nature as a normative guide (45). Regarding the ecological mode and its derivative praxis: «A turn will become imperative, a turn to nature, to the natural elements. It will be required [...] by the necessity of confronting, in *word and action*, the devastation to which nature is increasingly exposed» (73).

The first two aspects of Nature therefore correspond primarily to the artistic, or *literary* image of Nature: the first in furnishing Nature with a fathomless depth of historically contingent concepts and myths, which contain within them a certain aesthetic, and the second in imbuing those concepts with a normative force; i.e., the Natural is not *a priori*—*naturally*—good, rather it has been *ordained* as such by a force. The third aspect, contrariwise, is primarily concerned with the *scientifico-social*. Climate science, as an *empirical science*, «assumes that facts speak for themselves, that things come with a built-in [barcode] of truthfulness» (Morton 2007, 123)—the IPCC reconvenes and «the explicit content of the data seems so urgent: it's as if it is screaming, "Look, can't you see? Wake up! Do something!"» (Morton 2018, xxiii). Consequently, the ecological mode has doubtlessly assumed the same *factual brutalist* form which Morton coined the *data dump mode* (Morton 2018, xxiii). Just as nature writing—of which John Muir (2006) is seminal—allowed Nature to *speak for herself* through simple, *apparent* observation:

*Immediately* in front, loomed the majestic mass of Mount Ritter, with a glacier swooping down its face nearly to my feet, then curving westward and pouring its frozen flood into a dark blue lake, whose shores were bound with precipices of crystalline snow; while a deep chasm drawn between the divide and the glacier separated the massive picture from everything else. I could see only the one sublime mountain, the one glacier, the one lake; the whole veiled with one blue shadow-rock, ice and water close together without a single leaf or *sign* of life (46).

Nature as a «potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects» is signified in nature writing by nothing more than a *metonymic list*: mountain, glacier, lake, snow—all *signs*, not of life, but of *Nature*—as Goethe reassures us: «She hides under a thousand names and phrases, and is always the same».

The ecological mode of writing similarly relies upon a metonymic list of factoids—however, since its aim is not merely to *immerse* the reader within Nature, but to draw attention to its untenability in the face of inaction, these factoids undergo a particular metamorphosis: a tree is no longer merely a tree, but a tree at risk of *deforestation*—a glacier is no longer a mere glacier, but a *melting* glacier—a polar bear is no longer a polar bear, but an *endangered* polar bear. And this is the significance of factoids: they are facts «that we know something about» (Morton 2018, xviii).

Deforestation, glacial melting, endangerment of species... these are terms which, themselves, comprise their own metonymy of the unnatural—of *Artifice*. The ecological mode expects them to speak for themselves: the mere *statement of fact* contains within it both Nature and the imperative call-to-action—the normative obligation. David Wallace-Wells (2020) testifies that, his book, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* «is not a book about the science of warming; it is about what warming *means* to the way we live on this planet» (14). Hoping in vain that the facts will speak for themselves, however, the rest of the book is composed of naught else but the mere statements of fact which comprise the metonymic list of climate factoids; an upturned, dead bee—alone and washed in a depthless background of white—calls to us from the book's cover: «Look, can't you see? Wake up! Do something!».

As she writes, our hypothetical naturalist creates for the reader an entire *world* in which to inhabit; she invites her(self) inside the text and outside the room in which she reads: as she writes «As I write...» or «As I sit here, writing...»—she *posits her presence* within Nature. According to Morton (2007), she accords with an *ambient poetics*—or, «a way of conjuring up a sense of a *surrounding atmosphere* or *world*»—a process which may be called *enframing* (22). *Ecomimesis*—the writing of «as I write»—«aims to rupture the aesthetic distance, to break down the subject-object dualism, to convince us that we *belong to this world*» (135) and whose intent «is to reflect back the authenticity and capacity of the narrator—they're *there*» (132). Why? The ecological mode—which is Romantic exactly insofar «as it tries to “get back to nature,” and knows that this possibility is forever excluded» (124)—only has recourse, within its *undead, vestigial* Nature, to enframe us within an already-untenable world, hoping the facts speak for themselves and that we are compelled to act. It knows, of course, this return is impossible: «The end of the world has already occurred. [Once, in] April 1784, when James Watt patented the steam engine » and again «in 1945, in Trinity, New Mexico, where the Manhattan Project tested the Gadget, the first of the atom bombs» (Morton 2013, 7). The former began the chain of events which would molecularly permeate man's *fingerprint of Artifice*—an overwhelming excess of carbon dioxide—throughout the entire world; making it possible to chronologically order the apocalypse through the excavation of ice cores in Antarctica and elsewhere. The latter profaned, with heavenly fireballs, all of creation: ushering in an unending era of comfortable irradiation. Therefore, ecomimesis constitutes a *trauma*: by enframing the reader within Nature, and thereby rendering Nature as *possible*, it traumatizes her by simultaneously proffering Nature's demise; the realization that one is no longer frolicking in the meadows, but rather *wading through maggots*.

Imagining ambient poetics as a kind of dream—Freud, contrary to literature at the time, posited in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that PTSD dreams, rather than attempting to recreate the alleged kernel of pleasure at the origin of trauma, operate according to the conservative, life-preserving drive, *Eros*. Though the setting or characters of a PTSD dream may change, the trauma remains constant and drops us into an anxiety-ridden world, prior to the moment of traumatization. By placing us within a fundamentally untenable world, «at a point in time *before global warming happened*» (Morton 2018, xxiii) PTSD dreams create a sense of anxiety—which «describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one»—so that we may, in the course of the dream, avoid the initial traumatic moment thus curing ourselves of our trauma (Freud 1975, 11). There exists a fundamental incongruity, however: one's trauma is *always-already*; if one has PTSD, a trauma has necessarily already occurred. Thus failing to avert the traumatic moment, the dreamer—our naturalist—awakes, in a fright. What is subliminally communicated in the traumatic repetition of ecological factoids is that climate catastrophe has become always-already *inevitable*, as a trauma already-possessed and, as such, anxiety remains powerless to affect it. The ecological mode of writing therefore engenders Nothing: the inactive resolution of an apathetic, nihilistic woman condemning herself to an *un-life* of ceaseless guilt, rage, and despair—the realization that there remains only a non-choice: the regrettable inevitability of going quietly into that good night. A new mode of writing, a new language, is therefore required—a new mode of *thinking*.



### 3. Transhistorical Chaomancy

A new mode of thinking and a new language with which to think it has become necessary—no progress, except perhaps a marching procession unto the tomb, is possible without such innovation, for without an as-yet unthought and unspoken, *sui generis* language we shall remain tethered to the precepts of agrilogistics and will only accomplish a hastening of the end. Climate catastrophe requires such an approach because, as demonstrated, it is *weird*—it obsolesces the world, leaving us without any system, *logos*, or *nomos*. We are left floundering for words, having become kindred to Lovecraft’s protagonists who have seen some invasive corner of eldritch reality, of the Outside, and gone mad in a reconciliatory attempt to understand. Ecology, and by extension economy—both deriving from a certain (agrilogistical) logic and ordering of *oikos*—is unable to do anything other than tell us, empirically, that the crisis continues to occur. As much as it might be desired, the mere facticity of climate catastrophe in no way contains within it the ethical imperative to act in any particular way. One might reply and say that the threat of extinction is reason enough—however, risking charges of radicalism, it must be asserted that «there can be no imperative for survival at all costs» (Colebrook 2018, 273). Such an imperative is precisely what has landed us in this situation; is it not part of the agrilogistical program to, by whatever means necessary, perpetuate humanity, to continue in the divisions between the human and nonhuman realms, and to, at the cost of the very environment we now wish to save, (re)produce an abundance of the necessary means of our continued existence? This is not to say, misanthropically, that we should invite annihilation, but rather our survival must be calculated; we must not, in aiming to save ourselves, reaffirm the notion that humanity is inherently, *naturally*, the most significant, the most precious living being and perspective. Our project must disavow this *carnophallogocentrism* (Wood 2018, 41) which has dominated our culture since the advent of agriculture and neither must we «be revolted by the extravagance of new symbolic systems» (Crowley 2015, 190) which might hold the key, despite our philosophical prejudices, to survival.

The looming catastrophe, in the form of an irruption—since «it is the irruption into *this* world of something from outside which is the marker of the weird» (Fisher 2016, 20)—«suggests to us something important and troubling: that we are at the end of one discourse and, passing to another, we continue out of convenience to express ourselves in an old, unsuitable language. That is the greatest danger» (Blanchot 1995a, 176). Blanchot (1995a) remarks that we cannot wait until there are new categories «with which to think what is happening»; a «smell of the end times»—smell being explicitly linked to the weird in Lovecraft’s *At the Mountains of Madness*, with the not-quite dead bodies of the Elder Things excavated from the subterranean tunnels by Lake and his team—would constitute «a sort of *sui generis* experience that, amid real historical phenomena, would allow one to discern the breakthrough: being headed for its end» (176). Such an experience might make possible that a «kind of mixture of vague science, confused vision and dubious theology [...] have value as a symptom, and perhaps a prognostic» (176). This approach would take as its foundation the inherent weirdness of climate catastrophe: it «is the rupture that no longer obeys the economic»—or ecological—«order and that, within its confines, is experienced, precisely, as a disorder, if not *chaos*, a harbinger of crisis» (Marder 2018, 142). The smell of the end times is *chaotical*—etymologically deriving from the Greek *khaos* and which, in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, is juxtaposed to *kosmos*, the ordered universe, and signifies the void from which all signification originates, as it was from chaos that all life emerged; such as in Greek myth wherein it was from this void that the first deities were birthed and in the Christian and Jewish faiths as in Genesis it was from a vast black void that God first brought forth material existence. Chaos can therefore be viewed as an infinite potentiality which must be properly discerned if we wish to avoid annihilation from its violent irruption into this world.

Chaos, however, can only ever be a means to an end—alone it will always remain an insignificant nothingness—but neither must it be appropriated, for appropriation has been a



hallmark of agrilogistics. Chaos must therefore be read, interpreted; we must seek out its intrusion into normal, ordered space; intrusions which are announced «whenever we feel not at home in our economically arranged homes» (Marder 2018, 142). We must read and interpret the irruptions of the weird into this world so that we might be able to discern, amongst the infinite potential futures, the breakthrough that could, by a radical re-evaluation of what it means to be human, start us on a path of survival. I will call this approach *transhistorical chaomancy*—and, taking its significations, acting as the cornerstones of a new ethics, a *mythical oikomancy* can be derived which would focus the bewildering potentiality of chaos with a practical application and ethics.

Lovecraft (2016) describes *par excellence* the opening of a transhistorical epoch in the wake of climate catastrophe:

We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but someday the piecing together of disassociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age (139).

We live on our placid island of agrilogistics, held afloat by the violent and ignorant demarcations between human and nonhuman, surrounded by a chaotic black ocean. Empirical science has never ventured to betray the trust we place in it—it has never sought to harm those basic agrilogistical precepts which our life on this ignorant island of fact is founded. However, empiricism will one day stumble upon those invasive corners of the Outside which remain inconspicuous in isolation, but when pieced together will set our island aquaking and invite the tempest of the surrounding chaos—as when Dyer and Danforth, of *At the Mountains of Madness*, were traversing those insane peaks traumatically realized that each uncanny similarity between the soapstone carvings, the pungent, aeon-dead, not-quite corpses, and the cyclopean masonry were evidence of the infamous *Necronomicon's* veracity. The irruption into this world by climate catastrophe thus opens those terrifying vistas of reality, in the wake of which we are left with the choice of madness or suicide. The transhistorical epoch is precisely this opening of the *vistas* of reality—the opening of a space which refuses economical ordering and the rational, ecological logic with which we have understood and demarcated the biosphere; it is the realization of the untenability of the human order and of the humanitarian project. If we are to envision a possible future and «to form even a rudimentary idea of our thoughts and feelings as we penetrated this aeon-silent maze of unhuman masonry one must correlate a hopelessly bewildering *chaos* of fugitive moods, memories, and impressions» (Lovecraft 2001, 296).

Transhistorical chaomancy is based upon a reading of quantum field theory proposed by Karen Barad (2018), undertaking the project of providing «evidence for a relational ontology that runs counter to a metaphysics of presence [...] offering empirical evidence for a *hauntology*» (224). Setting aside the empirical kernel at the heart of her article, agrilogistics perpetuates and justifies a certain «logics of the void» directly tied to «land occupation, as a mode of empire building» (230). Originating in the philosophy of Isaac Newton, the doctrine of *terra nullis* is a logic of the void that insists «the void [is] a spatial frame of reference within and against which motion takes place» or, in other words, «the void, in classical physics, is *that which literally doesn't matter*. It is merely that which frames what is absolute» (230). It is a repetition of the agrilogistical idea of the dichotomy between human agency and autonomous animal behavior; the void as the literal non-mattering of nonhumans «helped to consolidated and give scientific credence to colonialist endeavors to make claims on lands that were said to be de-void of persons in possession of culture and reason» (231). Transhistorical chaomancy is therefore opposed to logic and instead affirms the notion that «the void is a dynamism of indeterminacy [...]. *The vacuum is far from empty; rather it is flush with yearning, with innumerable possibilities/imaginings of what was,*

*could be, might yet have been, all coexisting»* (232). Ecology and economy, as an ordering law and logic of *oikos* and of the surrounding void, are «set aquaking by the visitation of some external, diseconomic, unsaying, sublime, *unheimlich*, *ungeheuer* unthing of which it can be said in the sinister left-handed script of *chôra* not that it exists, but partitatively that *il y en a*» (Llewelyn 2018, 171). *Khôra*, meaning the space outside of the *polis*, denotes, in Plato, the formless void, or interval—the *no-thingness*—which constitutes the furrow and the capacity for the sensible and intelligible realms to exist; a notion that Derrida echoes, for it is the no-thing between things, the void of the distance of being(s) which constitutes the originary difference and enables the self to emerge as distinct from an Other. The event of climate catastrophe is therefore felt as a trembling or quaking in the «oikogrammatical architecture» (180) that sustains, not only the agrilogistical demarcations of the human and nonhuman worlds, but also the very difference between self and other—which is the very origin of deconstruction as practice, taking «as its starting point the ways in which our self-understanding as human rests on the construction of the animal as the subordinated other» (Wood 2018, 41). This quaking and trembling is a signal of the weird, of the ultimate untenability and obsolescence of the world, but a sign, in order to be recognized as such, must be *significant*—it must carry a discernible content. Therefore, the goal must be devising a method which is capable of discerning from the chaos of infinite potential futures a significant, a-logical, and a-nomical *oikos* which is able to sustain life in the wake of catastrophe.

Barad's evidence for what is essentially a transhistorical view of reality, unfortunately steeped in the empirical language of physics—although quantum physics undoes one of the central tenets of agrilogistics, which is a certain reliance and imperative that «the law of non-contradiction is inviolable» (Morton 2018, 47)—is based in the concept of entanglement—which, according to Morton (2013) is an attribute of *hyperobjects*, such as climate catastrophe (27). In short, particles are also waves and waves, producing diffraction patterns, are capable of being in more than one place at once; this is the concept of *superposition*, which, rather than stating that a particle occupies multiple positions at once which would be a sort of certain knowledge, says that a particle's position is indeterminate. This state of indeterminacy can be taken a step further: in the two-slit experiment if, rather than slits being separated in space, instead are separated in time, by use of a regularly rotating disc into which the slits are carved, another conclusion presents itself: *temporal diffraction*. It then appears that particles can not only be in a superposition of space, but also in a «*superposition of different times*. [Meaning] that a given particle can be in a state of coexisting at multiple times» (Barad 2018, 218). Such *spacetime* superpositions are the «sum of *all possible paths—they all coexist and mutually contribute to the overall pattern*, else there wouldn't be a diffraction pattern» (Barad 2018, 218). Therefore:

[In the] case of spacetime diffraction, a diffraction pattern can be accounted for by taking account of *all possible histories (configurings of spacetime)*, understanding that each such possibility coexists with all others. [...] The diffraction pattern is *not* a manifestation of an uncertainty in our knowledge—it is not that each history is merely possible until we know more, and then ultimately only one will be actualized—the superposition marks ontolog[ical] indeterminacy (not epistemological uncertainty), and the diffraction pattern indicates that *each history coexists with the others* (Barad 2018, 220).

Spacetime diffraction means that the bomb explodes continuously; the bomb explodes the day after the blast, as radioactive ash and rain, it continues to go off as the survivors get cancer decades after the initial blast, and as the children of those survivors «faces with each new day the temporality of the future coming from the past, the prospect of getting leukemia as a *second-generation hibakusha*» (Barad 2018, 222). Similarly, it means that, in the context of climate catastrophe, even if we successfully eliminate all sources of pollution we will continue to live in the midst of pollution. In a demonstration of spacetime diffraction on the macro-scale—the division between the quantum scale, at which entanglement and diffraction are possible, and the

macro-scale, in which we are dealing with classical, Newtonian physics, is itself arbitrary, according to Barad (2018), and nothing more than a comfortable demarcation (213) – it takes, due to a process known as *climate lag*, roughly fifty years for pollution to be fully integrated into the eco-sphere, meaning that the effects of climate catastrophe we are currently experiencing is the result of pollution from 1972 and prior. In the case that pollution ceases, the effects of climate catastrophe will continue to worsen until fifty years following the cessation and it will likely worsen further still due to positive feedback loops, already beginning to emerge, which will come to operate independently of human action. However, this does not mean that spacetime diffraction has a shelf-life macrocosmically, for just as the residual radiation which surrounded detonation sites has disappeared, the descendants of those who survived have higher incident rates of cancer, so too will the descendants of the survivors of our catastrophe have to endure the as yet unknown side-effects of a changed planet; what, for example, are the long-term effects of our extremely rapid rate of consumption of microplastics or of the continued inhalation of increasingly higher rates of emissions?

In order to discern the entanglements of spacetime mattering one must *trace* the entanglements and, towards this end, a new modification of the two-slit experiment was proposed near the end of the twentieth century which attempted to demonstrate that «the past might be open to revision through a “quantum erasure”» (Barad 2018, 223). However, rather than demonstrating the possibility of erasure, Barad (2018) believes that this experiment, if close attention is paid to «the material labors entailed, the claim of erasure’s possibility fades, while at the same time bringing to the fore a relational-ontology [sensible] to questions of time, memory, and history» (223). To simplify, it differs from a normal two-slit experiment in one significant way: rather than only having a single measuring-device which would determine the slit a particle would pass through, a secondary device «that enables the erasure of the information about which slit a particle goes through *after* it’s already gone through the diffraction grating... [which indicates] that each particle will have gone through both slits at once» raising the possibility that «one can determine *after* the fact whether the particle will have gone through one slit or the other [...] or through both slits at the same time [...] *after* it has already passed through the diffraction grating and made a mark on the screen» (224). Originally thought to provide evidence that the past can be changed, Barad instead believes that what the experiment shows is that «the very nature of [the particle’s] being, *its ontology, in the past remains open to future reworkings*» (224). The significance of this experiment is that it is not evident whether the *original* diffraction pattern which was supposedly erased is the pattern which returns upon the secondary measurement:

Rather, *a different diffraction pattern [...] can be found within the scatter pattern if and only if the experimenter is clever enough to know how to trace the existing entanglement. [...] Remarkably, this experiment makes evident that entanglements survive the measurement process, and furthermore, that material traces of attempts at erasure can be found in tracing entanglements.* Indeed, these experiments show that while it is possible to erase particular marks that seem to suggest that the “past” has been changed, it is a fantasy to believe that this constitutes an erasure of all traces of this history. *Erasure is a material practice that leaves its trace in the very worlding of the world* (Barad 2018, 226).

If the bomb and climate catastrophe are a sort of erasure, this experiment offers a radical reconfiguring of what our approach should be in response to this crisis. Since «attempts at erasure always leave material traces: what is erased is preserved in the entanglements, in the diffraction patterns of being/becoming» (Barad 2018, 229). A sufficiently *clever* investigator could discern from the void, created by erasure, the traces of what was erased and would enable an alternative to ecology and economy—as compromised products of agrilogistics that erase through demarcations—that would be capable of re-cognizing and of re-memembering what it means to be human such that a new ethics could be found in the entanglements of what was erased: hence, *a transhistorical chaomancy*.

A transhistorical chaomancy cannot have a definite structure, for it is opposed to that logic or structuring of the void inherent in agrilogistical projects, nor can it have a definite symbology, for it is a reading of nothingness, of chaos—typically, a lack of any evident patterns—and of *khôra*. As such, it meets the *sui generis* requirement necessary for discerning the breakthrough. Chaomancy is transhistorical because, in reading the void, it must trace the entanglements which contain all possible futures and the erasures of the past; it de-structures and de-realizes the present as presence—since quantum physics refutes the idea of either linear time or space—and destabilizes the concept of agrilogistics. Erasures, containing within them the trace of what was erased—the haunting of the forgotten—can be targeted by a transhistorical chaomancy in order to reconfigure, through a re-membrance of the trace, agrilogistical space, laying the *ground* for an *oikomancy*—a reading of our dwelling, of the eco-sphere—through which a new referential horizon and ethics can be established. Transhistorical chaomancy posits all things as essentially entangled within the formless indeterminacy of *khôra*, the nothingness in which signification becomes possible, for inscription is only possible insofar as there is a no-thing upon which meaning can be inscribed. Transhistorical chaomancy is therefore a reading of this indeterminacy, opposed to any *logos* or *nomos*, of the ambiguity out of which infinite futures emerge.

#### 4. Mythical Oikomancy

If transhistorical chaomancy is a re-cognition and reading of the void as something which, rather than being a mere empty no-thingness, contains within it the entanglements and traces of all past erasures and potential futures—a reading which escapes reading, as what significance lies there cannot yet be signified—then a *mythical oikomancy* would be what *dwells* at the outer limits of this chaomancy where a new iconography—as opposed to any symbol-logy—is established by way of the trace. In particular, a *mythical oikomancy* is required because myth is «neither “true” nor “false”; it is beyond our logic’s horizon, in that “pang” which comes upon man in the midst of things. In the myth and by means of the mythic image, there is an externalization of the inner stirring, the emotion of man as he meets the world, his receptivity to impulses coming from “outside,” the communality of substance which welds him to the totality of beings» (Dardel, as cited in Bidney 1958, 11). In short, *oikomancy re-members that which chaomancy discerns from the void*.

Barthes (1995a) believed that everything is open to becoming myth, that «the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state [...] for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things» (94). Jane de La Vaudère, writing over half a century earlier, similarly believed all things were open to semiosis: «We have learned that the Earth turns, that the blood that circulates in our bodies is a river that returns to its source, that there are, beyond the sea of darkness, lands covered with trees different from our own, inhabited by men who are also different; but *no one has yet recognized that all the creations and all the creatures in the Universe are signs*» (2018, 82). Erasure impresses upon what it erases this closed and silent existence, and the hauntings of erasure can only hope that their silence reaches us and can be recognized as an eerie absence: «*Why is there something here when there should be nothing? Why is there nothing here when there should be something?*» (Fisher 2016, 12). Transhistorical chaomancy is required because «mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth [...] presuppose a signifying consciousness» (Barthes 1995a, 95). The project of chaomancy is therefore to discern the swirling chaos of entanglements, excluded by «a record of erasures» (Barad 2018, 228) in order to open them to signification by a re-evaluated signifying consciousness capable of dwelling in the midst of the ambiguity of things without the need for demarcations. «One ideal of human knowledge and culture would be a

complete erasure of inscription; the truth and full meaning of the text would require that it pass into ideality and comprehension, no longer requiring an archive. Such a humanity would be maximally able and ecological: so attuned to its world that there would be no waste, piling up of *techne*, no systems that could not contribute to the full and clean functioning of the whole» (Colebrook 2018, 268). A complete erasure, following Barad, cannot actually be accomplished; however, the passage into ideality and comprehension proposed by Colebrook can be thought of differently: in the face of erasure, chaomancy would trace upon the effaced surface of the void a *mythic inscription*, thus marking the passage from either agrilogistical ‘spoken’ fact or silent erasure to a semiosis beyond any notions of truth or falsehood, facilitating proper attunement to a new concept of *oikos* capable of sustaining the rich and fecund ambiguity created by the deconstruction of demarcations.

Sebeok (1986), when faced with the task of answering the question of how to go about creating a semiological system that would, for ten-thousand years hence, communicate the dangers of nuclear waste *and* deter any curious trespassers from accidentally disturbing the site causing leakage, initially balked at the prospect of any semiological system’s significance surviving for more than «a third of the time-span of 10,000 years we are concerned with here» (166). Similarly, this is the problem faced by us, the contemporaries of the Anthropocene: if we were to devise a definite ideology, based in ecology, of a system of signs precluding any further decimation of the eco-sphere, not only would those underlying precepts of agrilogistics still be in operation, but there would be nothing stopping future generations from disavowing conservation efforts once the crisis is no longer as patently manifested as today. Sebeok therefore suggested the iconography of myth be revitalized towards this nuclear storage effort, taking Pandora’s Box as the myth most capable of survival and deterrence. He proposed that «information be launched and artificially passed on into the short-term and long-term future with the supplementary aid of folkloristic devices, in particular [...] an artificially created and nurtured *ritual-and-legend*» (168). This ritual-and-legend «would be tantamount to laying a “false trail”» steering the uninitiated «away from the hazardous site for reasons other than the scientific knowledge of the possibility of radiation and its implications» accumulating «superstition to shun a certain area permanently» (168). However, applying this line of thinking to the development mythical oikomancy, *shunning* is not appropriate; we should not wish to avoid the marks of our agrilogistical hubris, to forget our responsibility towards those who were erased. In fact, the prospect of being able to simply hide nuclear waste, or any waste for that matter, in some far-off mountainous vault betrays the catastrophe: for, «there is no “away,” [...] no background to [human’s] foreground [...] a lack that is evident in the return of culturally (and physically) repressed “pollution” and awareness of the consequences of human action on nonhumans» (Morton 2018, 46). Returning to Sebeok momentarily:

A ritual annually renewed can be foreseen, with the legend retold year-by-year (with, presumably, slight variations). The actual “truth” would be entrusted exclusively to an [...] “atomic priesthood,” that is, a commission of knowledgeable physicists, experts in radiation sickness, anthropologists, linguists, psychologists, semioticians, and whatever additional administrative expertise may be called for now and in the future. Membership in this “priesthood” would be self-selective over time (Sebeok 1986, 168).

What Sebeok is proposing here is essentially a magical system, steeped in mythical symbolism and iconography, that keeps vigil over a guarded secret; utilizing a master-student relationship to pass down these significant symbols and icons, and the practices associated with each, which do not shun the inevitable prospect of change or variation over time—an essentially oral system, which would, following Colebrook, no longer require a material *techne* that might leave its mark upon an otherwise effaced surface: the potential for a responsibility at once relying upon the trace and refusing further transgressions against the prohibition to demarcate.

Morton, whether aware of Sebeok's study or not, saw the danger in relying upon shunning—even Sebeok was aware that it was ineffectual, «curses associated with the burial sites of some Egyptian pharaohs [...] did not deter greedy, and presumably, illiterate graverobbers from digging for “hidden treasure”» (Sebeok 1986, 170)—instead envisioning a joyous ceremony of remembrance and personal responsibility:

Maybe we should store plutonium neither deep underground with militarized warnings nor in knives and forks without any warning whatsoever (this was actually suggested in the late 1990s). Let's get small pieces of plutonium, store them in a way that we can monitor them, and encase them in a substance that will not leak radiation, aboveground, so you can maintain the structure and so that you can take responsibility for it. You, the human, made the plutonium, or you the human can understand what it is—therefore you are responsible. Let's put these structures in the middle of every town square in the land. One day there will be pilgrimages to them and circumambulations. A whole spirituality of care will arise around them. Horror and depression will give way to sadness and joy (Morton 2018, 161-162).

This is but one, although very real and possible, example of what a mythical oikomancy could look like. It is the recognition that the world has disappeared, that we are not present in some immediate nearness against which an away or outside is any longer possible to maintain, that if we are to survive this catastrophe, «*my* responsibility for the Other presupposes an overturning such that it can only be marked by a change in the status of “me,” a change in time and perhaps in language» (Blanchot 1995b, 25). Such a mythic imagining of our responsibility towards nuclear waste can therefore be seen as a precursor to what would be required of a mythical oikomancy dedicated to a continuous prohibition against the agrilogistic (viral) program which precipitated the development of *logos*, *nomos*, the divisions between human and nonhuman worlds, and therefore also, eventually, patriarchy, class division, capitalism, and anthropogenic climate catastrophe.

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