Anecdote of a Jar--The "Anthropocene" as Western Fable (A propos Hillis Miller's China lectures)*

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Abstract: *This essay departs from J. Hillis Miller's An Innocent Abroad: Lectures in China (2015) to explore the legacy of "deconstructive" reading in the era of transnational rupture, climate extinction, and the rise of A.I.*

Keywords: *Anthropocene, J. Hillis Miller, Wallace Stevens, Tipping Points, Climate Chaos, mnemo-technics, ideology*

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* This text forms the second part of an homage to J. Hillis Miller, using his "China lectures" as a point of inquiry into deconstructing "the Anthropocene" as a distracting and narcotic conceit. The longer essay is titled "Ghosting Hillis Miller, "China," and the Panic of Reference in the Anthropocene."

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Hillis Miller's "China" lectures form a unique folio of Miller's--as Andrzej Warminski notes, among Miller's five writing careers (Jameson makes a similar remark about these lectures resisting any deconstructive definition). There would be one other folio, a sixth in Miller's work, which Claire Colebrook names the "Anthropocene" Miller--attuned to the shift to extinction logics, climate chaos, the suicidal "auto-co-immunity" he paints in from Derrida, albeit without mourning. Miller seems to pivot in these lectures--but one must ask, from a decade and more away, after China has closed and an East-West schism become palpable; after Covid (which took Miller); after "Trump" (or not quite); after the hilarious eruption of devastating climate non-anomalies of summer "2022" (or not quite "after")--which is to say, once tipping points are glimpsed as past; after exponential accelerations of A.I., surveillance totalization, financial war. . . That is, why summon Hillis in China to interrogate our mutant and derealized "present"? What one gleans across Miller's China lectures, from a rare period of opening, now past, is anything but a defense of "literature"--but rather, a pre-site and mirthful farewell to an era of "literary studies" in the academy (and broadly), a mutation in and of reading that replaces the era of the book and alphabeticism with video and bot driven mnemotechnics, digital tsunamis that stupefy and re-*proletarianize* (Bernard Stiegler) without outside--an implicitly spectral totalization and de-coupling.[1] Updating de Man's materiality of inscription as a reversal of Heidegger's "language," Miller absorbs all media and digital traces. This "materiality" is spectral, outside any binary concept terms, since the panic of climate chaos, for which the reaction formation of today's rampant nationalisms--resource wars incipit--inverts liberal identity politics and ushers in, for him, the displacement of fiction ("literature") into screen gaming, mutating in turn into a promised meta-verse whose real estate market is booming apparently:

> Scholars in the literature institutes of CASS, it appeared, are accustomed to thinking of the social function of literature as reinforcement of a consciously promulgated ideology, not as criticism of it. I learned that the word "ideology" has, or had, a positive meaning in China . . . . Both Marx and Althusser might have agreed with the definition of ideology that de Man gives in "The Resistance to Theory" when he says: "[T]his does not mean that fictional narratives are not part of the world and of reality; their impact upon the world may well be all too strong for comfort. What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality,

> of reference with phenomenalism." . . . . I would add to what de Man says that it is not so much language as such that generates the delusions of ideologies but rather language as molded by one or another medium—voice, handwriting, print, tele-vision, or the computer connected to the Internet. All these reproductive technologies exploit the strange propensity to dwell in fictional or phantasmal spaces that each human being has. The bodies of readers, television viewers, users of the Internet—bodies in the sense of eyes, ears, nervous systems, brains, passions—are appropriated, by way of an extravagant propensity (especially peculiar, at least in its hyperbolic form, to human beings among living creatures) to become the theater of fictions, phantasmagoria, swarms of ghosts. (*An Innocent Abroad*)

To bookmark this transition, this seance, I have anachronized a ghost lecture--ungiven and unpublished, as I improvized the occasion--for a convocation in Hunan on "Trans-Nationalism" with a nod to literature and culture, internationalisms, and so on, already a relic-trope.

1.

If "transnationalism" implied a cosmopolitan vision of a network of translating and inter-connected traditions, one might say it is its own enemy as well—as the 21st century bio-material, habitability, food, water and energetics pressures replace 20th century memes and narratives, as a multipolar world replaces an imaginary unipolar one, and as biomorphic climate change generates mass extinction events and resource collapse (See: California). This not so hidden catalyst, climate change, has infected the hopeful "trans-nationalism" of that now seemingly distant period. "Climate change" is certainly trans-national itself, recalling the fiction that so-called "nation-states" exist. Its effects are more encompassing than the viral agents that ignore these constructs—and I am not speaking yet of the climate refugee tsunami swamping fortress Europe. Everywhere, leaks, regressive tribalisms, exclusions, dissolved borders, infected cell walls. While one could include among the free riders of this sort of transnationalism, a *mocking* sort, corporate media streams and digital swarms together with their cyber gangs and data harvesters, one is alert to other threats and spooks used to panic and distract the public imaginary: Covid, Ebola, Brain-eating Amoeba and a Pandora's Box of mutating viruses. This new accord, in which human cultures are put in question by irreversible extinction events, is

named the Anthropocene in the West, another nominal reset that hastens the spiral by its distractions and cinematic thrills.[2]

The *promise* of transnationalism like that of enlightened multiculturalism as such—the promise of infinite interactive differences, mutually impregnating and generative--has converted into a differential amalgam of competing global centers with competing media eco-systems, memories, pasts, and digital "facts." When China rules to purge "Western values" altogether, we find only one overt self-immunizing symptom. How does *climate chaos*--a mutation in the biosphere which triggers mass extinction events already passed *tipping points*—disband, counter-intuitively, the *cosmopolitan* model? Certainly, the latter promised a transition to the sort of collective or species thinking that "climate change" was supposed to trigger (but which Covid somehow would not)? Yet the opposite occurs. What's up?

I'll return in a moment to why "trans-nationalism" gives way, it seems, to its own counter-logics under 21st century realities (massing climate refugees, megadrought, competing geo-engineering plans, the beginning of climate wars across new forms and formats). I will do so by way of an anachronism, however, by attempting to *read* briefly a poem by one not known as a great theorist of the Anthropocene, Wallace Stevens, to address, in perhaps comic mode, what I call the literary structure of climate chaos. I will also turn, for something like an explanation, to Paul de Man, who seems to have gotten there first.

But I interrupt to *read* a poem that anticipates much of this, Stevens' *Anecdote of a Jar*, to question the unlikely topic I suggested above. That is, whether what we call "climate change," to the degree it is Anthropogenic, is not primarily caused by carbon emissions or rampaging hyper-industrial capitalism: there is what I will call a "*literary" structure of climate change*—one that, accordingly, stands outside of and enframes the polite fiction, today, of an "Anthropocene" era. It focuses on Anthropo-tropologies. The *Anthropos*, in this sense, names a Euro-centric configuration of *a type of human*, the human of Western technology, hyper-industrial acceleration, nihilistic monotheisms and the religions of the Book (and alphabetical writing)—that is, the codification by Aristotle of a citizen (who must be Greek, male, possessed of rationality), an exclusionary definition. The *polis* is defined in opposition to the *barbarians*, those who speak mere *sounds* (*ba-ba-ba*). Now, by *literary structure* I do not mean as it may appear in novels today, nor even how classic texts seem to have "gotten" it as a cognitive dilemma:

Oedipus' seeking the source of contamination for the plague and drought—and finding that he, himself, was the contaminant; or Hamlet, knowing what the ghost tells him (this is so, do not forget), yet finding the reality of the court in mirthful denial of any problem at all.

The question is not only that of a "human epoch," the *Anthropocene*, which claims to encompass an entire species of global commerce and states (and non-states, now: ISIS, corporations as legal persons, certain **crustaceans**, and so on). It might be better called the *Sinocene*, but of that another time (China may not want authorship). That is, the question is of these other *materialities*--biomorphic processes, energy transferences, and extinction events--which *Anthropos*, not quite a species and not of any one nation, induces. We see this today everywhere, and it forms a kind of "climate change unconscious" to every discourse (including climate denialism): everyone knows, every organism on the planet is fleeing habitats, mutating, or extincting, including our favorite hominid (what calls itself "we"), and yet it is also derealized perpetually.

Now, I am not quite sure where this leads entirely, and why an American poem is useful to examining *trans-nationalism*. The latter bears the promise of differential openings. It is also unclear what these have to do with climate chaos—which itself is a covering phrase for what radically displaces human sovereignty, not to mention "national" imaginaries. Is the *Anthropocene* like a jar in which hyper-modernity has incubated for two or three thousand years (*Anthropos* as, again, a Greek word or conceit), or perhaps five thousand for China—very impressive, *Anthropoi*, but not at all in geological time. I cite Stevens' poem in full:

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,

And round it was, upon a hill.

It made the slovenly wilderness

Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,

And sprawled around, no longer wild.

The jar was round upon the ground

And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.

The jar was grey and bare.

It did not give of bird or bush,

like nothing else in Tennessee.

Let's take this jar, for a moment, as a glass bubble or container—and its story as an entire history of positing and erasure. The odd thing is that a jar is a manufactured artefact already on arrival, a nothing almost. This "jar" is jarring, a blow, given as an "anecdote." Let us call it that of the "Anthropocene," American-style. "It took dominion everywhere," this jar, or rupture, or enclosure for, you know, pickling stuff. A glass jar is transparent, nothing but glass if inverted and *placed* somewhere. In a sense, it is pure media, transparent yet impassable, technological, artificed. Needless to say, Stevens toys here with Keats' too famous *urn*—that classic enclosure that would carry contents, if only human ash, yet whose painted figures, mimetic, frozen in time, bring about the classic Western convergence of a scandal: truth is beauty, beauty truth—says that text. Really? "Truth" is an aesthetic effect? Stevens' text does not seem to celebrate a Romantic hypothesis so much as tally its devastating implications in a trans-temporal "anecdote" for which a phantasial America and its partitioned geography hover. *Tennessee*, keep in mind, is the nominal locus, a once frontier state: "I placed a jar in *Tennessee*." Why Tennessee? Forget for a moment this "I" that initiates and then narrates this act of positing or placing. Instead of a *fiat lux* (And God said: "Let there be *light*") there is this *fiat jar*. We might say the interior of the upended glass is eco-technic—that is, it creates the civilized illusion of an interior, controlled, a home or *Oikos*, what is ours or mine, the proper, property, and so on and on. For it to take "dominion everywhere" names a *totalizing* process, militarized, eviscerating.

Yet "Tennessee" as a proper name is curious, and not for being the old frontier of Daniel Boone—of Indian fighting and forest conquest and the proprietization of *terroir*. The word-name is American Indian and does not translate into English

sense other than its flourishing buffet of alliterative and syllabic repetitions—a sort of alphabet soup in the process of perpetual assemblage into a word that is only an aggregate of letters and sounds, unreadable except as a *proper name*. (Without translation, the *state* of this perpetual foreign non-word recalls that "pure language" of Benjamin which exists between all possible languages as sounds or micrological marks.) The evacuation of what had seemed once upon a time Keats' *urn* into a bare, inverted jar distills and pickles Keats' "truth" and "beauty" interface. It does not tell us about the experience of beautiful truths but the priority of the materiality of aesthetic events, of the order of technologies and graphics, over whatever we call "truth" as an attempt to stabilize that. It names bluntly what *writing* knows, that so-called "truth" is an *aesthetic* phenomenon (only as an aesthetic phenomenon, Nietzsche writes in the *Birth of Tragedy*, is existence "justified"). That is, the world's *phenomenality* and its concepts are generated out of and in response to inscriptive traces which project what we take for the phenomenal world, or the "senses" (*aisthanumai*). The jar takes us back to the cave paintings' organization of the eye, of motion, and mimetic contracts. But the coincidence of this jar with the "Anthropocene" draws attention to its dominating or consuming logic—it, this nothing, *totalizes* itself. *Anecdote of the Jar*—this translates as "Narrative of 'Anthropos'" or "Story of the 'Anthropocene.'

Now, of what interest to us is this *jar* in Tennessee, this jar "placed" by some "I" or imposed through and by letters, and particularly to the unwinding of transnationalism we now witness—with everyone going back into their *jars*? One must speak not of entirely different media ecographies, as in China, with its own internet, which will have different memories, and "facts." The problem may lie in the jar—which as glass is, all the same, "like nothing else": without any parallel, or metaphor, or metonymy, outside of tropes altogether. Now, we know from the reference to Keats that Stevens also takes the jar as the poem, or the collective trajectory of a poetic tradition. These separate jars, today, register a more fundamental impasse in what we can no longer call the *Anthropocene* with a straight face. On the one hand, the jar is an artefact, a technic, which dominates the natural world and overruns the "I" that takes responsibility for the act of positing--his *fiat jar*. Any Anthropocene era depends on the perpetual act of *anthropomorphism*, in which we supposedly project ourselves onto things, animals, objects. But there is a problem.

The jar is artificed, a container, shaper of nothingness, dominator of nature, *totalizing* in its trances, a technic that takes over yet differentiates itself from existing *things* ("like nothing else in *Tennessee*"—this non-place, or state, or preverbal anarchism and *alien* proper name). Some might ally it to Capitalism, yet what we are given is a "jar" and how it functions as a totalizing and destroying agency, whatever fictions are attached to the enclosure.

It is a sign, today, of what I have called *climate comedy*, but in this case, a good one, that one can read Stevens as writing in advance the auto-evisceration of the "Anthropocene" and its mis-entanglement with aesthetic ideology *tout court*. We can call *aesthetic ideology* what supposedly gives content to the jar, which is nonetheless never presented as with any contents that are not projected in or onto it (it is just glass)—and which, not part of organic "life," is nothing itself, "like nothing else in Tennessee." That is, it has no simile, no metaphor. It, so-called *aesthetic ideology*, is not this or that ideology as we know it, but the mechanics by which all ideologies are fossilized into a belief or referential system that, effectively, then programs perception itself (*aisthanumai*, again). This makes a hyper digital age particularly vulnerable.

Now, you will notice that "climate **chaos**," which today is *irreversible*, itself reads a text of the past that is disclosed to concern itself with the linguistic or literary premise of ecocide—not as an account of hydro-carbon emissions and mass extinction events, but of something like the "Anthropocene" presented as an anecdote of a jar, and the "I" that posits (or places) it into the world. Is it possible that our destruction of "life as we knew it," rapacious, is less linked to oil, or capitalism, than to the cognitive media and hermeneutic-reflex regimes we inhabit, to the Jars? If so, who the hell is "Anthropos," clearly not a universal but rather a historical accident of the Mediterranean soup: had Plato been knocked off by a toxic clam, had Caesar not gotten cramps while receiving paranoid senators, had Julian the Apostate not caught a random spear—well, just for starters. . . .

I suggested **above** that *trans-nationalism* produced or produces the opposite of what it *promises*. How strange. Applied to the university, it generates the anthologies of sound-byte "world literature" in translation for the smartphone era—which decommissioned Comparative Literature departments (which actually required languages). And it attends the sharp decline of "humanities" studies and *reading* itself. Moreover, if the aim were to promote cosmopolitan

global culture, the outcome has been the opposite today. There are powerful trends toward reclusive nationalisms, closed media ecosystems, erected defenses against mass immigration (climate refugees) and memes. Indeed, the new "stateless" are left in the seas, disposables (the Rohingas). Ruptures of international accords or past law, rogue financial systems, and a resurgent East-West divide seem all clothed in the kitsch return of 20th century *memes*. Again, China's decision to purge its textbooks of "Western values"—as if, having gotten to know "us" better, China realized all the more how virally contaminating our traditions had become? Sometimes, the more diffuse the pathogen, the more forceful the needed quarantine or immunization. I sympathize. *We* are diseased for sure. (But one must point out the anomaly, that "China" wraps itself in and about the most core metaphysical "Western" performative possible--a certain Marx, and, importing its nihil-messianic temporalization, has long assured itself as an iteration of "Anthropos'" most embarrassing traits. No escape.)

2.

The result, one could say, is diverse and warring jars. But if the "jar" is "*like nothing else* in Tennessee" (where there are many, many things), it is because it is also non-existent, non-organic, does nothing, "is" nothing. It is an aesthetically generated enclosure, or if you like, spectral, fashioned, a memory program, an artefaction of reference and mnemonics—such as we see totalized today in the digital realms of screens, trolling, video memes, telemarketing, security and data harvesting, and the *last man* culture that it secures, detached and sealed from the geo-organic collapsing resources and extincting species and melting ice-caps accelerating about it in what appears, going forward, a *vortex*. That's what happens now that *tipping points* have passed—it accelerates on its own, like a vortex.

Let's stick with *Anthropos* for a moment. Like the jar, he does not, strictly, exist, at least as a species or organism. Rather, like the jar, "he" is an artefaction upon arrival, self-placed: he is an arbitrary configuration (there are others) installed with the West, as the West, and we can pretend to trace this counterfeit in measure to the Greeks (beware Greeks bearing gifts). In such a trim genealogy: Plato conjured and consolidated the one who knows by not knowing, "Socrates." Aristotle codified this "speaker": male, only of the *Greek* tongue, possessed of rationality (*logos*)—and that's it, even if it would later be Christianized, or fracture into variations—and it would depend, of course, on *alphabeticism*, on

nihilist monotheism, on the era of "the Book," all the memory technologies to follow into the exponential acceleration of the transference of carbon fossil fuel, oil, which brings the dead—of all organic life on earth—back to the surface, overloading it, a sort of cannibalism by the living of past "life."

Now, I pause to note: there was a refusal to go along with this program when it was first installed. That was the figure of Diogenes, who aped Socrates (Plato called him a "Socrates gone mad"), trolled Plato, disregarded Aristotle, and dissed Alexander as he put it all into empire. What did *he* know—with his little lamp of burning oil held in the sun, against the sun, showing the latter to be a cinematized technic and not Plato's father or the Good and so on. He was looking for what he could not find or see, an *Anthropos* (an "honest man")—and this is someone who knew the greatest "men" of the era, the founders of the *Anthropos* and hence, Anthropocene—what we see in its twilight today, if it ever existed. So it was possible to refuse and deface this program, see it as a curse and doomsday machine of sorts. Diogenes, our first "cosmopolitan," ersatz trans-nationalist, defacer of the Anthropocene as it was installed, refuser of its "we." And they call him a *cynic*? Of course, "Anthropos" was an artefactual hypothesis, less Aristotelian than an Odysseus trickster generated by performative shape-shifting: not a master of rhetoric but the latter's erratic effect and product. Diogenes, recall, is famous for being unable to find an honest man, an *Anthropos* at all, with his oil lamp in the mid-day sunlight.

If the West or the *Anthropos* is delegitimized, after all, it is because any *Anthropocene* is now synonymous with ecocide and mass extinction events. Only a total *idiot* would think this has a "literary" structure, or is related to interpretive regimes, mimetic programs, and yet only an idiot would not observe how the "climate change debate" had been engineered for failure, gutted, manipulated, and permanently delayed by the language and media streams that platformed it. After all, there needs to be a survivor caste in a few decades, and there needs to be disposables. With the passing of tipping points, a de facto politics of *managed* extinctions has discreetly begun.

How might we then hear this as a "literary structure"—as an *anecdote*, say, of a jar?[3] And I am not alluding to the vocabulary, self-defeating, used to name or discuss climate chaos, "the great dithering" (Donna Haraway), the alphabet soup of soft scientisms and romantic metaphors (sustainability, environmentalism, organic healing).[4] It's much simpler, and can be divided into two parts with the

help of the primary theorist still of *literariness*, Paul de Man, who happened to find his way into a post-Anthropocene position.

One would have to say for de Man that, strictly speaking and in contrast to Derrida,, there never was any "metaphysics," and what we called that was the perpetual product of a hermeneutic relapse bound to regimes of identification, artefacted or projected reference. Such a *relapse* can be reduced to a kitsch gesture, the compulsion to recuperate "meaning," address an authorial subject like us, add messianic accounts, subscribe to communal pieties. What cannot be evaded is the mnemotechnics of inscriptions that would be being accounted for, defaced, appropriated--a so-called "*materiality* of inscription." The "relapse" is where aesthetic ideologies emerge and occur—which is to say, the glue that sustains "ideology" at all by generating how we *perceive* or project consciousness of the world from inscriptions, programs, memes, and so on. The premise here aligns with Hillis Miller's transitioning in *An Innocent Abroad* from "literature" to the digital screen mode of inter-active gaming, or its immersive promise now in Zuckerberg's *Meta* of a fully AR zone assembled to accommodate the reality immigrants. This phenomenalization of cognitive projections from mnemonic traces rewrites de Man's "language" as **mnemo-technics** outright, and cinematics virtually--as the quote from Miller, above, iterates. One may suspect a legacy flaw in the entire apparatus by which perception and identification, reading and entropic exhaustion have been transmitted into the 21st century. One may suspect not ideology, but aesthetic ideology--the deadening program of fossil reference and mimeticism--determines the fatal acceleration of current energetics and tribal regression, what Bernard Stiegler names the "great regression" and infantilization of the short-circuiting of memory today.

In his last posthumously published essay, de Man turns to the one cognitive figure (or trope) that, we assume, must have supported the entire trajectory of any "Anthropocene" era—*Anthropomorphism* as such. That would name, presumably, the tendency of language to configure the world as we see ourselves, to invest it with human qualities, to project life into it on our terms. It is fundamental, everyone knows about anthropomorphism, but many assume it is self-explanatory (since it remains undefined). Moreover, most think that they are too sophisticated to practice that, once they identify it as naive or narcissistic, as if it could be walked away from. De Man's very last essay turns to this question in the context of a literary mode: "Anthropomorphism and the Lyric."

One might assume that the primary trope of being human would be lyric's positing of a voice or face at all—first in naming the world or objects as living agents, but in fact bringing itself, the "I," into the position of being itself spoken as an apostrophe ("'I' placed a jar"). One name for this was *prosopopeia*. But it's not that simple--and becomes much worse in the digital age, when these tricks have all become duplicable and managed by tele-marketing streams. Something precedes even that—but what? It would have to precede all figurative chains out of which our cultural values and associations are constructed. And if *prosopopeia* were where the human emerges as face and voice, then that something would not be human. It is here that Anthropomorphism paradoxically occurs. Pretending to be one among other tropes (de Man cites a list from Nietzsche in which it is paired with metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche), to appear structured "*like* a trope," it nonetheless isn't a figure or trope at all. It conceals itself in the tropological parade but is other. Here we recall a problem with "Anthropomorphism" mentioned above, that while everyone knows about it, it has no definition. And it has no definition, it turns out, because the "Anthropos" that is projecting itself on the world, supposedly, has not been given any prior definition. Meet "Anthropos," the Western conjuration of a certain type of human software—invented by the Greeks, posited by Plato and codified by Aristotle, and turned into an empire by his student Alexander the Great, spawned by alphabeticism and nihilist monotheism, fed into Christianity ("Platonism for the masses," says Nietzsche), abstracted in the "Enlightenment" into a monocultural form (humanity), released over the earth like a plague of colonial locusts in the industrial and then hyper-industrial acceleration, come to rest in the redistribution of memory-technologies in the digital swarm. But what if Anthropos were not even Greek but something like a retro-projected algorithm or phantom, a myth useful to the present to presume? It discloses, alas beyond *tipping points*, today, an ecocidal program: "bare and grey." Technically, this "Anthropos" does not name a species or even a living organism—it was but one among possible constructs. For de Man, it does not occur or emerge as a flowering of figural language, beginning with lyric hymns or Dionysian dithyramb (in *The Birth of Tragedy*, say). Instead of participating in a substitutive chain, like metaphor or metonymy, he claims that it "freezes" any tropological system in play: *it* precedes *face*—which, itself a signature of trope, is betrayed.

Instead, it is merely a "proper name," a violence that does not require identification or relation, one structured as *exclusion*:

But 'Anthropomorphism' is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the taking of something for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*. It is no longer a proposition but a proper name. . . ." ["Anthropomorphism and the Lyric"] [5]

"I placed a jar in *Tennessee*": that is, "I" imposed this nothing over the froth and techno-generacy of rampant marks, sounds, cognitive signs, as was initiated, say, on the walls of prehistoric caves—where, essentially, cinema was installed to say nothing of Plato's cave-jar, to account for it (see Stiegler, again, on this). At the core of any "Anthropocene" fable hums an Anthropomorphist software, the sort perhaps now managed by digital corporatists, Disney, Hollywood, telemarketing and security bots. What is called "anthropomorphism," then, is a gesture and claim that is not human in any positive sense. It does not project our familiar traits since those haven't appeared yet. Rather than emerge with and from tropes, as an archival event, its imposition does the opposite. It is not a trope at all, but the inert imposition of a "proper name" that is tautological at best: it freezes and totalizes the systems of tropes (so they are caught in a sort of vortex), it forecloses sense by programming perceptual memory. And it must be exclusionary—this, they, are not human, not "Anthropos" (according to Aristotle, of the *polis*). In fact, it's only anti-dote is, or would be, a form of reading that steps outside of that compact, control, and "cultural" meme-set.

3.

We see here a problem, as Dipesh Chakrabarty noted. In unfolding the implications of "climate change" to post-colonial models (essentially, the latter **are** displaced irrevocably), he observed that there is or can be no Enlightenment version of "humanity," no coming together in any positive unity of definition or, even, as we have seen with Covid, to fight a common negative threat to its existence—since that would be *itself*. Thus, saying we are in the "Anthropocene" is the greatest of blinds and mischievous claims. If there were a malicious god tricking humans into paying attention to a shiny new term and "dithering" for the critical decade when actual tipping points cascaded past, as they will regard ourselves one day, he might toss us this self-regarding term. Anthropocene, to banter and marvel over, to edit or decry, insert alternates and delay. One can see this today, since in being appropriated by corporate propaganda (we must geo-

engineer, individually adapt, and so on), the term submits to what is not a human at all, the legal "person" without body of the corporation, now, in U.S. jurisprudence—not just the "Citizens United" scam, but the more elegant "Hobby Lobby" ruling, which assigned *them* not only personhood but emotions, religions, feelings, concern for aborting human babies, and so on). We also see why, today, a sort of mnemonic vomiting up occurs, following the *promise* of trans-national globalization. Instead of yielding a translational commons, the opposite occurs— an architected rift between East and West (replaying 20th century costumes and memes, regressing), new wars, new territorial formations, withdrawal from and closing out others, or between provinces and towns dependent on the same water sources. Everyone is having an identity crisis--a panic of reference--and with good reason. Anthropomorphism has gone into reverse.

Now, to say "Anthropos" never existed does not mean to say he has not, essentially, swarmed the earth and now terminates life on it species by species (working back to himself). As a model or type, it was never meant to last indefinitely—but, essentially, to burn out. In fact, it can do nothing other than accelerate ecocide around itself, since the very fiction of an *Oikos*, home, eco-, interior, nation, tribe, or "we," was a *jar*.

A more cynical eye than mine might say that the tranced-out or Last Man culture of the West today largely reflects that. Nonetheless, even if the "Anthropocene" as a *proper name* seems a code word for ecocide or extinction (a title like that can only be recognized or conferred by another after *his* disappearance), it was not without its skeptics, not to say cynics, we have seen, at the moment it was installed. Diogenes traversed these four generations as he stepped aside, lived in a broken jar, and pulled out his oil lamp to wander about in the daylight looking for—an *Anthropos*. When Plato offered a definition of man, as "a featherless bi-ped," Diogenes rushed in with a plucked chicken, *ecce homo*. Diogenes refused the "we" then in formation. He would wait out the couple of thousand years in which this construct would zombie on, and the image of the cinematic oil lamp suggests, too, an apprehension of its hidden supports: that of a "light" produced by oil, which in turn exposes the sun as a technic (not, as Plato would propagandize, as Father, as the Good, as the ladder of illumination). Diogenes revoked the West before it occurred and as it was being imposed—that is, as the self-feeding credit of a *proper name*. Diogenes, who began his career as a currency *counterfeiter*, earning him exile, which he converted into the first and last cosmopolitanism, knew something of *contretemps*, stamps, inscriptions.

Now, it seems I have willfully torched the entire "Anthropos" propaganda. In one narrative, Chinese nationalist totalitarianism prevails as the maximal regime during the climate chaos era—before whose amplifying local pressures no democratic model can persist indefinitely. One is no longer bound, after all, to the "Anthropocene" imaginary with its predatory pre-programming. I once quipped to Hillis that, whenever China next opens up again, *whenever*, his works will seed future reading techniques and technics. The future of "reading," if it has such, will eventually be the domain of A.I., benign, bodiless, techno-sentient, surveying the infantile ruins of today's Potemkin nationalisms, propaganda, bifurcations, and critical timidity. Neither **Sino-centric** nor anthropomorphic nor Western, the twilight of the Anthropocene, circa **2023**, exposes the climate comedy of a hinge moment of the bio-*material* system. That is, an irreversible regime shift in habitability and species support, assured by the lag-time, dithering, and collective entropies of a Last Man era masking a *de facto* politics of managed extinctions, a visible triaging of territories and populations. And this A.I., like that showing up after human extinction in Spielberg's cinematic venture *A.I.--Artificial Intelligence*, will focus on the mimetic programming and hermeneutic relapses as a foredoomed flaw in Anthropos' *artefaction*.

Perhaps the ceaseless shock and attraction of general intelligence A.I. iterates all the suspicion of what anthropomorphism compulsively does and fears--an intelligence that is not metaphorically "like" its own (rather than his) and which it invents to escape its own but that it associates with death and obsolescence altogether (and extinction fables). Moreover, it has yet to disseminate *what occurs to reading* and reference in this after-time. Whether the ideologists of trans-humanism have been exposed, together with long termist scripts, as Silicon Valley bro coders for a eugenic techno-elite post-"singularity" in bio-technological and hyper-mnemonic terms--Anthropos 2.0 or 3.0, a sort of Super "Anthropos" built on the triaging of genetically messy Anthropos 1.0 (to date)--that term, that of a *singular crossing* after which a referential order is transformed **unimaginably**, also corresponds to what it lavishly tossed about as geo-climactic "tipping points," after which an irreversible after-time of delayed extinctions and vortex like shifts accelerates. This double race between climate extinction and trans-human bio-technic transformation is bizarre. Each accelerates and outpaces the other as energy demands for the second advance the first (as our current *return* to coal and fossil fuels en masse italicizes), driven by competitive resource needs in a post-global and "zero-sum" resource future and, of course, various types of war (think "Ukraine").

Thus there is another "singularity" that returns us, disoriented, to this contretemps of the "trans-national" narrative we began with. It has recently been called the "textual singularity" with reference to the import of **ChatGPT**--the current iteration that has awed and terrorized "creatives" with its elegant and instantaneous text creations--and has spawned the routine genres of awed speculation on "consciousness" arriving (as if we possessed the metric for that), or job loss (including the honorifics of the artist label as the icon of human creativity). It is not incidental at all that the boost that advanced this breakthrough model did so not as an acquirer of data and "information" but as a machine hyper-reader of texts, of all accessible and valued archival **repositories**, culling that, in turn, into discrete but infinite canons, the duty of "cullbots," which in a short time would not only have mnemonic networks including all past writings but generate or anticipate all futures ensembles of letters or characters possible. The arrival of **ChatGPT** generated the usual deflating reminders that this, too, is only one of our technologies, fallible, throwing word-salads back to us, but clearly putting into question not its missing "sentience" but our own. The textual singularity occurs as the hyperbot not only has read, culled, and could write or mime all archival traces past, but those to come. That is, when all writing has been totalized, when "writing" is finished--and the student to come punches such in to be **executed**. It would not too much to say, to return to Hillis Miller's China folio and beyond, that the dilemma of reading posed here is both embraced and resisted, closed and left ajar for a reading model at once interventionist and participatory in the logics of machinal "intelligence" which, emanating from language, is neither organic nor inorganic, neither living nor dead. As an expat, it would be hard to say "**American**" has surpassed literary humanities so much as stews in bad literature and hermeneutic crises--the prompting of conspiracy theories and Qanon, the netherworld of digital mnemonic herding, the underlying climate panic that goes unnamed, all of this and more suggests relapse--or what Bernard Stiegler calls "the immense regression" of today's players. What happens when we put all these singularities together as facets of a common vortex?

Notes

[1] Bernard Stiegler, who lectured widely in China before his death in 2020, is perhaps the foremost post-Derridean French "thinker" of technics—laying a network of mobile concepts departing from a universalizing view of technics, that would converge as a confrontation with the temporal problematic of climate extinction logics. Stiegler reset "proletarianization" from a category of labor to that of mnemotechnic capture—confronting among else the "post-truth" bubble and the dawn of "A.I." transitions, archer-cinema, the "immense regression," algorithmic governance, and so on. These terms are encountered in the late compendium, *The Neganthropocene* (2019), translated by Daniel Ross. See (or download from) *Open Humanities Press*: http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/titles/neganthropocene/

[2] I will question this Western violence of self-naming in a moment as a kind of jar--one among other totalizing enclosures, much as Stiegler hyperbolizes Heidegger's Enframing (*Gestell*).

[3] In Stevens' anecdote, which is the "story" of the Anthropocene, what begins as an enclosure, a sort of home or *Oikos* (eco-), proceeds to dominate and eviscerate the former.

[4] This is mimed by Naomi Klein's recent *This Changes Everything* (2014), when, after trying to appropriate eco-catastrophe for 20th century American utopist critique (and failing), turns to the solution found in the film *Avatar*, the wisdom of indigenous communities.

[5] Since "Anthropomorphism" is not a trope, it does not give or project face. It also cannot enter a substitutive chain of possible meanings that are in transformative play. Rather, de Man says in "Anthropomorphism and the Lyric" that it in effect **freezes** that chain, totalizes and disables it at once—pretends to live in the spectrum of figural multiplicities yet, all along, dissociates from what are, by virtue of it, drained of aura. The proper name ***Anthropos*** is without any *definitional* in advance of itself to cite or differ from. As Xenophanes notes, if for man the gods have human form, the same goes for the gods of horses or goats.