Between Futurology and Extinction:
A Transautographic Experiment
in Two Turns

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This article is a writing experiment that engages critically with the traditional modes of academic praxis and explores an alternative, interactive way of writing as the necessary complement to a mode of thinking concerned with the possibility of freedom in the face of the progressively exhaustive computational rendition and datafication of existence. By using different yet not distinct voices (in 'two turns'), this piece aims to foreground the trans-autographic connection at stake in autography and the role that friendship can play in opening a space of freedom suspended between the threat of extinction and the algorithmic government of planetary life. The essay hinges on Heidegger's notion of 'futurology' as technical calculative appropriation of the future reduced to an extended present, and it proposes the threefold articulation of global computation, futurology, and climate emergency as a way to draw the coordinates of the elusive 'predicament' of our time and of a constellation of questions that go under the rubric of the 'Anthropocene'.

Primo tempo. Global Computation, Futurology, Climate Emergency

> The future studied by futurology is nothing but an extended present. Humanity remains enclosed in the circle of possibilities calculated by and for it (Heidegger, 2013: 125).

'Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war' (Center for AI Safety). This statement was released on May 30 2023 and signed (then) by more than 350 researchers and tech executives. Although the risk of extinction from AI was not in our purview when we started talking about the threefold subtitle of our paper, and while at the same time the climate emergency is present in the statement only in the form of the blatant omission of any reference to it, it seems like each word of this remarkably brief declaration points to one of the threads connecting the three quite ambiguous syntagmas that we ended up choosing - not without a certain degree of hesitancy and doubtfulness – as our indices or guides.

Risk is certainly the key word of this only 22 word-long statement, as it is indeed repeated twice. The sociologist Ulrich Beck considers risk the pivotal category of modernity, and in his 2008 book *Worlds at Risk*, he clarifies:

> Risk is not synonymous with catastrophe. Risk means the anticipation of the catastrophe. Risks concern the possibility of future occurrences and developments; they make present a state of the world that does not (yet) exist. Whereas every catastrophe is spatially, temporally and socially determined, the anticipation of catastrophe lacks any spatio-temporal or social concreteness (2008: 9).

Modern societies are *risk societies* as they are organized around the calculation, control, and compensation of the two faces of risk, namely, chance and danger, which emerged as side effects

of successful modernization. Today we live in a world risk society – that is, a society organized around the 'staging of the reality of global risks' (Beck 2008: 10). The calculation, staging, and administration of global risks is at the core of what we are calling *futurology*, borrowing it from a lecture Heidegger gave in 1967: 'The future studied by futurology,' he said, 'is nothing but an extended present. Humanity remains enclosed in the circle of possibilities calculated by and for it' (Heidegger, 2013: 125). Our preliminary and tentative inquiry into the connections between global computation and climate emergency pivots on the concept of futurology. Here, futurology identifies the contemporary extension and transformation of the cybernetic logic of the technical scientific calculative ordering of industrial society to which Heidegger referred. In this perspective, we are primarily concerned with the role *global computation* plays in representing, staging and calculating the global risks posed by the *climate emergency* –that is, the climate crisis insofar as it comes into view and presents a problem for thought, often (and increasingly) under the name of the 'Anthropocene'. And thus we are also concerned with the climatic ecological impact of the role global computation plays and its exponential growth. However, this statement on AI forced us to take another, broader look at the network of problematic connections at stake here, forcing us to abandon any secret unconscious hope of linearity and closure ciphered in the two mirroring titles we proposed for the papers we had originally presented as a two part intervention at a conference on the Anthropocene (in Vigo in July 2023).

> *'Thinking the Anthropocene' was the title that convoked us one more time to writing. It convoked us to try to explore once more the transautographic stakes of our simultaneous inscription in a shared, and yet also unshareable, space of thinking. A year before we had walked through the Scottish countryside wondering about the possibility of an idiosyncratic encounter within a thinking and writing grounded in the radical singularity of the existential conditions of thought rather than in the*

cosmopolitan vocation of philosophy. What started almost by accident in the wake of some virtual discussion during the pandemic and helped us face the increasing isolation of academic life, then became an intentional exploration of the possibility and implications of trans-autographic connections across a praxis of thinking deeply grounded in the singularity of our existence. We had sought to foreground the transautographic potential of what we have called 'autographic praxis' through a co-writing experiment that brought us from animated conversations echoing in the bucolic surroundings over a brief summer workshop, to the virtual writing pad that afforded us the somehow uncanny experience of sharing a virtual space of co-writing and, despite our differences in times and spaces, also a virtual simultaneity of the praxis of writing. In a forthcoming article, we wrote thus:

> *Autography is a praxis inscribing the singularity of existence in thinking and recognizing the singularity of thinking as an experience that is existentially situated. It is a praxis of embracing the powerful noetic dimension of existence and the uncanny affective dimension of thought (Cerrato & Baker, forthcoming).*

What does it mean to be brought together again to participate in this praxis, now under the rubric of reflecting upon our new geological era marked by the unique print of human agency on an historical scale that was supposed to exceed it by definition? The 'Anthropocene' was offered to us as a matter of thinking, a matter that brings to thinking the spectrum of its own extinction. In our preparatory readings for the conference in Vigo, the 'Anthropocene' turned, for us, into a name for the urgency of a thinking that dealt with the potential loss of the conditions of thought as the factic possibility of a singular opening onto a future to

come, that is to say, of thought as an experience of freedom. The 'Anthropocene' became the name of the threat to this open future, i.e. a future that would never be guaranteed, determined, computed or anticipated in advance. And the question became: Are we 'still', given the possibility of thinking the opening (and as an opening) of a future to come (à-venir)? We ask the question, and yet, both the 'we' and the 'still' do not seem to be able to offer a solid-enough ground for the question that is implied and imposed upon us by the awareness of the material direct impact of our collective human agency on the future habitability of our planet that the term 'Anthropocene' names. And this is precisely because the questions about this 'we' and about this 'still' exceed and haunt all the discourses that such an awareness produces, a haunting which is present in the scientific and humanistic debates on the Anthropocene themselves. Who is or should be the 'we' in the 'Anthropocene'? Can we dwell responsibly (and response-ably) in the uncertain horizon of an indefinite 'still', rather than trying to master it through calculation? The contingent occasion of a summer conference turned the name 'Anthropocene' for us into the index of a transautographic praxis attuned to a certain existential anxiety in the face of the climate emergence-emergency (tied together in the double sense of the word 'emergencia' in our original Spanish presentation title). It also turned, at the same time, into the index of a certain uneasiness toward the onto-theological-metaphysical ordering of the future through science and technology in their attempts to save us from 'climate catastrophe'. It also became the name for an urgency for trying to rescue our interlocution as an experience of freedom and friendship from the total ordering of existence through its datification.

The statement released on the dedicated website *safe.ai* represents the risk posed by AI as a risk of *extinction* – the

central concept of Claire Colebrook's approach to the Anthropocene (Colebrook 2014) – and compares it to the risk posed by pandemics and nuclear war. The risk of extinction refers broadly to our disappearance at the level of the species. Colebrook reminds us that there are three senses of extinction: the current so-called sixth great extinction event, extinction by humans of other species, or self-extinction, or what she calls '*the capacity for us to destroy what makes us human*' (2014: 9, her emphasis).

The choice of a comparison between AI, nuclear war and the pandemic, on the one hand, suggests a clear commitment to direct the focus primarily toward the need for international agreement, coordination, and regulation, while also underscoring both the viral and the technical component of the risk. On the other hand, these references work to underscore the ambivalence of the risk of extinction from AI with respect to Beck's typological distinction between unintentional and deliberate global risks. And yet, the lack of comparison in this statement with what we are calling the 'climate emergency' seems neither a simple oversight, nor simply an attempt to avoid a politically controversial issue. Actually, to the extent that the statement uses the words 'mitigate' and 'extinction,' one could even argue that the comparison to the climate crisis is not omitted but is rather just left implicit, evoked only as a spectral presence that is already haunting the receiver of this hermetic communiqué. In any case, the avoidance of any explicit reference to the risk of extinction from climate change could also be a strategy to deflect attention from the salvific power attributed to global computation, and, more specifically, to artificial intelligence. In a recent article (2023) for *The Guardian*, Naomi Klein refers to the salvific power attributed to AI with respect to climate change as what she considers the first hallucination, not of the AI chat bots, but of their AI makers who are trying to rationalize their choice to roll out the new technology amidst so many uncertainties and concerns:

Almost invariably topping the lists of AI upsides is the claim that these systems will somehow solve the climate crisis. We have heard this from everyone from the World Economic Forum to the Council on Foreign Relations to Boston Consulting Group, which explains that AI 'can be used to support all stakeholders in taking a more informed and data-driven approach to combating carbon emissions and building a greener society. It can also be employed to reweight global climate efforts toward the most at-risk regions.' The former Google CEO Eric Schmidt summed up the case when he told the Atlantic that AI's risks were worth taking, because 'If you think about the biggest problems in the world, they are all really hard – climate change, human organizations, and so forth. And so, I always want people to be smarter.

In his final book (2020), the creator of the famous Gaia hypothesis James Lovelock takes such an hallucination to a paroxysm. There he suggests that the recent achievement in AI's autonomy and superhuman ability reached by the Deep Mind Lab signals the beginning of the new age of the Novocene and the imminent emergence of a new form of intelligent electronic life; that is, cyborgs capable of designing themselves and whose 'faster intentional selection' (84) will replace the Darwinian natural selection. We should not worry, though, but rather: 'We should understand that whatever harm we have done to the earth, we have just in time redeemed ourselves by acting simultaneously as parents and midwives to the cyborgs. They alone can guide Gaia through the astronomical crises now imminent' (86). To what extent does bringing the current predicament under the rubric of the 'Anthropocene' necessarily invoke, together with a hybristic guilt, a human and technologically mediated geological power to respond to it?

I cannot help but think about the rhythm of our trans-autographic writing, the proliferation of its heterographic forms as this writing experiment extends

and diffracts over time. Time, precisely, is what such a rhythm marks, traces, contours. Your words have been like a missive responding to my reflections, and in your ruminations I found what I did not realize I was already thinking and, yes, in spite of a certain kind of uncanny telepathy, I was always pleased to see there, too, plenty of surprises, an irruption of alterity to shift the terrain of my own thinking. In the times when the pace of our writing subsided, the gaps between these missives increased, but in times of intense productivity, more recently, the joyful and yet unsettling experience of simultaneously writing together on the same document has arisen. I cannot help but be amused by the irony that this digital interface – which is part of the technological structuration of the world we interrogate without distance – is the same medium which facilitates a 'real time' exchange of writing and thoughts that takes various forms (pages, comments, footnotes, WhatsApps…). But what is this 'real time'? The illusion of a temporal immediacy of our interactions contrasts sharply with the fact that our exchanges are actually exchanges between 'users,' processed through a mix of encrypted and unencrypted information bytes, which inevitably left numerous digital footprints and traces well beyond our control. But what kind of crypt is ciphered in this encryption? This mediated, immaterial and illusory cyber reality leaves me with the feeling of a very material encounter with a friend, which is to say both an affective relationship and a relationship of trust based on a heterogeneity of experience without guarantees, a material encounter which is not separate from thought. I am touched *by a syncopated rhythm which is worked out in our exchanges. Therein I experience a formlessness of form that is shared, hetero/trans-autographically, and which could never be captured (I muse) by an AI generative learning model. Could ChatGPT share with us this abyss of thought? Could it predict the sequence of words that try to name*

it? Could it think that which we struggle to name, indeed,
something that may exceed the order of the name?

The perspective of extinction brings global computation and climate emergency together as two mirrors that stand in front of us, both shattered. Both suggest inherently plural catastrophic outcomes, rather than a punctual catastrophe which would be – according to Beck – 'spatially, temporally and socially determined' (Beck 2008: 9). As we know, the spectrum of risks related to the climate emergency and global warming includes natural disasters, loss of biodiversity and habitats, overheating, desertification, the rise of sea levels, air pollution, toxic contamination, as well as, through its unequal effects, loss of world heritage and cultural and linguistic diversity. The spectrum of generative AI-related risk goes from jobs loss, misaligned automated decisions, misinformation and deception, all the way to the development of general intelligence AI and robots' take over, and it invests all different domaines or 'climates' of human life. In both cases, extinction concerns first and foremost human existence as self-destructive, and yet this self-destructiveness implies the composite figure of multiple extinctions: ours, the others', and of 'what makes us humans', that is the plurality of climates that constitute the 'there' of our facticity, as suggested by Colebrook:

> The very climates—cognitive, industrial, economic, affective, technological, epistemological and meteorological—that render our life possible are also self-destructive (both destructive of the self, and destructive of climate itself). (2014: 11)

Both the climate emergency and extinction from AI amount to a mosaic of threats, dispersed and diffused in both time and space, that operate on multiple levels and different contexts engendering destruction, while also interfering with the production and reproduction of forms of life and modes of existence. And yet, both the environmental catastrophe and the extinction from AI are staged as unitary risks organized around

the metaphorization of a unitary - though complex - external agent. Multiple active/direct and passive/indirect, and immediate/long-term modes of destruction and disruption are framed in composite scenarios that exteriorize and give a face to the uncanny (and uncannily suicidal) spectrum of self-extinction.

Climate (or sometimes 'Nature') and AI are represented as agents of risk that are already here, and yet their metaphorization as individual destructive forces hinges on a certain representation of the future 'as an extended present' that needs to be anticipated and homogeneously calculated. The *emergence* of climate and global computation as emergencies and agents of risk is entirely dependent on a futurology in which the staging of future scenarios is always already intertwined with a cybernetic perspective of potential calculative regulation and logistic control, in spite of the widespread acknowledgement of the striking extent of not-knowing inherent to both kinds of risks. The discourse of the Anthropocene and the material practices which underpin it provide the horizon for the metaphorization and externalization of these two risks of extinction and the ground for their implicit symbolic connection.

> *'Anthropocene' is both a scientific and political term. It calls for a new epistemic framework to displace the human subject and dispense with the nature-culture binary, while it also calls for political responsibility toward the future of our planet. But what does the 'Anthropocene' really name? What really 'emerges' or presents itself for thought in the climate 'emergency'? How to think about the double paradox of its future, which seeks to mitigate future risks on the one hand whilst fantasizing about species extinction on the other? Who would dare to question, in any case, that the humanities should have a role in understanding the meaning or implications of what the sciences are revealing about the climate crisis and what (under the*

guise of the 'Anthropocene') presents itself for thinking? But what does this call or beckoning to the humanities conceal in its apparent obviousness? In other words, what is it that the humanities, that is, we as 'humanities scholars', are being called upon to do or to think here? And should we be complicit in, or resist, this call? What does it mean, then, to be called upon to 'think' what the Anthropocene names and has already to some extent been thought (at least as a question by the very fact of being named)? We might anticipate ourselves by suggesting that, perhaps, following Heidegger, this question would already presuppose an equivocal relation to thinking, one that engages with the Anthropocene in an ontic register, and should be rephrased.

As we have seen, then, the question of how to think about the 'Anthropocene' is not an abstract one. The amount of data produced to try to understand the possible effects and timeline of climate change exceeds the human ability of computation and requires machines to collect, store, read, and assemble them in workable models. Now machines are constantly producing, updating, and computing the 'reality' of the 'Anthropocene'. As Benjamin Bratton suggests at the beginning of *Terraforming*: 'Planetarity itself comes into focus through orbiting imagining and terrestrial modeling media (satellites, sensors, servers in sync) that have made it possible to measure climate change with any confidence' (2019: 6). And later, he states:

> 'climate change' itself, as an idea, is an epistemological accomplishment of planetary-scale computation. In its embryonic form, this accidental megastructure was used for global weather modeling; in its mature form, it has been employed in and as Earth Science. The notion of 'climate change' is an empirically validated pattern drawn from a comprehensive, planetary-scale biopolitical sensing, surveillance, modeling, and

calculating apparatus. That most artificial of innovations, The Stack, is what has made this most significant artificial abstraction — climate change — into a legible and communicable concept (2019: 33).

The 'reality' of the 'Anthropocene' seems to depend on algorithmic modeling and this is often often translated into the idea – of which Bratton is quite an extreme example of translation– that global computation will actually redeem us from the most catastrophic outcomes of climate change. From this perspective, the computational science of the Anthropocene is literally like living in a virtual reality geared towards what Frédéric Neyrat calls geo-constructivism: 'The geo-constructivists are not striving to conjure these dangers by way of the self-limitations of industrial and technological power but rather by way of an increase in anthropogenic modification' promising, not progress, but rather 'the mere survival of humanity' (2018: 4).

In contemporary futurology, the predictive power of AI is depicted as the technological *katechon* of the planetary environmental crisis. The superhuman capability of neural network and machine learning would seemingly confer to the so-called general purpose AI the power not only to calculate, stage, and monitor risk, but also to contain and administer its mitigation through automated calculations that exceed the understanding of their engineers, as many of them have openly admitted. This containment and administration is possible thanks to the progressive embedment of global computation in all the different domains of planetary existence. Through the increasing automated computational mediation of all productive processes, economic and social exchanges, creative and scientific activities, energy and resources extraction, and the surveillance of planetary biochemical geological and meteorological processes, what emerges is a new form of automated governmentality that leaves little or no space for political action in the traditional sense. Like the AI logic of predictability based on the manipulation in the black boxes of

neural networks of massive data, the new form of *algorithmic governmentality* takes control of the future represented as a fully mastered extension of the present, and *de facto* annihilates any political - more or less revolutionary - response to change. As Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns have aptly marked with respect to their use of the term 'algorithmic governmentality:'

> We thus use the term algorithmic governmentality to refer very broadly to a certain type of (a)normative or (a)political rationality founded on the automated collection, aggregation and analysis of big data so as to model, anticipate and pre-emptively affect possible behaviors (2013: 10).

'Possible behaviors' are anticipated and molded to conform to the AI's constantly actualized prediction of the future that claimed to result from the objective and individualized knowledge based on the collection and correlation of information unintentionally generated by the 'real life' of the subjects 'in the wild' and captured by apparently unintrusive sensory machines. In this sense, what is hidden by the metaphorization and fetishization of AI is the ultimate historical form of what Heidegger calls positionality, meaning the universal ordering essence of modern technology and the totalizing subsumption of human existence under the government of what Heidegger named (*ante litteram*) 'the cybernetic-futurological science of mankind' (2013: 124). This leaves us prisoner to the double paradox of facing looming species extinction, and at the same time the potential immortality of our digital projections and of all the bytes of information resulting from the rendition of our existence, now fully subjected to surveillance and extraction of data as part of a plan for redemption and salvation. As Bretton suggests in a section titled 'Enforce the Model':

> I realize that for many good-hearted people, this sketches out a nightmare, but in important ways, this recursion is exactly what we want. We want our climate

models that demonstrate looming systemic risk to have the kind of capacity for granular-level feedback on the ecology itself that financial models of risk have on the transactions they observe and indirectly administer. This is a different kind of geopolitics and geoeconomics. I don't see this as a 'biopolitical enclosure of a natural outside,' but as the means to artificially organize artificial cognitive abstraction to predict the effects of fundamentally entangled waves of production, metabolism, and mediation. At stake is the ability of Earth's existing ecosystems to survive the evolutionary fact of our sapience (2019: 88).

In response to the discursive framing implied by 'Anthropocene' (and the 'Capitalocene'), Donna Haraways' *Staying with the Trouble* invites us to engage with contingent dynamic practices of tying and untying, picking threads and knotting figures. She invites us to 'become with each other' recognizing the urgency that binds together human and other critters and *staying with the troubles*, avoiding the calculative hopes and despairs of futurological attitudes and 'accepting the risk of relentless contingency' (12). What is this practice of ours if not precisely a string figure game like those that Haraway describes and that occupied countless hours of recess during my school years? Using each other's hands as a support for the web we weave, the string would begin to take its idiosyncratic form from wherever the other person would choose to create the tie and knot of the pattern left by the other's last intervention. Could we say that the topic of the 'Anthropocene' gave us the string that we are pulling and tying, leveraging the supposed four hands involved in this practice of writing and giving support to our multiple tentacular thoughts? What happens if I stretch my hand and let you pinch the central knot of this writing experiment and turn around the string figure with which we are playing? If you pinch 'futurology' and turn your hands 180 degrees we will have a different sequence: *Climate Emergency, Futurology, Global Computation.*

Secondo tempo. Climate Emergency, Futurology, Global Computation

> Everything washes together into the uniformly distanceless. How? Is not this moving together into the distanceless even more uncanny than everything being out of place? The human is transfixed by what could come about with the explosion of the atomic bomb. The human does not see what for a long time now has already arrived and even is occurring, and for which the atomic bomb and its explosion are merely the latest emission, not to speak of the hydrogen bomb, whose detonation, thought in its broadest possibility, could be enough to wipe out all life on earth. What is this clueless anxiety waiting for, if the horrible [das Entsetzliche] has already occurred? (Heidegger, 2012: 4)

The specter of extinction loomed large for us, as a question that emerged in the shadow of the climate emergency and of the scientific literature of the Anthropocene. Yet this 'no future' nihilism often became in our readings both symptomatic of a problem which was never explored sufficiently, as well as the index of the ultimate risk that had to be mitigated in the logic of future anticipation that we are calling 'futurology', the flipside of this no-future nihilism becoming the foreclosed future of technological mastery. In this futurology, planetary computation becomes a remedy, the future redemption and salvation of humanity. The second coming will be a God that we ourselves have created in our image. Colebrook's 'extinction as a thought experiment' (2014) calls us to break with this image of the future by advocating a form of reading that thinks about the futurity of the traces left by the species *homo sapiens* being read by other forms of being after our extinction. The question of extinction with reference to the climate emergency thus displaces both the centering of the human subject and our common sense understanding of temporality, of futurity,

including the future reading of the human *as* archive. Colebrook calls it a 'broader thought-event where humans begin to imagine a deep time in which the human species emerges and withers away, and a finite space in which 'we' are now all joined in a tragedy of the commons' (2014: 10).

Colebrook's work suspends the ethico-political injunction that is often implied in the use of the term post-humanism, an injunction which hinges on the imagined continuity of a collective subject. For, as she also identifies, veiled in this critical approach to anthropocenic futurology is the insistence of a 'we' – that is, of an existence – which remains largely unquestioned. Who, or what, is this 'we' that is at stake? Does it extend beyond the human, or that which 'makes us human', again paraphrasing Colebrook, if such a thing can be defined, and, inversely, does this invocation of the commons in the quotation above invoke more than it can possibly represent? For the emerging and withering away of the species concerns more than just biology and evolutionary history. As Thomas et al. (2020) claim, it is unlikely that the consequences of what they call the Anthropocene will witness the end of the species per se, but it will perhaps entail the end of human civilisation as we know it, and the ecological niche that makes it possible. It will, in Colebrook´s words, 'destroy what makes us human' (2014: 9). But as Colebrook herself expresses, can we be so sure about what that is? Is what is indexed here under the name Anthropocene not precisely the clearing in which the question of 'what makes us human' stands *as* a question, one in which the notion of humanity immediately and necessarily opens itself to its other, becomes other? Perhaps like the earth itself, opening to planetary multiplicities and earthly multitudes (Clark & Szerszynski 2021). If that is the case, and if we are to accept that no propositional statement in response could ever serve to answer the truth of that question, then what path is always already being thought when we raise such a question? And what does it mean to inscribe ourselves at this abyss of thought, as part of a trans-autographic praxis of writing which seeks to dwell on a horizon of the unforeseeable, approximating

ourselves to the radical finitude that such a being towards extinction implies?

*Can our writing escape the requisitioning (*Bestellen*) of technical positionality? Are we, despite ourselves, unwilling technicians to a machine to which the interstitial space where thought meets existence is hostage? This activity called 'research' is overdetermined in each instance by a call to put it to the service of a 'sustainable development', that is the academic variant of futurology. The voices seem to say repeatedly: What is the contribution of this research? How does it achieve societal impact? Or even: How does it generate revenue for the university? The system leaves a little wiggle room for writing against the grain, denouncing the contradictions of the system, resisting its terms and reframing its narratives. What would it mean to hold onto a form of writing that indexes a register in which we take a step back from this existential trap, where life is always already rendered as data and interpreted to stage a future that is always already ordered in advance? Would it be possible, in other words, to hold onto a mode of writing which has not always already been put to the service of a future that has been shaped, anticipated, defined by the ontic present? Would it be possible to think of a praxis of writing which could still be surprised by its future, and consider authentically the possibility that the future may be radically other, including, at its limit, extinction? Questions of the material medium and the technical procedure that our work is subject to cannot be separated from the kind of writing praxis that can be risked. It is extremely important 'to take account of the ongoing changing materiality of the scholarly book if we are to understand its potential to enact new institutional forms and to embody and perform different scholarly practices', as writes Janneke Adema (2021: 2). A right to creative use, re-use, re-appropriation, co-construction,*

providing a certain "as-if" playful quality to writing, can never of course be taken for granted. Both of us have experienced the stifling of ideas through bureaucracy, the policing of what is and what is not acceptable as knowledge 'production' (the factory of university discourse). Would writing always contain an excess with respect to all methodical procedures which seek to entrap it, an excess which remains open to other futures, other possibilities?

The notion of a certain 'we' is always at stake in the climate emergency and its futurology. We find something of an invocation of a common humanity, indexed by the very name of *Anthro*-pocene. On the one hand, the 'Anthropocene' is a scientific discourse (with its accompanying technological methods and outputs) that is re-signifying the separation between nature and culture operative throughout our so-called modernity (Latour 1993). It marks an epistemological and aesthetic turn, reconfiguring our understanding of the human impact on the planet, the human dependency on finite eco-systems and resources, and of the interspecies interconnectedness of planetary existence. On the other hand, the term 'Anthropocene' carries specific political and ethical resonances, of a calling upon a species ('our' species, a supposedly stable signifier we should not take for granted) to accept responsibility and to become response-able, that is, to act, shifting the terrain of political action from nation-state sovereignty to planetary thresholds (as discussed by Clark & Szerszynski 2021). And yet, between these two sides, the unspoken question of existence quietly insists. The generation of knowledge about the impending boiling point of irreversible planetary changes is taking place at an unprecedented scale, and whether it is met with terror, denial or apathy (which are not necessarily oppositional reactions), underlying these multiform processes is a muted anxiety around the possibility of a way of life (and of life tout court) becoming extinct.

Indeed, the question over the temporality of the Anthropocene, of when it should be judged as having begun, is so often a question concerning who is represented by the suffix *anthro-*. Kathryn Yussoff in her *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018) speaks about the regime of historical erasure in what she calls the 'white geology' of Anthropocene science, which is unable to recognise the specters of the billions of extinctions of black and Indigenous worlds as a result of the currents which are driving the climate emergency. Marisol de la Cadena uses the neologism the 'anthropo-not-seen' to invoke the same notion (2015), and it is also present in the calls to decolonisation and earthly multitudes in the current literature on the Anthropocene (Clark and Szersynski 2021; Pratt 2022). Yet Dipesh Chakrabarty insists that the import of Anthropocene science for the humanities is such that anthropological differences are inconsequential, that it concerns a human collectivity which he calls, borrowing from Adorno, a 'negative universal history' (Chakrabarty 2021: 88).

Although it is difficult to disagree with Chakrabarty in terms of the implications of his thinking, at the same time it is also difficult not to feel that there is something important in the claim to a certain historical injustice that is being invoked by Yussoff, de la Cadena and others. A double temporality thus imposes itself: that of a present of collective human action and its effect on the planet with its concomitant future of species extinction, on the one hand, and a register of (in)justice which invokes the history of peoples without history and raises questions of debt and responsibility, of the futurity of a past that has been effaced or that is still to come, on the other – a messianic form of thinking (Derrida 1994). Rather than seeking to resolve this issue as an apparent theoretical choice to be made, it is worth us staying with this problem, of this double 'emergence' of senses of self/humanity and temporalities that come into view as part of this climate emergency. Is it not possible to read as ciphered in this debate the unsettling idea of a finite future that may not simply be about what is ahead of us, but also concern our ancestors, even or especially those we

have forgotten, and so also involves a certain grief? A grief which no work of mourning could heal, and which precedes even the possibility of melancholia? What we might call this 'originary grief' – of a past which was never simply past – seems to be closely bound with that expectant anxiety over what we cannot control or know, that anxiety which, according to Jacques Lacan (2016), 'is not without object'.

> *Last night I went to bed early, I was tired and and I was not feeling well – and I am even entertaining the phantasy that I might have got a post-pandemic Covid infection, a reminder that after the emergency one is left to deal with what has emerged and has silently modified the coordinates of our existence. It was stormy and I was sleeping soundly although with some level of awareness of the rain and the infuriating wind outside, until the two iphones in the room burst with a loud penetrating warning sound and a message appeared on the screen urging us to find refuge and stay away from windows. (Funnily enough I got the message in Spanish which made me wonder once more about how approximate are the algorithms organizing our digital governmentality.) I could not sleep anymore between the most immediate apprehension of whether the risk that emerged, staged on the little luminescent screen, was significant enough for me to overcome any bodily resistance and seek refuge, and the resonance of Heidegger's question: 'What is this clueless anxiety waiting for, if the horrible [das Entsetzliche] has already occurred?' (2012: 4) The incumbency of a perishing threatens the chances of engaging my finitude through a liberating experience that opens my being to possibility. The haunting thought of extinction by climate change, as a certainty up for futurological calculations, overdetermines the contingent fact of weather unpredictability, in a move that threatens to expropriate our facticity of its utter possibility, where death and freedom are to be experienced at once.*

There is certainly more than one possible response to the climate emergency, ranging from climate change deniers to those suffering from the recently proposed diagnostic category of eco-anxiety which is particularly affecting the younger generations. These generations are frequently portrayed in the media as feeling robbed in advance of their future, affected by the paradoxical nostalgia for a future that their parents and grandparents enjoyed at their expense, borrowing time from their children and grandchildren, but unable to pay it back. The climate emergency already calls upon a certain atemporality of justice such as that invoked by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1994), and a perception of time that brings us back to Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's fallen angel, its wings caught in the ever-accelerating pace of a history, watching an impending catastrophe that others choose not to see without being able to do anything about it (Benjamin, 1968). Clark and Szersynski (2021) quote from student banners from a protest in South Africa that reflect these sentiments: 'You'll die of old age, I'll die of climate change', reads one, 'Why the actual f*** are we studying for a future we don't have!', reads the other (2021: 1). Whilst the authors bring these questions together, the second one perhaps prefigures something else. Certainly, from our perspective as university teachers, we feel that presupposed in the second question comes a certain relation of learning to the future. In my university, this is often termed 'employability' and 'graduate attributes.' These are 'measurable' skills and outcomes that refer to economic productivity and the acquisition of social capital for developing a career. It concerns fields of knowledge as always already disciplinary and disciplined knowledge, projected towards a future of societal development and careers whose existence appears not only precarious but senseless in the shadow of what is indexed by the climate emergency. Yet if we rephrase the student's question, no longer as 'what is the point of studying?' but as 'what is the point of thinking?', it inevitably raises other ways of looking at the issue. For at the same time as we question the point of learning and its futurity

– we might go so far as to say a technical learning, as a mode of working within the technological framing of human existence, as futurology – thinking, as the path that we are always already following, continues, unabated by the uncertainty of its future, but also perhaps now determined precisely by such uncertainty. But if the question of being-towards-extinction is a question about keeping open a possibility for thought (for its future), then the question remains over what exactly that possibility concerns. Will thinking have a future in Lovelock's age of the Novacene?

Futurology makes space neither for grief nor for the radical perhaps *of which Nietzsche spoke and is echoed in Derrida's messianicity without Messiah. There is no future to come without anticipation or sacrality unencumbered by dogmas and pastoral control, there is no faith free from the secularized theology that AI offers to us. As Derrida suggested, today's techno-scientific discourse keeps turning into a secularized doublet of religion, which seems everyday more paired with multiple forms of secularized inquisitorial governmentality. This morning the radio was announcing the unbreathable quality of air in the North East of the country due to the extraordinary wildfires in Canada and was inviting people to monitor the level of risk on their cellphones. We keep plotting for an experience of freedom not so much to open up a different future but to rediscover a relationship with the air –which Irigaray suggested Heidegger was forgetting – while it is still breathable. 'But this aerial matter remains unthought by the philosopher. And in this unthought, the force of mother nature prevails, at least until the present day, over all of his power' (Irigaray, 1999: 12). And yet we do so on a computer owned and monitored by the university, on a Google doc, always already expropriated of our words that will be promptly used to train new LLM that will soon enough be able to add enough accuracy to their fluency to replace us in our*

> *'cognitive-intensive' jobs - the first to be subject to loss according to the futurology of the risk of extinction by AI - as soon as the administration can screen our work using an algorithmic model in which all the metrics of productivity and sustainability are supposedly encoded. We are nothing but digital Marranos.*

The question that is raised here is one of meaning, exposing the hidden question of nihilism that is often in the background in discussions of the climate emergency and the end of humanity. The question *Do we even have good reasons to seek to save 'humanity'?* regards the issues at stake as if they were exterior to the thinking being who is asking the question. Indeed, the call on the humanities to engage with the 'Anthropocene' as problem for thought, as 'predicament' as Thomas et al. call it (2020), would appear to unhesitatingly presuppose a changing reality 'out there', even if partly anthropogenic, for which 'our' thought needs to find adequate forms of reflection. And, certainly, the language of crisis and emergency, although not at all unmerited, would seem to make such a lack of hesitation appropriate - we need a response from the humanities, before it's too late (and, in fact, we can never be sure whether we will have already known in advance when it is too late, or indeed if we are already living on borrowed time). And yet, it is not at all clear what the so-called 'humanities' is being called upon to answer to or for. Does this call not always presuppose already the 'Anthropocene' as a given reality to be beholden, analyzed, and organized according to a certain order of geological time and space? Would it not be necessary to slow down our thinking precisely when it seems most urgent to accelerate it, in order to understand how this 'thing', this geological 'era' called the 'Anthropocene', is not some 'thing' exterior to thought which we are called upon to think 'adequately', but something that is part of the unfolding of thinking already underway, one which should not make any assumptions about its futurity or whom it concerns? Does not this unhesitating call to think the 'Anthropocene' not also simultaneously assume that we have an understanding of the meaning behind current historical,

technological and planetary events, and of the urgency of human action and thought in 'responding' to them? As Colebrook also states: 'why should the human species wish for or justify its prolongation, and what would be worth saving?' (2014: 41-2). Lacanian psychoanalysis reminds us that behind every chain of signifiers lies a master signifier that is quite simply meaningless, but that retroactively gives meaning to any enunciation. Logically, then, meaning must therefore be lent to futurology in advance, defining why it is important to try to anticipate and mitigate the risks of the future via a certain afterwardness. What is at stake, in other words, by exposing the presuppositions of what comes into view in the climate emergency, its futurology and its presumption of a common humanity, is what Heidegger once called a return to the question of the *meaning* of being. What is at stake is not finding the 'adequate' way to institute a new ontology, but rather trying to open and maintain open that ecstatic space of thought and existence's parasitic co-belonging, on the aporetic edge of all limits, awaiting death.. But what happens to Dasein's being-towards-death when it is overcome by the sense of an urgent imminence of the possibility of extinction? Is the horizon of extinction slowly eroding our chances of finding, in our singular relation to finitude, the opening toward a possible abyssal dimension of freedom?

> *A feeling of anxiety and enclosedness encroaches upon me as I consider these words, as I feel that the typeface digital media upon which we write these reflections transforms before my eyes into a prison out of which there is no escape, regardless of whether or not I move to an analog format. Heidegger nevertheless suggests that there may still be an opening for the work of art outside of its technological capture. If this possibility concerns the relationship between τέχνη and Φύσης, then it also concerns an otherness, neither strictly human nor non-human, a nearness to our existence for which we must seek an opening. Can the 'thereness' of that opening be traced through our trans-autographic*

experiment? In the common singularity of our thoughtful inscriptions in a space of writing organized by multiple forms of heterology (linguistic, academic, disciplinary, material), we keep looking for the chance to encounter an open space of errancy. Almost a year ago, when this semi-serious playing on the excessive margin of academic writing started, we wrote:

> *Errancy seems quite an unexpected achievement, as we still move within a web that we have no ambition to untangle—only to loosen it a bit perhaps—that is, a web of institutional directions and academic standards, expectations of productivity, and more than our fair share of reproductive work in and of the field. Errancy— although momentary and incomplete—feels like the unexpected, seemingly hopeless, and unreasonable recovery of a mystery that is out of reach and yet haunts you. (Cerrato & Baker forthcoming)*

In the different voices that mirror and blurr each other in our virtual writing experiment, 'we' discovered and rediscovered a momentary ludic space of thinking subtracted from all futurology, a space of errancy impossible to master or secure. Through the dissonant chorus of multiple voices that are always more and fewer than two, 'we' have repeatedly invited each other to dwell in a space of recess haunted by multiple specters of risk; a remote dimension of retreat, recreation, and suspension upheld between the catastrophic futurology of extinction and the salvific transhumanist futurology of redemption. Is there anything that can be asked of friendship in the 'Antropocene', if not the impossible precarious gift of this 'we'?

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