

*Ministry of the Future*

TIMOTHY MORTON

**Waiting for Humankind**

**Waiting and Anxiety**

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**Waiting and Alienation**

*Waiting for Humankind*

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There is a radical gap between “little me” and me as a member of the human species.

Little me, starting my car on Monday morning, shouldn't feel guilty in any way, because I'm not causing global warming. My action is statistically meaningless.

But as a member of the human species I am part of the being that most certainly caused global warming.

We have to think of ourselves on many levels, many scales, both in time and in space.

We need to think how to say “we” because humans, not jellyfish, caused global warming.

Looking around for ways to say “we” one usually discovers various racist and sexist ways of doing so. Not to mention speciesist ways—ways that draw a rigid distinction between humans and nonhumans.

So how do you do it? How do you say “we” and how do you not let powerful forces such as racism or big corporations define this level, the level on which you are a part of humankind?

There are two normal left-wing way of thinking humankind right now. It's embarrassed silence or trying to define the concept away.

There's a normal right-wing way of thinking humankind too. It's the old-fashioned idea that humans are superior to nonhumans. This idea is always racist, because it's always based on distinguishing some humans from others, who are seen as subhuman or as inhuman, uncanny beings residing between the human and the nonhuman, making the difference look big. Often the nonhumans “over there” are all seen as nature, the humans “over here” are all seen as culture. Nonhumans are familiarly different. Subhumans or inhumans are uncannily the same. “Nature” “over yonder” is a concept we try to scrub of uncanniness. Accepting more uncanniness is part of how to talk about humans and nonhumans in ways that aren't racist or sexist, and so on.

A non-racist, non-sexist, non-speciesist concept of humankind is one in which the human per se is haunted by the spectral presence of all kinds of other entities: DNA, stomach bacteria, thoughts, cows, computers...

Which means that humans are bundles or heaps—loose piles of things none of which are strictly human at all! So we need to think about heaps. Do you like the idea that there are heaps? Are heaps even possible?

When I say that the human species is a heap of all kinds of things, I'm using

the term in a very technical way. Technical heaps. Can you visualize a heap? They are loose piles, perhaps they are shaped like cones. Perhaps the piles resemble humans a little bit. Like Archimboldo paintings.

Right now it seems important to think humankind, and obviously this means we need to think humankind in a way that isn't racist or misogynist or speciesist. The way to do this is to see humankind as a real thing, but as a real thing like a heap from which all kinds of things can be added and taken away, and the heap remains a heap. And heaps can overlap. You can share at least some of your stuff with other humans and with nonhumans. You share your bacterial microbiome with whoever is standing next to you and with whatever you are eating for lunch. You can share the world of a lion. So what if it's only 30% sharing? It's better than nothing.

To accept this, you have to allow for shades of grey. You can't think that "true" is 1 and "false" is 0. There have to be values of "true" in between 1 and 0—some things can be half true. There's all kinds of logic that can help you to talk in shades of grey.

All ecological talk—art, science, policy, everything—is a shade of grey.

*Waiting and Anxiety*

TIMOTHY MORTON

What does “present” mean? We say global warming is happening now. What is now? What size is now?

In an era of ecological awareness, humans are confronted with a bewildering and often disturbing variety of timescales and spatial scales, and almost none of these timescales are specifically keyed to human beings.

For example, think about the timescale of your visit to this room. You probably didn’t plan how long you were going to spend here. That makes it different already from the way you organize going to your job. And it has a different size and shape. Think about timescale we call “career.” It overlaps with the one we call “my life.” Then there’s “my family,” spread out over space and time.

Where is this room? In Barcelona? Spain? Europe? Earth? The Solar System? The Galaxy?

When is this room? Today? This week? This century? The time of humans on Earth? The time of organic matter in the Universe?

Fear is when you think something will happen next.

Anxiety is when you don’t know whether something will happen at all.

For “happen next” to work, you have to have a timescale in place.

Anxiety is when you have no idea whether there’s a timescale or not.

If you are aware of living on many different scales, you won’t be able to keep track of all of them all at once. Not because you’re not intelligent enough. It’s because the scales are varied: they don’t all fit one single master scale.

There is no one single master scale. We only think there is because we confuse time with the measurement of time.

Time isn’t one, two, three, four, five... That’s counting, in a rhythmical way. Counting isn’t time. Counting in a rhythm implies time. You can’t point to the time on your phone either. Pointing at your phone isn’t time.

You can search the whole Universe for something to point to that you can call time. You won’t find it.

That’s because the being who is pointing is time. Time is a liquid pouring out of you.

Time also pours out of trees, dinosaurs, bacteria and the biosphere.

So many liquids, all pouring, flowing together.

Ecological awareness is floating and uncertain.

Ecological awareness is a great opportunity to explore anxiety.

If you don’t like exploring anxiety, you can try to cover it up. You can avoid it by eating or taking drugs or starting a war, or destroying Earth.

But anxiety is a universal acid. Anxiety burns through everything.  
It's better to realize that than to destroy Earth hoping to avoid it.

*Apologies for the Delay: Time Junction*

TIMOTHY MORTON

To be inside a hurricane is to inhabit a “present” that doesn’t accord to conventional philosophical concepts of “present.” This is because a hurricane has its very own temporality, not ours. We endure it, undergo it, in a nowness that is more like a slightly nauseating feeling of relative motion, like what happens if you are in a stationary train, and another train is moving beside it. Or if you are on an escalator that has stopped. There is a feeling of evaporating, a strange vibration or rocking to and fro. Like being at sea.

Where is the past? The past is in the way things appear. Look at your shoes. Your shoes tell a story about everything that happened to a pair of shoes. The way your shoes appear is the past.

Remember that. Those stories about your shoes are not “in” the past. Those stories are the past. How a hurricane appears is the past. How global warming appears is the past. Climate is the past. Weather is the past.

The past is a train leaving the platform—and you have no idea how long the train is.

Where is the future? The future is in the way things are. Look at a stranger in the room. Who are they? You don’t quite know. You know a bit—you know how the stranger appears.

How the stranger appears is the past.

But who are they really?

Who they are really is the future. You know a bit—you can predict some things about them accurately. But you can’t know the whole story. You won’t ever get to that kind of future—it’s always receding like a train that’s just leaving the station. You have no idea how long the train is. What a hurricane is, is the future. The biosphere is the future.

So where is the present?

The present does not exist. There is not a little bubble, no matter how big or how small, called “present.” There is no minute-size bubble. There is no million-year-sized bubble.

Living in an age of ecological awareness, you realize how many train platforms you are waiting on. There are so many, right here. Ghostly platforms, overlapping. Some are a million years long. Some are a hundred thousand years long, like global warming. Some are a few decades long, like your life. Some are a few seconds long, like a signal in your brain.

*Waiting and Reality*

TIMOTHY MORTON

We wait for the next arrival. Who will come through the curtains next?

We wait for ourselves to show up. We look in the mirror. Can you see your true self yet?

Stop the tape of evolution. You will find a species that possesses some kind of mutant power: maybe it's a fish that can breathe out of water for one minute. A fish is never just a fish. A fish is always a fish plus some kind of mutant power: an X-fish. You are an X-human. You have a superpower that others don't have. Maybe it's nothing special, maybe it's drooling for long periods of time. But you never know what mutations will help. Adaptation is always a 20-20 hindsight sort of a thing.

If I'm always haunted by my X-version, I'm always a little uncanny aren't I?

Here's the thing. So is everything else. Everything is an X-thing.

So everything is uncanny. But now the uncanny can't be used to make distinctions between a "normal" human "over here and a "natural" wolf "over there," because I'm just as weird and creepy as everyone else.

Does waiting take place between "actual" events, or is waiting an intrinsic part of the fabric of all events?

This is the same question as, does reality consist of things functioning smoothly until they malfunction, or is reality a series of malfunctions punctuated by the illusion of functioning? A flower looks like it's functioning for a bee when she sucks nectar. A flower looks like it's functioning for a human when he gives it to his girlfriend.

And isn't malfunctioning also mal-functioning, an "evil" action-at-a-distance whose model, for us moderns, is art? In a global warming age, our environment is malfunctioning and mal-functioning in every respect.

Ecological awareness is creepy.

*Waiting and Alienation*

TIMOTHY MORTON

Humankind is alienated from its political “superpowers.” We can’t quite think and act on that level yet. Hyperobjects force us to begin to think and act—and we are one of them!

“God is love” is an upside-down way of saying “love is God.” Collective thought and action is crippled by alienation and its policing mechanisms, for instance religious guilt.

Waiting for... is part of the problem. But we have the controls already. Samsara, the Matrix, however one thinks of it, consists of waiting for something to happen (while something is already happening).

What are we waiting for? It looks like we live in world designed for others. Even the phones in our pockets don’t seem only to work for us any more, if they ever did.

The word lobby comes from places like the lobbies of Versailles. The interesting thing about a lobby is that it’s the actual room in which you do lobbying—namely, petitioning powerful people to do stuff for you. The corridors of power are rooms of power for powerful people. To you they’re just a corridor, a gorgeous, alien, irritating airlock between one space and another.