

2024 PAUL MELON LECTURE, July 19, 2024

Ruth Estévez: So, I'm going to be very brief today. [laughs] So, it is my pleasure to welcome everyone here tonight, this is a very special day for me. A long one. But I, because I have all of you, my dear participants, who have become part of this kind of temporary extended family for me, in addition to my wonderful team, trustees, governors, who are dedicated to preserving the extraordinary Skowhegan experience, so, it's with deep gratitude that I welcome so many of you back to this campus, friends and supporters, and also my co-director, Katie, who is here also, and part of the team of New York also. I am truly grateful for the vision and generosity of our boards, and my colleagues, who ensure that we can be here this summer.

And I also would like to make a special thank you to Rosa, who, we were going to do a toast there [applause, cheering] – I mean, come on, it's like, I mean, it's absolutely fantastic!

So, the first time we met, like six weeks ago – I am counting the days, oh, my god – I gave a presentation about how every artists' space, whether educational or exhibition-based, doesn't matter, it always perceived by a, by forest. Somehow, a forest is for me the antithesis of the white cube exhibition, an ideology, just life as it is, so I think that Skowhegan has a bit of that. Not only is it radically in the middle of a forest, but it also moves and grows like one, [laughing] including the mold. [laughter] During these nine weeks – nine weeks, no, during these six weeks, all kinds of symbiotic relationships and transformations have growth, and each person managed them at their own pace, and I have to say that after these six weeks, you have exceeded all my expectation, and I can't imagine doing this again without all of you, I really mean it. [cooing] So we still have a lot of – I mean, a lot, like another three weeks, so I'm not going [laughing] to get sad yet, but it's, it has been a truly amazing experience.

So, during these past few days, we have like, people like Georgia Sagri, who was working on rehearsing with us different stages of recovery, and it wasn't really about resting, but about preparing our body for different kind of connections. We also have Gabriel Pérez talking on paying attention, and how to slow down the way in which we approach art objects, and judgements, and easy explanations. We have endless conversations with our faculty, we have been sharing our skills through different ways, like fire pits, reading groups, ice cream making, questioning labor, sandwich making, performing with archives, [laughter] talking about visas, meditating – I mean, amazing. So I think that at Skowhegan, for the first time in many, many years, I feel like I am back in the kitchen, rather than in the living room, which is where I have been for many years, also, in some organizations. I think the place where things are, at Skowhegan, the kitchen is the place where things are prepared, discussed, mixed and messed around, and the big difference for me is that here we don't have to be worried about who, for who we are cooking, or how we should serve the food, and if, if it tastes good or not, so, but yes, we have also the privilege and the responsibility of hanging kind of outside the scaffolding of power relations and categories that run in many different levels in the art world, so I'm, I'm very happy for that.

So, nine weeks are not too long, but, I think a lot of us, we'll understand how significant this moment is, perhaps with time. So hopefully this time together is a good start, or at least a stop along the way. Or not, let's see. So, my dear Daniel Bozhkov, who is there, faculty member, and a fantastic, fantastic, fantastic ally during this summer, will introduce our Paul Melon Distinguished Fellow, Timothy Morton [applause, cheering] in a few minutes. But I would like to finish with a huge thank you to all of you, for your presence, for your physical presence here, for making this program possible, and for letting me part of this organization, but mostly for being part of your life, for these weeks, so thank you. [applause, cheering]

Daniel Bozhkov: Hello. Can you hear me?

Audience member: Yes!

Bozhkov: Great. What a special evening tonight.

Life as such is the capacity of the universe to have stupid accidents. [laughter] Accident and miracle are the same word at different amplitudes, writes Timothy Morton in the recent book *Hell*.

Philosophy, which is wonderment, hence horror, or eroticism, or anger, or laughter, in a conceptual form, is a metonym to the way a thing is a portal for the future. The love of wisdom implies that wisdom isn't fully here, at least not yet.

"Argument Clinic" is a sketch from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, written by John Cleese and Graham Chapman. A customer explores various rooms in the clinic, such as an office called Arguments, another office called Complaints, and an office that offers being hit on the head lessons, which the customer finds a stupid concept. At some point, a [WORD UNCLEAR] detective, Inspector Fox, of the Light Entertainment Police Comedy Division-Special Flying Squad, intervenes and declares the two men under arrest for participating in a confusing sketch. The sketch has become popular with philosophy students, who note that arguing is, quote, all we are good at, and wonder about intellectual exercise one can get from playing, from, from paying for professional quality debate.

The philosopher Bergson tells us in his book *Laughter* that the function of art is to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself. For Timothy Morton, art is a place where we get to see what it means to be human, and is a great mode for relation among humans and non-humans. The aesthetic experience is about solidarity with what is given, and once we start embracing difference, not as rigid separation, but as uncanny affinity, we see that humans are more like non-humans, and non-humans are more like humans that we like to think.

Art is telepathic; it's a spooky action at a distance. The strange part of quantum [dog yelps] entanglement [laughter] is that when you measure something about one particle in

an entangled pair, you immediately know something about the other particle. Even if they are millions of lightyears apart. This odd connection between the two particles is instantaneous, seemingly breaking a fundamental law of the universe. Albert Einstein famously called the phenomenon ‘spooky action at a distance.’

The Morton detractors accuse him of misunderstanding contemporary science, like quantum mechanics and set theory, and then claiming their distortion as support for their wild ideas. Other critics especially on the left complain that Morton’s conception of the Anthropocene glosses over issues of race, class, gender, and colonialism by blaming the entire species for the damage inflicted by a privileged minority. One of Timothy Morton’s most influential books, titled *Hyperobjects*, examines the experience of being caught up in, indeed, being an intimate part of, these entities which are too big to wrap our hands around, and far too big to control. We can experience hyperobjects such as climate in their local manifestations, or through data produced by scientific measurements, but their scale and the fact that we are trapped inside them means that we can never fully know them. Because of such phenomena, we are living in a time of quite literally unthinkable change. This leads Morton to one of their most important claims: that the Anthropocene is forcing a revolution in human thought. Advances in science are now underscoring how enmeshed we are with other beings, from the microbes that account for roughly half the cells in our bodies, to our reliance for survival on the earth’s electromagnetic heat shield. At the same time, hyperobjects in their unwieldy enormity alert us to absolute boundaries of science, and therefore, the limits of human mastery. (00:10:00) Science can only take us so far. This means changing our relationship with the other entities in the universe, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, from one of exploitation through science to one of solidarity in ignorance.

Timothy Morton is Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University, and Director of the Cool America Foundation. Morton is the author of *Hell: In Search of Christian Ecology*, published in ’24, 2024, by Columbia University Press; *All Art is Ecological*, first published by Penguin Books in 2018; *Being Ecological*, Penguin, 2019; *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*, Verso, 2017; *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Columbia, 2016; *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*, Minnesota, 2013; *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard, 2010; *Ecology Without Nature*, Harvard, 2007; the list goes on to include numerous other books, translated into nineteen languages, and 300 essays.

Morton has collaborated with Laurie Anderson, Björk, Susan Kucera, Hrafnhildur Arnadottir, Adam McKay, Jeff Bridges, Olafur Eliasson, and Pharrell Williams. Morton co-wrote and appears in *Living in the Future’s Past*, a 2018 film about global warming with Jeff Bridges. They are the author of the libretto for the opera *Time Time Time*, by Jennifer Walshe. In 2018, Morton curated art exhibitions on their book *Hyperobjects* in Barcelona and Marfa, Texas. Morton has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *Vice*, and *Wired*.

Dear friends, participants, faculty, staff, governors and trustees of Skowhegan, dear guests, please fasten your seatbelts and help [laughter] me welcome Timothy Morton. [applause, cheering]

Timothy Morton: Yeah! Please keep going. [laughter, applause, whistles] It's lovely to see you. It's, it's been lovely to see you, you know. For me and Treena, our visit is coming to an end in a couple of days, so it's very poignant for us, it's poignant for me to be giving this, it's super poignant anyway because of what I'm about to say, the title of which is "Silhouettes in Paradise."

But it's poignant for you guys, cause you've got a few weeks left, and I know what that's like. You know, I've been on long, long meditation retreats, in the mountains, with large, small, medium-sized groups of people, and my own, right, and right around two-thirds, three-quarters of the way in, you start to feel, wow, this is ending, right, this is coming to an end. Yeah? There's sadness, you know?

Part of what I want to talk about, actually, is – so we were visiting the studios the other day, and I, you know, we, we, a lot of feelings come up, and I wanted to talk about those feelings, cause they're actually directly related to the, the lecture that I'm giving. They're sort of part of it, you know. But the first sentence of this lecture, apparently, according to this thing that I'm holding here, is, I come before you today to speak of worms, and to speak of lilies. But before that, I have to talk about war, for a minute. But before that, I have to talk about wow. You know, and, as we've given her an enormous round of applause already, I dare say she can do with another one, let's say thank you to Ruth for being incredible. [applause, cheering]

All the staff, everybody here, this is a very, very, this is a, a special place, and you allowed us in, at a very potent moment. You know? A couple of days into being here, I felt all the feelings coming up, you know, and I'm a, I know that, I know that happens when you're on retreat, yeah. So I understand, there's a kind of container, right: you've got the forest, and everybody has their studio, and they have their practice, right, and there's a certain set meal times – there's enough of a format to allow a kind of a pressure cooker situation, you know. I got so paranoid, yeah? [laughter] Thank you for laughing. It's very good for my paranoia.

I, I suffer from a thing called complex PTSD. It gets really bad, you know, I have these PTSD episodes, yeah, I have to put on the Rambo sort of thing, feel really crazy – thanks for not laughing about that, [laughter] it's a very serious thing that I suffer now. And, you know, so, all this stuff coming up, right, lots of grief. You know, I just learned how to grieve, and so many of you are working on such powerful, profound things, I feel, you know, to do with very much, strangely, like the stuff that I seem to be working on right now, right? Which is the basic, basic kind of interface between you as a being, and other beings, whether they be other human beings or other life forms, that the, out of the biosphere that we grew out of, right?

The thing called narcissism, yeah? The thing called narcissism, the thing that is named in words that might be very upsetting to you, okay, so part of my job, unfortunately, is I get paid to say upsetting things. Also, part of my personality is that I accidentally say upsetting things. Unfortunately, also, part of my personality, I sort of say deliberately upsetting things. [laughter] I'm like a sort of combination of Dr. House and Larry David, right, [laughter, whistling, cheers] the Dr. House - thank you! The Dr. House part can take over, I'm like, I'm talking to my very new friend who's directing a, a, a, was directing a, a museum that unfortunately just imploded; we're doing this huge exhibition called *Annunciation*, right, I've been talking to some people about it. And I'm, she, she told me one sentence that her ex-person had said to her, and I said, 'Please forgive me, I have an interpretation of this guy, you know, do you mind?' These things are very provocative, you have to be really careful. Unlike Dr. House, I'm asking permission, you know. Cause the thing about House is he, he saves your life, and ruins it at the same time, you know? So kind of like that's the scapegoat thing to do, right? Like, I, I am, I've been scapegoated so bad, in my actual family life, you know. I, I was actually literally disowned - but I'm just gonna say, it's, I'm being really honest here: I got disowned by my mom, last year, for some incredible reason. You know, like really, like a curse, you know, like, you are no longer my son. You know, that level, yeah? And I, my childhood was spent with a psychopathic father, who was also very connected to crime syndicates, right? Crime syndicates in London, like, like the London mafia. You know the Kray Twins, if you know about anything to do with the London mafia.

So I know what it's like to be in a toxic group such as fundamentalist Christianity, you know. I also know what it's like to be in imminent danger of fascism. Yeah, I understand it, like, on a, on a visceral level, and it really is about the viscera, right? It's about your, your this stuff, right? It's about the interface, it's about what you let in, and what you excrete. You know, all groups are narcissists, until you really work on them really, really hard, right? And that means that they are all about inclusion and exclusion, and that means they tend to put all the poison, emotionally or literally, into one or two or whatever people, or class, or race, or whatever. Then they eject, right, from the group, right? So the problem with our world, unfortunately, is that fascism and tyranny is the default, yeah, and, and, and whatever democracy is is this really boring kind of con, very conscious - consciousness sucks, you know? Like I teach a theory class all the time, and the subtitle of the class really ought to be consciousness sucks. [laughter] Cause it's just so much nicer just to act out all the time, right? All you need to do to be a fascist is to just hit the retweet button. Right? It's called the banality of evil; you don't even have to believe it, right? There's the blood level from thousands of years ago, anti-Semitic thing, just lying around, waiting for someone, like a virus just to hit the retweet, yeah?

But they can have all that stuff, cause all that stuff is the past. Just some kind of junk, right? That's just some kind of piles of meaning. And all the meaning was kind of crappy. Right? Look around you - are there any flaws, you know, like I'm slightly sweating, I have the sort of acne, and from the age nineteen - that means the past sucked. Right? All of it. So they can have that stuff, right? And somewhere in the basement, me, which, who has complex PTSD, is this newspaper headline, is that, just in, Tim Morton is a piece of shit. (00:20:10) And it's like, I, I know the meaning of life. Right? I have these voices that tell me

that my life is pointless, right. We don't need any more of the meaning of life, right – you are the slave, you are the master, you are the subject, you are the object, you are the male, female, you know, right? We don't need any of this anymore. What we need, actually, is the meaningfulness of life. The meaningfulness. You can't have meaning without meaningfulness. Right?

So, all the tyrants and the fascists can have their stupid little piles of swastikas and crap, cause that's all just some kind of junk from the past. That's meaning. Meaning is from the past, right? If you know what a word means already it's from the past, right, you defined it at some point in the past. Meaningfulness is from the future. And meaningfulness is predicated on – sorry, I'm, I'm really nervous. [cheering whistle] Thank you.

Meaningfulness is predicated on the possibility of meaning less. Right? QAnon knows what I mean, right? QAnon knows that I'm a pedophile is [PHRASE UNCLEAR] who drinks baby's blood. They know what it means, right? They can see all the symbols, and the, on the web, right, they know. I'm teach, I teach how to read a poem class all the time, and what I teach, what, what, what I say now in my class is, I'm actually teaching you how to not read the poem. First and foremost, how to not know what the fuck you're doing. Right? Think of being a mathematician, it's the same thing as being an artist, right, calculating is part of math, but math is bigger than calculating. Mostly, math is like looking at a problem, and just looking at the problem, and just looking at the problem, and you're like, I don't care if I die, I'm still gonna just vibe with this problem. That's what the word math means, it's means vibing. Mathersis [?], the Greek, means communing with, or vibing with, right? Getting used to, right?

I don't know what this work of art is yet; I am just gonna hang out with it for days and days and days. I don't even know if I should be doing a work of art, I don't even know if I want to do a work of art, I'm just gonna hang out with that feeling for days, weeks, nine weeks, I'm gonna be in this funny, tentative, subjunctive, maybe, maybe not, maybe, maybe not. It's, it feels like nothing. Right? It feels, it seems like nothing. Compared to the huge pile of meaning junk, it's just this little wavering curtain. You know, in the, in the *Bardo Thodol* – I'm, I was trying to learn in Tibetan Buddhism, many, many decades, yeah, and apparently, when you die, according to this certain thing, you, you go through the nature of mind. You know, Buddha, Buddha mind. Right? But it doesn't look like anything. You want something more entertaining; you want a, you want some meaning. The Buddha mind part of it is just this weird, shimmery, just, oh, what the hell is this, it's just some kind of shimmery curtain thing. But that actually is the hyperspace tunnel. And you just missed it! Right? You missed it. But you let yourself not miss it for nine weeks. Right? You let, you let yourself allow for meaningfulness, aka the possibility of meaning less. That it's not gonna work. Right?

And please believe me, this is the fundamental chemical in the anti-fascist death ray thing that I am trying to construct, to get people to fire at the enemy. Seriously. That's the magic, that's the secret sauce. It doesn't look like anything. It looks like nothing, it looks really weak, you know, like [lowers and raises voice] this would be a stronger, more meaningful leader, who da-da-da – no no no no no no no no no. Yeah? Beauty, ambiguity,

and irony, the ultimate anti-fascist death ray chemicals. Yeah? And they all depend upon just allowing things to be sort of uncertain. Right? And that uncertainty is from the future.

Imagine you're in Washington, and there's this guy standing up in front of you, seems like a pretty courageous guy. And why he's so courageous is he's trained as a minister, right, so he knows, he understands about intimacy. And he's gonna say a thing that's gonna change your life forever, because the intimacy is gonna be in that, right? But also the future, right? And also the meaningfulness, but not the meaning. The first thing he's gonna say is, I have a dream. I have a dream. He's won [snaps] already, as soon as he says it, right, I, I have a dream – he's already opened up the possibility that the future can be different from the past. And we need this feeling; it's a feeling, right? That, we need the feeling that the future can be different from the past. We need to know why to stop oil. We need to know why to citizens' arrest all the directors of Exxon, for the equivalent of war crimes, right? We need to know, we need to feel it, right, we need to feel like planet scale collective action, very, top of my list is ending the legacy of slavery through doing about 100 years of truth and reconciliation on that stuff, and really working on it all the time, cause that's how we're really gonna forge meaningful relationships with other life forms, right? Like, in brief, how we treat each other is how we treat the biosphere. Yeah?

How do you get, how do you get into that, right, how, what's the, what's the reason to feel that? You know? Where's the techno that's gonna entice you? You know, you know the can you feel it is my favorite – I, I'm from 1988, I was born in 1968, but existentially, I'm from 1988. Everything I learned about bunny rabbits and wilderness is from acid house. I didn't go camping in [laughter] my shorts. I solely went to this club, it's run by Dave Dorrell. You know "Pump Up the Volume," M*A*R*R*S? Dave Dorrell did this thing called "Pump Up the Volume," and then he created this club, and then he did this beautiful flier for this club, with the Virgin Mary, you know - the opening night was called Religious Experience, and I needed this flier for the first page of the book, so I found a way to contact Dave Dorrell, and I was like, Dave, Dave Dorrell, you don't realize this, but you're the DJ, who, 13,000 nights ago, saved my life. You know, cause I'm born into this very traumatic situation, and you gave me how to feel different. Right? How to re-start my life. Yeah? And we've been texting each other every since that day, because weirdly he was like, 'You're not Tim Morton, are you? [laughter] I'm a really big fan, I've read all of your books,' and it's like, oh my god, wow – I'm fanning on him, he's fanning on me.

And "Can You Feel It," by Mr. Fingers, 1987, it's a beautiful piece of techno, like a very synesthetically glossy, transparent bass line, the Martin Luther King mix, where the 'I Have A Dream' speech is perfectly coordinated over this incredibly tight, never-changing keyboard bassline, it's un, unbelievable. Right? He, he, he finds the song that King is singing, and he just finds the exact notes to repeat the entire – and it's 'I Have A Dream,' yeah? I have a dream, of what, right? Already your mind is opening up to the future, right? And in the, in the end, the anti-racist content just downloads almost automatically into that speech, and you just, you, you, you're ready, you know? You're feeling it!

Why doesn't someone do that about, like, ending oil, and caring for glaciers, and like, why, where's the I have a dream? You know? Where's that? Right? And I think these two

things are actually related, of course, because how we get on with each other is how we get on with the biosphere, in general. Right? Ending patriarchy and white supremacy is a number one priority, in order to foment any kind of decent anything – see, I’m, I’m a creature of the New Left, you know, and for a while, I was doing this big detour around, like, describing the world as enjoined by Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Zizek, and everybody was like, oh, look at Tim, he’s not a political guy, in fact, he’s evil, cause he’s not making the right noises. But I’m doing it to figure out what the fuck is happening, and how to actually do something about it, and now I’m just like, okay, I’m coming out, I’m a child of the New Left, and the New Left, right, the reason why you do theory class, right? You have Kristeva, Foucault, Cixous, all the students of Heidegger and Lacan, blah blah blah, Derrida, right? The reason why, gender and race are foundational to class. That’s the point. Right? Gender and race are foundational to class, so if you don’t do something about patriarchy and white supremacy, the whole other thing isn’t gonna work. Right.

And, I would add into the mix there the notion of species. Right? The notion of being a, being a biological being is right in there. In a totally non-essentialistic, queer way, that I’m hoping to outline in this wittily entitled talk, that I will be getting to, any time soon [laughter] called “Silhouettes in Paradise.” It’s called “Silhouettes in Paradise,” it’s so great. [laughter] I wonder what I’m gonna say.

You know what else is cool about I Have A Dream, you know, it’s, when do you hear someone say that? It’s when your favorite bestest person in the world is waking up right next to you, and you’re already awake, and they’re just waking up, and they’re like sleep paralyzed, almost they can’t move, they can’t move their lips, go like that. (00:30:09) I’m having a dream. Or they’re going to sleep. It’s a very vulnerable moment. And they’re allowing themselves to go to sleep in front of you, you know, like, how cats express love, by like, it’s okay for me to go to sleep in front of you – they close their eye. It’s beautiful. Right?

The right of a life form to be asleep in public, yeah, my friend Laurie Anderson is doing all these performance pieces where she just goes to sleep in a park, goes to sleep in a subway, gets arrested, of course, right – the, the right of people to be unconscious, right, the right of someone just to stumble across the road and onto someone’s lawn without having to do a million calculations a second as to whether the other guy, who’s white, is gonna shoot them dead, with a gun, with a stand your ground law, right? The right to just kind of, ah, I have a dream – it’s beautiful. It’s so intimate, right? And, and the, and so you’re going to sleep, the person’s going to sleep, and then, I, I’m starting to have a dream. Well, what are you dream – what? And now they’re asleep, you can’t talk to them. Just there, it’s a physical being.

Yeah? The default art, for me, is drama, dance, yeah? Same thing. And the default drama dance is called being alive. And the default being alive is called being asleep, and the thing that your brain does when it’s asleep is a thing called the dreaming. Right? So I have a dream, you’re saying that in front of millions of people, you’re saying that in front of the future, you’re saying that, what your lover says two millimeters from your face. You’re saying that, on this podium, right? Cause you’re a highly trained person, a highly trained Christian minister, and you’re ready to deliver that intimacy. Right? So as well as the future,

it's the future as this incredibly intimate - the future is here. It sounds like a horrible TED talk, it's crap. I've never been invited to do a TED talk; I'm quite proud of that now. They're all great [laughter] cooks, while I'm gonna live forever people; they obviously don't want to invite me, cause I'm all about dying, and grief, and sorrow. You know. With a bit of a smile on my face. [laughter] And, so screw them. I'm not, I'm not upset or anything about it.

What you're doing, every room I came into, every single room that I came into, you are, you are doing the thing named in very triggering words like theology, spirituality, religion, dharma - you are doing it. Right? Without reference to a specific doctrine, or sect, it's more, deeper than that, you're dealing with the basic vomit level of life. Right? Where what you allow in and what you let out, and who you allow in, and so and so on, is the, is the key, that's all that's happening, right? You're allowing your body to dream into the clay, or dream into the paint, or dream into the fabric, right? You're allowing those things to tell you about yourself, cause how can you kinda know about yourself - not yourself, but your - now we're getting into the lecture, see.

Like I say, I'm, I'm here to talk to you about, about worms and lilies. How can you know about yourself - not the concept self, but the basic heads, shoulders, knees, and toes, without handling something? Right? Like handling the clay. You know, it's how you get to know yourself, but in a funny way, you're, you're kinda, it's kinda like a displacement. Right? You didn't quite grasp yourself, you made this beautiful clay instead. But that's how you get to feel. Right? Cause you're made out of time, the clay's made out of time, and so there's an inevitable kind of dance that's happening there. That isn't possible to point to directly, so it's this process, right?

This is proto-religion, right? Proto-ideology, proto - Ray, Ray, Raymond Williams has a beautiful word for it, it's called structure of feeling. Raymond Williams, Marxist literary critic from Britain who started the cultural studies Birmingham School, with Stuart Hall, in the 1970s. Structure of feeling, right? That it's not yet beliefs, it's not yet ideology, it's where we are right now, it's like I can feel the power lines over there, and there's the dining hall, and I, there are cars parked over there, and the forest goes to there, and I have a, roughly a sense of the space that I'm in, and the people that I'm seeing, and it's a kind of collective feel. This kind of feeling isn't, isn't restricted to one person, it's a collective, right? It's, in yoga, it would be a prana, right? It would be a prana; in some Western philosophy it would be affect, right? It's a transpersonal - when Martin Luther King says I have a dream, he's trying to create a transpersonal affect prana, inside of people, yeah?

If you want to destroy the master-slave template, you also have to destroy the subject-obliterate, object template, which is a function of that, and that means that you have to start talking a little bit, maybe temporarily, in between those categories, and so I find this concept of subtle body, from Chinese, Indian, and so on, Tibetan medicine, very, very potent, and I, my, I feel my own subtle body, you know, and, but, but if you don't know what it is, you, you have the tingles, right? You get the tingles? When you, when a beautiful thing happens, and you're, wow, goosebumps - I was talking to somebody about the King's speech, and the future, and about how you, how artists are kind of inviting the future, you know, at, at lunch, and they were, wow, I'm having the chicken skin. That, right? It's a

specific prana, called the all-pervading wind. But in Greek, it's called katharsis. Right? Kata means all-pervading, and arsis is the flow. Right? Katharsis is not purgation, katharsis is the thing that art is trying to induce, it's trying to induce a yoga – what's it trying to do, it's trying to connect, yoke you, yoga, yoke, the, the Greek is zeugma, it's trying to yoke you to the biosphere, to the divine. Same thing.

Whew. Tim said a thing. Yeah?

I want to demonstrate that everything that you know about religion and spirituality is everything that you feel about being a life form in a, in a biosphere. And I would argue, actually, that religion, whatever it is, goes all the way down, even possibly to pre-sentient beings. Right? It's that edge between sentience and non-sentience. You don't have to be sentient to have the religion. As we all know, from watching many, hopefully you don't watch this, Trinity Broadcasting Network? I've never seen anything as scary in my life. Those guys aren't sentient. [laughter] Those guys are demonic droids from hell, man. They're - me and Treena and her mom, in Montego Bay, watching it on a Sun, every Sunday morning, right? And these are these, like, robotic, white, Pentecostal people going, 'Can I get an amen!' [grunts] You're like, oop, have any, have all the amens you want, dude, I'm outta here. [laughter] You know? What the hell is that?

You, you are doing, you are doing theology as a, and it's a political act, it's a political act right now. At the very least, talking again of the war that we're in, unfortunately – not another one, you know, it's, at least it's a way of keeping your head, right? Because if you know that you're not just 2D, like imagine everything that happens, all the arguments, and all the nuclear bombs, and all the Trumps, and all the bullshit, everything that happens in this world, and all the blue whales, and everything, is just like scribbles on a 2D surface. And someone comes along, and you're flat land, and someone comes along and says, 'Actually, you know, it's really odd, but you are in fact 3D.' Right? That doesn't get rid of the 2D. That doesn't mean you're better than the 2D. That means you can care about the 2D much better. You can engage with anti-fascist, anti-racist, politics, because you know that you're 3D. You know, I have a dream, it's like, [snaps] in miniature, it's like, you are a three dimensional being. You're not just inhabiting two dimensions, and you got this! You've got this, you know how to do this, you're bigger than this entire stupid fascist empirical universe that seems so loud, and it's shouting at you, it's trying to scare you, but you're bigger than it. Right? And you're bigger in this beautiful, calm, non-violent, shimmery, I have a dream – it's bigger, it's more powerful, yeah? But it doesn't look like it. It just looks like nothing. Right?

But what I was privileged to be able to share with you was room after room of this feeling. Right? Of the thing called futurity, this feeling that, this feel, this prana. Right? That the future is different from the past. It irreducibly is different. And everybody on earth needs to know that the future can be different from the past. Because you're a life form, your body knows it's true, because your body is a place in the universe. When all the chemical warfare in the universe turns into a little bit mercy, for a little bit, yeah? Life is, is chemistry having mercy on itself. (00:40:01) Just a little bit. Not too long. Live forever, and it's horrible, for you and other people. Right? So in the end, you have mercy on mercy, and

you die. But just for a moment, you, you know, hesitation, it's a quantum thing. You're like, when, when, when you're in a fight, and you're like, wait a minute, this is stupid, this is like a mechanical – you feel like a mech, automaton, you're like wait a minute, why am I even doing this? Why am I about to wail on this person, with the, with words or whatever it is, right? And you hesitate, that, that's what life's made of, right, it's made out of quantum theory where the basic fundamental quality of the universe is a hesitation. Right? Vibrating without any mechanical input, just hesitating. Yeah?

It doesn't seem like anything. It seems just like a little rippling shimmering curtain of nothing. But it's the hyperspace gate. And everyone had a little way of opening that gate, as far I could see. You know, and it seems to me that there is a huge, like worldwide, and in particular in America, interestingly, movement, to now include what is called spirituality, religion, dharma, whatever that is, in the art, as a political act. It seems to me that that, that's like a thing, you know? Trust me, I'm a smart guy who writes about this. [laughter]

So I'm gonna show you a thing now, it's called mindfulness of life. Everybody put at least one foot on the floor, or just feel your butt on the chair, something that's gonna connect you to the basic earth – it's not, it's not the actual empirical earth, it's the feeling of earth. Right? Whatever that is, your elbow, your butt, your, whatever. Your foot, whatever you have – doesn't matter. Right? And you're gonna sit up – up, you know up? A little bit. So your spine is just a little bit, pull, feel there's a little string pulling. I'm making up for years of all the Tibetans going, why don't you do meditation instruction, Tim, you're – get with the program. And, your eyes are open for this one, right? We're not gonna block anything for this one. Your eyes are open, but they're a little bit down, just a little bit down, cause you're just kinda like, calming the little frightened doggy of your mind. You know. What's professor Tim gonna say next, oh my god, he said he was Dr. House, is he gonna diagnose me, just, sorta, so eyes down a little bit, maybe, not too far in, like don't pull it too in, that, that creates too strong mindfulness. You know mindfulness, the horrible one? The corporate one? The one that's like, pressing the finished smiley face, angry face, neutral face, sad face button? On the inside of yourself, every five minutes. That one. Like the extra, extracting something, an extractive technology of mindfulness – we're not doing that one. We're doing something else, right? So you're, this, it is not about tight. Yeah? This is not about tight. You feel your hands on your knees, if you have hands or knees, you're gonna feel - just feel something in your body. Very simple. The, the high level meditation is the simple one. Yeah? The, the complex one is the, the low level. The high level is the, the thing that doesn't look like anything. Right? So sit up – sitting up. Eyes a little bit down.

And inevitably, you're doing a thing called breathing. This is called, because you're alive, you know, if you don't do it, you're just gonna be dead. So just don't follow your breath, just feel your breath, don't follow it. Don't do the mindfulness thing where you, mm, mm – you're not fixating on an object, yeah? That's, that's very soothing, but if you over-apply it, it can turn you into like a maniacal corporate pod person of your own psyche. That's the way corporations like it. It's like filling out an evaluation form on yourself. That's not really meditation; this is more like mathematics. As opposed to calculating. Yeah.

Just feel the breath in your nostrils, coming out. Mostly just the out. So imagine you're, can see it, like the sort of steam, it's kind of, [exhales deeply]. Can use your mouth, you can use your nose. You're doing it. Yeah! Doing it. Can you feel it, you're doing it.

And you're aware of the prickly sensation of the heat against your shirt, you know, you can, I can feel the sweat. And hear the hum of the electronic device cooler. I think. Can see this yellowish light there. Don't, you're not blocking anything, right? This is not like the toilet on a plane, where you're replacing everything with an occupied sign – it's not that kind of meditation. This is mindfulness of life. Life. The thing called being alive.

I think you notice your heart. You notice this trembly palpitating pulse-y, you know, my, my daughter had a heart operation to remove a strange extra electrical node in her heart, and before they did it, they did an echocardiogram. It was this incredibly beautiful thing, where somebody was doing the sonar to kind of feel her heart, and creating this colorized sort of pulsing opal on the computer screen. And when you get really close to the heart, it's kind of [rolls tongue]. Right, from about 20,000 feet it's doing the Pink Floyd, [makes deep heart beat sound], like that. But when you get close up, it [rolls tongue].

You know, [snaps] everybody out, stop, stop, stop it. Out of the meditation. You can come out. Good. This is a thing called thumos [?], in Greek, it's where we get the word rhythm. Right? It means palpitation, yeah? Rhythm is, means body fluids, is the [WORD UNCLEAR], rhy means flow, and then thum is the palp, palp, palpitating – palpitating body fluids. Right? Before and above, rhythm is the measurement of a, some, something. The regular measurement of something. But what, what is actually rhythm measuring? Rhythm is the pulsing, the palpitating. It doesn't have to be regular, right? It's just this thing called life. This tantalizing – yeah? We're, tant, you can't quite feel it, you know. Does Tim need me to feel something? Cause I'm not quite sure – right! This feeling of not quite sure is the life, yeah? Amazingly, it's the theory, phenomenology, it overlaps with the philosophy theory space, right? It's like what the hell, what is that? What, what is that? You know, it's what you're thinking to yourself when someone says, I'm having a dream. Yeah?

This is the very precious chemical. You can access it all the time, and fundamentally, it has to do with your thing called your proprioception, which is your sense of yourself as a heads, shoulders, knees, and toes. There is a neurologist called Bjorn Merker, this Swedish neurologist, right? And he's figured this incredible thing out, which is that you are a silhouette in a biosphere, right? This funny tantalizing feeling is because you are a silhouette. Of what are you a silhouette? You are a silhouette of the biosphere as such. Your proprioception is like noise cancelling headphones. It's an upside down inverted image of the environmental awareness, right? So I'm touching the podium, and I'm breathing in and out, and I'm looking at the mic, and your, my sentient system it noticing this, and then it's flipping it upside down, and that's my sense of my me. Just basic me, not ego me, or Tim Morton me, just me. Right? Fantastic! Right, your basic sense of self is your, is your, is the environment, flipped upside down. Neurologically speaking. How do we know, because worms – which were in the title – would get stuck in the, in the tunnels they're digging, if they didn't know to do this, right? They wouldn't be able to distinguish themselves from the tunnel, so the fact that a worm can tunnel is because a worm can have an inverted image of

itself, right? This very, very basic thing, that if you're sentient you sort of, you have to have it; if you're a plant, and you have roots growing into the earth, you have to have this. Right?

This is where the beauty lives. This is where the meaningfulness lives. Right? This is where the ambiguity lives. Or this is where the consciousness is living. It's much cheaper than people think. Right? All these special things that we think of as special human things, and in particular some people think of as special white boy human things, right, are actually incredibly readily available to the entire biosphere, as a precondition of being alive at all. Yeah?

And what this means is that to be a life form is to be a paradise. Paradise. Yeah? Silhouettes in paradise. Cause the silhouette kind of is a paradise. You know, paradise is an old Iranian word, pardis, yeah? Pari is around, like para, like Greek, like paranoid, para. Parallel, by the side of. In this case it means around, right. And dis is the, you know, you're, you, you're shaping the clay, right? (00:50:08) You're creating this boundary, yeah? This primordial kinda, we're just gonna create this boundary now. Right? I'm gonna go in my studio, and I'm gonna hang these things, and I'm gonna close the door, and this is me, little space here. This is the paradise. Right?

Every garden is a paradise garden, to the extent that it always has a garden within a garden. That's always a functional definition of a garden, is it has a bed of roses, and it has a little tree, and each little thing is like a little garden inside the garden. Right? Every poem contains like a little poem inside the poem. Right? Cause there's the poem, and then there's the narrator saying the poem. Every story contains a story within the story, in the same way. Right? This kind of funny little thing, where, where this is kind of nesting, recursion quality, is this paradise feature of our universe.

Universe is a whole bunch of overlapping, concentric kinds of, kinds of paradise. Yeah? So yes.

I'm gonna - thank you. I'm giving, I'm trying to give you the reason why to give a shit about the biosphere. Yeah? That's one reason why. Yeah? And what's it made out of? It's made out of evolution. Evolution is awesome, because it's based on three kinds of accident. Life is a beautiful accident - thank you, Daniel, for bringing that up, right? Life is a beautiful accident; it does not have a point. It does not have a telos.

The concept of race has an arrow to it, it has a telos, right? The point of some people is to be enslaved, and the point of other people is to be the enslavers. That's a telos. Teleological, right? You need to take the telos out, then you've got something really interested, and actually, you know, you could say that a lot of esoteric practices around the world are basically taking the telos out of the religion. You know? You get to a certain VIP lounge, and in the VIP lounge, they say, 'You know all that stuff about a psychopath who mostly want to hurt you wasn't really true, and really, you are this thing, or you're connected to this thing, or you're intimately bound to this thing. And your job now is just to notice that, until you die.' And they give you a little instruction about how to do it, right? You know, the, it's very often a, the very high level ones are often very simple, right? So the

Tibetan one, meditate like a corpse. [makes snore-like sounds] Doesn't matter. Christianity, cloud of unknowing – that's a great title, yeah. The, the title is the meditation instructions. Just be a cloud of unknowing. [makes light whirring sound] Yeah? And you do the thing, and you're like, I can't get it – what, what am I supposed to be doing here? Am I supposed to be touching god, or whatnot? Seeing the nature of mind? But I can't find it. And you come to your nice teacher, and your nice teacher says, [snaps] 'That's it. That tantalizing quality, that you can't quite touch it, is it.' Right?

Remember, you are a silhouette in a biosphere. The silhouette appears just a little bit after the environmental awareness, which appears just a little bit after the actual environment. By a few hundred milliseconds – I'm not a biologist, right? So this, here [tapping on podium] is the future. Right? And all the sensations about it are the past. Right? The, the, the actual biosphere that you're in is the future, phenomenologically speaking. You are in the future. You're separated from the future by like a couple of hundred milliseconds. If anything, the Garden of Eden is just a couple of hundred milliseconds in the future. Right? It hasn't even [snapping] happened yet. Yeah? You were never alienated from anything, there's just this tantalizing feeling, of what the hell is this? Yeah?

And because of that, evolution depends upon accidents, so we've got random genetic mutation, right, which is random with respect to current needs. So there's no arrow in evolution, and human beings are not the top, or even better than, whatever. Right? If Steve Jobs had designed these things, he would have made little pin pricks, cause they're not more efficient, right? This is a whole bunch of stuff – like this little thing on the ear is from when the common ancestor was, had like pointy ears, and they could have folded in, yeah? It's just a whole bunch of junk, you know? Anything other than that is just like an ableist concept of, of, of a life form, it's not correct.

The other thing, that is fascinating, is symbiosis, right? Symbiosis, which is also accidents – symbiosis is random encounters with strangers. Yeah? Like today, me and Treena are sitting there, reading Thomas Merton – medieval mystical theology has a very precise theory of fascism. And also an incredible theory of how to attack it. Interestingly. And some people coming in, you know, and it's like, we're the neighbor, you know, suddenly, ah, oh, what's happening? We're in the – that's what's happening to a single-celled organism as it's floating through the ocean. Imagine you're a single-celled organism, and you're floating through the ocean. It's three billion years ago, suddenly, ooh! Ah. Shit. Did I just swallow poison? That's what it would say if it could talk. Two hundred million years later, there's a conference of amoebae – no, that wasn't poison, that was a bacteria that symbiotically welded itself to the cell, and now we're animals! Yeah? Or now we're plants. You know?

So these random encounters seem, could be scary, at first. You know that Marina Abramovic piece where she sits, standing, like crouching in the corner of the room, and you come in the gallery, she starts to walk towards you? Whoa! And you need to leave. That's like the, the essence of symbiosis, right, that sort of stranger, horror, wonderful, scary, right? Neighbor. Love thy neighbor. Yeah? Or you could –

Audience member: [PHRASE UNCLEAR]

Morton: I, I would love to tell you later.

Audience member: Okay, we can talk later.

Morton: Yeah. I would love to tell you later. Yeah.

So random encounters between strangers. And then the, the third driver is the thing called sexual selection, right? If you're not a cloning part of the biosphere, you are involved in the sexual selection, which is not just queered desire, but trans desire, right? Beauty is a fundamentally trans phenomenon. Yeah? Evolution is incredibly cheap. Like, do you enjoy peacocks' tails? Or do you, whatever? I rest my case, right. It's not just the female peacock that likes the male peacock tail, and the male peacock obviously must like the male peacock tail, but also you like the male peacock tail, and Darwin is on record for saying whenever he thought of a peacock tail, he always used to want to throw up. And I think one reason why is pleasure is – disgust is too much pleasure. And a little bit, his very smart mind is working it out, he has attraction towards the peacock tail, therefore beauty is not some special human being thing, and it's, it goes all the way down at least to peacock tails, and it's a totally trans phenomenon, right? So that's, and that's a mega evolution driver. Right? Like this code, the sound of my voice, the columns in the room, the paintings, the way you're sitting – everything is created by, by queer female desire, AKA desire without an object. Desire without a goal. Cause it's not about reproduction, right?

DNA is incredibly cheap, and sexual display, like, like, like, it would be too expensive to go after, you know, efficiency, or looking like you have six-pack abs, or whatever. The default reason why things look like the way they are, the default, it's called the neural hypothesis, right, the one you don't even have to prove, is a queef - queer female desire, is what is responsible for the look of the entire biosphere. The beauty, you know? Random encounters between strangers, a random genetic mutation, trans des, beauty. If that's not a great reason, little re-packet [?] of reasons to really care about caring for the earth, I don't know what is. You know? And that's the feeling I wanna, that's what I wanna convey. You know?

Maybe if there is some kind of god, if – what, what, whatever god could be, you know, the, for my, for the guy who drove me to the airport in Sidney, Australia, last time I was there, it was the smell of shrimp on the barbie, you know. He was an Iranian guy, exiled from Iran, cause he's a Bahá'i, and he's like, 'Shrimp on the barbie, that's my idea of god.' I was like, actually, that's a really good idea of god. You know, the like white guy sadist who wants to hurt you isn't that great. Compared to shrimp on the barbie, I thought, I'll definitely take shrimp. So whatever that is for you, right, the broadly kind of wow, you know, reason to get out of bed, like, whoa, that. Yeah? Subtract the content, just go with the feeling. Yeah?

Gods themselves might create the universe like this. The universe might be gods' way of knowing that they are who they are. Right? Like when you meet the art is your way

of finding out who you are, right? So the cosmos, in, on this explanation, which is a heretical one, called ex deo creation, yeah? (00:59:59) Is a god-shaped hole in god. Right? Fact number one about our world, god isn't anywhere. And in some weird non-paranoid sense that's a fantastic evidence of the existence of god, cause to this extent, the universe is the mystery of god. Mystery, right? Mystery comes from a Greek word, myein, which is an onomatopoeia for going 'mmmmm.' Right? It means to close the lips. The, the universe is god closing their lips. Right? And earth is like a cosmos-shaped hole in the cosmos. Right? The cosmos proprioception. The cosmos is the god proprioception. Yeah? And on and on, and on and on; it's all silhouettes within silhouettes within silhouettes, like a beautiful Matisse. You know.

I want to finish with something that was made for me by my friend Andrew. I met Andrew a few years ago, and Andrew and I fought, and like, like, liked each other, and exchanged texts, and, you know, everything, and it wasn't until three years in that I realized he was in Massive Attack. I'm like, Andrew, dude, you, you're in Massive Attack. He's like, yeah, I am. Like, what? [laughter] He's so humble, right? He didn't tell me at all, for three years, of, wow, this is like the best way [laughter] to make friends with someone who's in Massive Attack. [laughter] Right? And he has created an AI – this is Massive Attack Tim Morton. Ooh. I am a bit showing off, but I'm showing Andrew off rather than myself, right, cause he's created this AI version of myself, which is a much more demotic version of me, with a little bit more of a northern English accent. Yeah. And he's got this AI talking a little bit Blake, and the music, which Lydia's about to play, is called "Come Fast From the Dark," and we'll be done when it's done. [track plays 01:02:04 – 01:06:35]

That might be the end. [applause, cheering] [lights come up]

The, I hope I talked for long, short enough so we can have a nice discussion. Yeah. I am a motormouth, so I may have just sucked all the oxygen out of the room, and I'm sorry.

The, one, only reason I played that, really, apart from the fact that I love Andrew, and I love this thing that he did is that he sent it to me this morning. [laughter] So I'm in the dining room, and I'm like, oh my god, Andrew just sent me the thing. Yeah.

Audience member: Thank you so much for your talk, and for being here on this very special evening. I really appreciated the way you go from micro to macro, zooming in and out very fast, it's something that I appreciate and I think is very effective in thinking about existence.

It's not really a super specific question, but it's something that was kind of ringing around in my head: when you were talking about beauty, I was thinking a lot about Mijke van der Drift's writing, I don't know if you're familiar with them, a Dutch writer, but she writes about cuteness and touch –

Morton: Oh, yeah.

Audience member: -- as being methods –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- as like trans methods of --

Morton: That's awesome.

Audience member: -- destroying, destroying the world --

Morton: That's beautiful.

Audience member: -- and ideas of worlds buildings.

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: And when you talk about beauty, the reason she uses cuteness is that beauty is rooted in balance, and symmetry --

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- and cuteness is a bit more radical, and it's --

Morton: I get it.

Audience member: -- and maybe even naive, so I just wanted --

Morton: Yes!

Audience member: -- to see how you would riff on --

Morton: I'm a huge fan -- thank you, very much, for all of those beautiful things that you just said. One of my most favoritest philosophers, Theodor Adorno, wrote a thing that's one of my very favoritest things, which is an essay called "Progress," and in this essay, Adorno says, "True progress would be abolishing the idea of progress," cause that's the problemo, yeah? And so genuinely actual progress, unquote progress, would look like regressive, childish. And his example is Nietzsche weeping when the horse is being beaten, and he's crying, and he's hugging the horse, and there's, it's more than just sympathy, he's identified with the horse, right? Now that's the normal thing, you would weep when you see a horse, but from that age of white people in Europe, it's like, that's a childish thing.

So I love this cuteness, absolutely, I might want to change the way I talk, actually, from what you're saying, and by the way, incidentally, this is my lab, you know, some people, you present their work -- this is my work. Right? So what you're doing here, you're helping me to think, cause thinking is a team sport.

And I was just talking earlier with Daniel about how touch is such a part of meaningfulness. You know, there's this thing where people say, I hit them to teach them a lesson. You didn't teach them a lesson, you just hit them. Right? Violence is always an expression of a deadlock in communication. But you never touch someone in a gentle, kind way to teach them a lesson. (01:09:58) You don't kiss someone to teach them a lesson. You almost, to unteach them, unteach yourself, right. And this is the meaningfulness I'm talking about. Now, the previous president of the USA wasn't touched at a very young age. We have a problem. Right? This is the, this is the problem. Yeah. And I'm scared of this problem, I'm scared of this, the, I, I, I, you know, I was married to a, you know, an NPD, and then, in my, because in my childhood, I had this psychopath criminal - not Treena, Treena's absolutely wonderful [laughter] - previous, ex person, who I'm dissing right now. Sorry. [laughter] But it was because of having a psychopath dad, right? Who had this kind of crime syndicate family thing going on, you know.

And so, and I was born into an incubator, I was born, like, for, after forty hours of labor, into, like, inc, intensive care, for three weeks, and my mom didn't know to touch me. You know, and so like I, thanks to a very powerful Italian nurse, who picked me up and like put me on my mom, I was able to imprint, right? But the previous president didn't imprint, you know. A little baby doing this is supposedly cute, and you want to pick the baby, and then they imprint. Right? A forty-year-old guy doing this is Ridley Scott's alien. [laughter] Right? Whenever you see the guy, you should just substitute the alien, like this big mouth that just wants to eat the world, you know, like a black hole. Yeah.

So I, I appreciate what you say, and in another way, I'm beginning to wonder whether - and this is the kind of corny thing that I, I love that you said that about corny, you know, because I'm gonna say a thing now, and it's gonna be like, oh, that couldn't possibly be right. That's a, Tim's gone daft, you know. This is why the Lacanians are like, 'This guy doesn't have any actionable ideas that he can extract and use for a profit, he must be an idiot!' And they, they, they literally said that about me online. That's why I like myself; I like that about me, I do the weird childish kind of collages of things, that's what I do.

Oh, I got carried away. [laughter] But, so, may, may, maybe love can, love can save the world. Right? These very simple, primordial, affective things. Like, on a planet scale, it's gotta be about the most regressed, basic sort of vomit level of your life formness, right? The basic intimacy. Right? And so in a funny way, maybe these things that people say, like, that's the revolutionary praxis, hiding in plain sight, disguised as this corny thing, and I'm, like Maya Angelou birthday card. But it's actually how to do it. The instruction manual. You know.

So I, I really appreciate what you're saying, because, like, connecting the micro and the macro might be exactly what is required, rather than just this cute thing that this funny little guy does sometimes, on, on, on a stage. You know, and I'm, so I'm really thinking about that right now.

I was team teaching a class about *Interstellar*; the teacher was a very traditional, very vulgar Marxist, right? And, so, she had taught all her students to sneer at the film -

that love can save the world, scoff scoff. Right. I taught my students to see the film as an art object, right, with all kinds of ambiguities and layers and like, this is how – we're gonna study the theory, then we're gonna learn how to look at this movie. I didn't realize theory was about learning how to be paralyzed, and full of cynicism. Right? Which it often is, right? The theory class is often the place where you learn, you're less intelligent than me, cause I'm more cynical than you, and you have no idea how paralyzed you are. You have no idea how [WORD UNCLEAR] in ideology you are, compared to me, which is why I'm the teacher. Right? And since when did making people feel paralyzed be a good politically powerful tactic? You know – but it's kinda like where we are, how we argued ourselves to the place we argued ourselves into.

Audience member: I just – I don't need that.

Audience members: Yes you do.

Audience member: Oh, okay.

Morton: Yeah, thanks.

Audience member: Par – I would highly suggest reading the book *The Right to Maim*, because paralyzing people has been the main tactic of governments for, and any, any institution of power, for, that has existed ever, to enact and keep enacting systemic violence on a population in order to extract resources and labor from them.

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: And I think that is the main horror of institutions, is that wanting to make students feel dumb, and powerless –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- is creating the sort of learned helplessness –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- and the inability to face difficult things –

Morton: Mmm.

Audience member: -- because someone else should be smarter, and taking accountability –

Morton: Mmm.

Audience member: -- and changing things.

Morton: Mmhmm, thank you.

As a, as a survivor person – like, I shouldn't be here, like this is part of me talking of the meaning of life, like, I'm talking to you and thinking, actually, I shouldn't have any money, I shouldn't have a job, I shouldn't have a house, I shouldn't have lovely Treena, I shouldn't have written any books, I should be in some ditch on heroin, is what I should be. You know? And I don't know how to, like, I have no model for being a parent, there's no, I know how to do it, like, I, I can do it, but I have no inner model for how to do it. But in another way, I, it's easy. It's easy. Just imagine what my dad would do, and then don't do it. It's the simple parental advice, but it's also the voting, right? Just imagine not checking the Trump box, but checking the other one, right? At that level, it's a survival thing, right? You want to survive. Rule number one of being in a horror movie, how to survive it: you are in a horror movie. Right? The, the person who figures out [snaps] as quickly as possible that they're in the horror movie survives it. Ripley – cause my hero is Ripley, right? Ripley figures out, very quickly, you can't negotiate with alien, you can't fight alien, you can't hide from alien. There's only one thing you can do with alien, it's to blow them out of the airlock. [laughter] That's it. Simple. [laughter] Right? How to survive in a horror – and my early childhood was a horror movie. Right? So I think I have, you know, a very special set of skills that might enable me to help people understand this planet emergency, because it's very regressing, right? Big huge corporations are literally committing crimes on our bodies, and we feel teeny tiny because it's so huge. Right?

So I think we know why we feel this feeling, the fundamental reason why, right? It goes back to quite strongly repressed feelings and thoughts from early childhood. Right? It's very, very heavy. And that's sort of why, you know, it's so scary that Greta Thunberg was the spokesbeing for biosphere, the first-ever planet one, was a sixteen-year-old girl, and everybody wanted to be photographed with her. I went on Twitter and said, I will never be photographed with Greta Thunberg, because it's a kind of pornography aspect to that that makes me feel very scared, you know. That was part of my early childhood, is this crime syndicate stuff, and like, how you survive the horror, you know, is rule number one, [snaps] it's real, yeah? It's actually happening. It's not just in your TV, and then you, then you're a little bit safe, step one, like how to get out of prison, [snaps] you are in prison. Rule number one, right?

So I, I resonate very strongly with what you're saying, and I thank you very much for saying it, cause it's key. Yeah?

Audience member: I guess I already have the mic, so I'm gonna ask the [laughter] question here: thank you so much for coming and being here, it's been amazing to hear you in person, and I loved how you kept returning to that, [clears throat] that moment, I guess, of inspiration but not knowing, and the sort of like –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- knowing and not knowing at the same time.

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: And then talking about sort of being this person who is in this state of sadness, and sort of coming to, and, and talking about these things, and I guess, and it, and I was thinking about it during it, and have been thinking about it in relation to climate, with, the level of grief –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- the collective grief –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- is sort of related to the, the level of love –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- you know, and how much we actually, like, I think, whether we know at all or not, love [clears throat] what, this biosphere that we're in –

Morton: Right on.

Audience member: -- and sort of like how do we –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- come from a place of devastation –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- and, and move through that, and then what you just said is what I was kinda thinking, which was that love can save the, the biosphere, maybe. And this is something, and I don't, I hope this doesn't sound too eros, eso, um, esoteric, and I promise I'm not –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- trying to be silly, but [clears throat] that, the collective love I feel like has something to do with the collective grief –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- and I guess my question for you is, do you feel like if we can convey this love big enough to the universe, that the universe can, like, love us back?

Morton: Right on. (01:19:57)

Audience member: And then that power can fight the tyranny and things that you were talking about.

Morton: Yeah. I, I will just preface this by saying I am a huge, massive Pollyanna, and I try to see the good in everything. I feel this is my job as a literary critic, for example, I try to see the good in what I'm reading, where's the gateway to utopia in this poem, right?

I like to see overlaps between people, rather than contradictions. Right, the where, where do we overlap, you know? I'm also deeply influenced by a Dagara shaman, called Sobonfu Somé, who I haven't talked about enough in my work, but, every time I talk about grief, if you've read me, it's be, under the influence of Sobonfu, who trained me a little bit how to understand, study the grief, right?

Sobonfu's world is based on, was based on – she died in 2017. The reason why I know her is because one of my very best two friends in the world was her personal assistant, right? And, you know, she was the shaman in her village, right, and she was everybody's mom, but she wasn't a mom herself, right? And that whole village is predicated on grief rituals, right?

You know, you, you have to know how to grieve to do anything else, right? So you're gonna get, getting married, you're gonna have a grief ritual; have a dispute with your brother, you have a grief ritual. You wanna put new windows on your house, you have a grief ritual. Right? They're so busy having grief rituals, they're not, don't have time to take over the world. You know.

And it's the, it's definitely the missing piece in America, where there's PTSD from like 500 years of, plus, of slavery, everyone's got it, and some people are like, 'Oh, no, I don't, bleh!' It's even in the word woke, this horrible mocking sound of the, the mocking of an African-American word from the slavery time said by a white allied person in this word woke. The mockery of it contains a little hint of something that I see in Antonio Banderas' *Puss in Boots*, in the movie. Yeah? When, at the end, he says, [adopting accent] 'No matter what happens next, I will not cry!' [laughter] And it's like, the word, the very word woke implies that [snapping] you're already waking up. Right?

This, the genie's out of the bottle. Right? The fascism's trying to put it back in, it's not gonna be able to. Cause it's not made out of plastic, it's made out of the shimmery, it's made out of the future – it's from the future. You can't destroy it. Cause it comes from the future. Yeah? And what grief is is the past correctly deployed as a kind of inner body worker to give the future a massage. Right? So that it can be different.

I only just learned how to grieve about four years ago, and I was in this hotel in Rotterdam, and I thought, oh, I've got eight hours to kill, I might as well just collapse with grief about my entire existence, and so, grief came [laughter] – yeah. Grief came along and said, but, I know this is gonna sound really stupid, but, lie in bed on the fetal position, and I'm gonna palpate your abs for a while, and you're gonna cry, and you're gonna want to

throw up, and it's gonna be horrible, beautiful, and at the end, I'm gonna just leave you. At an unspecified time. Remember to drink lots of water! And then I will return, at a time of my choosing. Right?

And I say the water thing because after it had happened, I'm like texting Carlyle, and Carlyle, I can do it! I can grieve! Cause Sobonfu would come around the house, and she'd be like, so how are you doing, Tim? And I can feel the grief coming up inside me, and, oh, my god, I'm going to lie to Sobonfu – and, I'm okay! Everything's fine! And she's a grief specialist, so she can see everything is totally not fine, but she's very kind, so she's not gonna, like, push me. You know. And Carlyle said, drink lots of water, and it's then that I realized, oh, [snaps] it really is a kind of body work. It's your past trying to give your future a massage. Right? It's beautiful. There's at least one thing in the world that's bigger than your ego, and that's the grief, right? And, and, when you relate to it properly, it's actually trying to lubricate the future. So it can be different. Yeah?

There's nothing to be scared of, it's just that the antechamber of grief is called panic, you know panic? It's the, it's the democrat feeling. It's the everything feeling, right, it comes from the word pan, which means everything – it's everything, [snapping] joy, pain, sorrow, everything, all bundled together, and you don't want it! You don't want it, right, that's the, that's the panic. Get this off of me. As soon as you're like, wait a minute, I can't get it off of me, it's eternally stuck to me, then you're in the grief chamber, you're not in the antechamber of panic anymore. And then you can relax, but you relax in the form of a massive sobbing, you know, could be public. Yeah?

If, if Americans could just learn to grieve together a bit, you know? I don't know how many decades of truth and reconciliation it's gonna take, with one Desmond Tutu for every major city in the USA. [laughter] But we should do it. As a, as a precondition for creating a more ecologically just world.

And that, and that's how to – the, the universe loves you already, is what I want to say. You know, it's really, it's the corny, you know, like, this is the trouble, Joe truck driver has the antidote to the environmental speech. Cause the environmental speech is in the key of revenge. It's mostly people like me saying, you're gonna be laughing on the other side of your face when you find out the science was right!

Like my friend Adam McKay made a movie called *Don't Look Up*, and it's about an, a comet that's coming to destroy the earth, and the mainstream media isn't covering it, but guess what, Joe truck driver from Houston knows there's a comet coming to destroy the earth, it's called the Book of Revelation, he knows that the mainstream media isn't covering it, but Joe truck driver knows something that the movie doesn't know: Joe truck driver knows – I'm gonna say a thing now and you're gonna hate it. Yeah? The corniest, stupidest, most exclusive version of this thing is, so sorry, better than any revenge discourse. Namely, Jesus loves you anyway.

Okay, there's a comet coming to destroy the earth, but Jesus loves me anyway. Until people like me learn to talk to Jesus loves you anyway, we're never gonna talk to MAGA

guy. We're never gonna get MAGA guy, so we're never [snaps] gonna get China, so we're never gonna get India, so we're never – and that's assuming that there's still some oomph in the US of A. Right?

So, in order for this to work, we gotta go through the grief tunnel, we gotta be, people like me gotta be humble enough to talk mercy, cause Joe truck driver understands mercy, and unbelievably, I don't. I talk revenge. Yeah? And mercy is bigger than revenge, and grief is like all of your whole life, kind of having mercy on you, in the key of massaging your abs, and making the future be different, right? So Jesus loves you anyway, the universe loves you anyway. Right? You're, my, my problem is I don't want to let it in, cause I'm an abuse survivor.

Audience member: Hi there. [laughing] I'm back here. I want to thank you for the conversation tonight. And as I listen to your talk, I came to a lot of different thinking about nature, and one of the things that struck me on a fundamental layer about nature is how animals don't make unnecessary judgments; they make judgments based upon their environment, what they need to do, they –

Morton: Mmm.

Audience member: -- survive, and one of the things I'm curious about, over the past hour, listening to you, is your thoughts about judgement –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- and in particular about unnecessary judgement.

Morton: Right on.

Audience member: -- which I think is an aspect of contemporary life that –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- is not terribly elevated.

Morton: Right on.

Audience member: Judgement seems to be quick, fast –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- sometimes correct, sometimes perhaps wrong.

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- and given your wisdom, I'm curious what you, how you respond to that.

Morton: Well, that's really kind of you. I would like to quote my therapist; I was in twenty-four years of psychoanalysis before I figured out there was a problem with me, and then I went into three years of EMDR, from there, cause it was so imprint, embedded, yeah? So I must have really liked this guy, cause I paid him like six figures of money, [laughter] over twenty-four years, wow. And Bob would say, 'There's only two kinds of people in the world: people who, who know they're judgmental, and people who say they're not.' [laughter] Right?

I am the most judgmentalist – I'm just gonna preface this, pref, preface this by saying I, I love being judgmental. I am so judgmental, judging, judging, judging, right? And it's very important, right? That is wrong, you know? Like, the last time a white guy in a university said something in the humanities, said something like Jesus didn't say that, you need to re-read your Bible, was in 1960 something and it was probably Northrop Frye, right? And then suddenly there was this invisible unwritten memo that people like me shouldn't say stuff like that anymore, and [snaps] then MAGA showed up. After we'd given everyone the Internet. Let's give everyone this totally free space that is totally lawless, what could go wrong? We work in a monastery, we're totally safe. Right?

Audience member: That's not the question I asked.

Morton: Absolutely it isn't, I understand completely.

Audience member: I asked [PHRASE UNCLEAR] --

Morton: Yes. And I would love, I would love to get to that, I'm just prefacing it by confessing that I'm a, I'm a – I'm evil. I'm a bad, I'm a baddie, you know, because I, I put [laughter] part of it, a little bit is, for me, please, please agree with me, don't, being a good teacher means thinking that you're a bit of a rubbish teacher, right, that being a good question answerer, and think, oh my god, I'm not answering your question properly. (01:30:01) Being a good parent means thinking you might be a bit of a rubbish parent. Yeah? Please say yes. Being a truly great country means realizing you might be a bit of a shit country. [laughter] Right? That's the feeling of good. The feeling of good is, I am poisoned. I'm contaminated, I'm bad. Evil. I can't get it off me, I can't fly a plane into it, I can't fly a drone over it, right?

It's perfectly possible, therefore, to suspend your judgment. It's, and I would like to argue, actually, that it's much more pervasive in the biosphere than you might think. And that actually, this suspension of judgment goes at least down to insects, because bees have been observed – this is crazy, right, but I've got the *Nature* articles on my computer, if you need, but like, ants hesitate, right? They circumspect, they make ants walk up a little ladder and they look around like, mm, what's going on? They're not just automata following blindly. They're not al, they're not just droids, you know? The animal versus human

boundary is often a – and you're not saying this, but it's often a machine versus person boundary, which maps onto a slave versus master boundary. Right?

So instead of that, it might be good to make this concept of person really, really cheap, which might mean, first of all, scientifically finding, as has happened, that bees have little mental maps, and they think about things, and ants hesitate, and rats have a sense of regret. They really do, I have the articles on my computer. Right? They, that, the, the, these are all forms of hesitation. And I think in general, life just kind of is hesitation, right? So that kind of suspension is built in. And a, a, a, as an example of the suspension, you could argue that every single thing that you guys are doing in your studios right now is a form of very intelligent hesitation, where you don't need to come up with the solution. You know?

When I write a book, I'm always trying to say thing that I don't know what I'm saying. Can you tell? And, like, I'm, I'm always, like, so I don't quite know what I'm saying until after I've said it. I think the Han Solo, is a, it's a great ethical injunction: I never ask myself that question until after I've done it. You know, Rey's like, is that even possible? Han Solo's like, I never ask myself that question until after I've done it. It's like, yeah, that's, absolutely. You know? So, whoa, what did I just do? You know, it's almost default sentience, is this hesitation, right? Like, did I leave the gas on? Uhh? Like, that, in a way, déjà vu, which is your brain hesitating on a very fundamental level, is the default consciousness, in a way. You think it's the exception, [snaps] but actually maybe it's the default, like, wait a minute, have we had this conversation before? I don't know, uh? Yeah? That Scooby Doo kind of, eh? That sort of thing, maybe that's the de, the default, right? The default confusion. It's also in the esoteric Buddhism, they say that primordial realities of confusion, enlightenment is, and confusion are like coexisting, together. Yeah. And, like, like a really great book, like I say to my PhD students, you know, that a really great PhD is just really intelligent confusion. With a lot of footnotes. Right. You don't have to be right, [laughter] you just have to be intelligently very, very confused. Yeah? I, I – this is why people don't like my stuff, right?

I love what you're saying, because it's actually suggesting that it is possible to suspend the, the, the violence of a, of a judgment, and I truly believe that that's the case. And I, I would like to argue that it's, it's a lot easier than we think, because we're sort of made out of it, is, would, would be my answer to your, to your question, right? That it's our, it's our default condition of being alive that is then reflected as a default condition of thinking as such. And gets into all, lots of lovely places, so that the feeling that you have when you, the thing called cute, or the thing called beautiful, is default to being sentient at all, this kind of uneasy kind of wow, yeah, wow, that, ah – whoa. You know, somebody put the Spandau Ballet on. Ah-ah, ah-ah, ah, ah. Beauty is the feeling of true. Yeah?

Or even better, to put the P.M. Dawn, "Set Adrift on Memory Bliss?" It's a brilliant deconstruction of the Spandau Ballet. Vulpining whoop of male conquest. Be, with a sense of nostalgia and loss, and I can't quite hold it – that's all part of the beauty, you know. And the ethics, right? Like I, I don't, I wanted her to be a big PM Dawn fan, but I'm not going to, cause I can see that she's got a ring on her finger, so I'm not, I'm just gonna, I'm not gonna, I'm gonna suspend, I'm gonna hesitate. That's the primordial ethical action. Right? Encoded into the fundamental aesthetic experience, you know? Why to, why you can be right – this

is Emmanuel Kant's argument, like, how you can be right, how you can know that there's a world that's not just a projection of your mind. It's this funny, not quite feeling that isn't really your feeling, called beauty, or cute. Yeah.

Audience member: Hi, Tim.

Morton: Hello.

Audience member: I want to come back to, I think I want more, in this, I've seen through the whole lecture, you talk about how antagonized, the hyper-specificity of things, and kinda how to escape it, and group, and escape it, and regroup –

Morton: Mmm.

Audience member: -- into a different, right? So I think in many, many ways, from the garden, to the jail, to this, to many systems, you analyze kind of the process of literalization [?], and [WORD UNCLEAR]. If I understand well, many examples you put about – so I wonder, it's like, where this power to escape and come back reside? Where, where the powers comes, for you?

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: Please.

Morton: From what are we escaping? Par, par, pardon me, can you rehearse again, what are we escaping from?

Audience member: What?

Morton: From, from, from what are we escaping? Are you, you're saying escaping?

Audience member: Yeah, no –

Morton: What are you saying?

Audience member: -- what do the power, where does the power reside for you when something gets, escape normativity, or escape definitions, and come back to be redefined?

Morton: Uh-huh.

Audience member: In a lot of examples, you were talking about –

Morton: Oh! Yeah.

Audience member: -- this energy that requires –

Morton: I get it.

Audience member: -- to understand that the definition --

Morton: Yeah. The power, yeah – the, the, the beauty of this is, right, so I am fully in the lineage of deconstruction. Everything that I do is in the lineage of Jacques Derrida, in part because Jacques was the first person to be nice to me, you know? [laughter] I, I was his office mate at NYU, and he read my book, and he said it's magnifique, you know, and after I was like, whoa, yeah – the first person in the academy to be nice to me. Other people had been nice to me. Sorry. [laughter]

But he was a lovely guy, yeah? And over time, I kind of ungaslighted myself from the, from the Hegelian – apologies to anyone who's into the Hegelian, you, you, you can be a Marxist without being a Hegelian, I'm sorry to all my friends who are the Hegelians. I've wrote a book with a Hegelian, please don't hurt me, and so, what is deconstruction, it's not destroying things, or taking them apart. Yeah? Cause, cause that's called destroying things, and taking them apart. Deconstruction is bomb disposal, yeah? Deconstruction is you go inside a horrible idea and you cut the blue wire, and you disarm it so it can't hurt anybody ever again. Yeah? It's primordial bomb disposal squad. Yeah? Like Dave in the, *2001*, basically. He goes inside of HAL 9000, pulls the cassettes out, and this computer that's trying to kill everybody is singing "Daisy, Daisy." That's the deconstruction, yeah?

And quite often, everybody's screaming at you, 'Don't cut the blue wire, that's so stupid, why are you cutting that wire, you should, cut the red wire!' And you're like, I know what I'm doing, cause I had a psychopath dad, and I know it is the blue wire. I know to do this, just trust me. Click. And it, hopefully, what I'm doing is I've cut the blue wire. Yeah?

The power is, is, is the big, it's beautiful, it's the lack of power. You know, the power is an inverse power. It's the power cut. Right? I, I'm a Houstonian, we've experienced days of power cuts, especially in my neighborhood. Yeah, like every house is, power cut for like days and days and days. And we all hated it, but I'm gonna use power cut in a more positive way here. Yeah? Where, you know, in Buddhism, it's called wriggle room – no it's not, I call it that! In Buddhism, it's called emptiness; pardon me. [laughter] Buddhism is a grown-up religion that uses grown-up words. And it's called emptiness, yeah? Emptiness is usually enamored of, you know, very intellectual people who like to argue about it, and they, this is emptiness, this is emptiness. And really, emptiness is a feeling. The high level emptiness is an emotion. It's the 'ness' that gives the clue. Sunyata is the Sanskrit. The ta bit means the feeling, the feel. It's the empty feel. What is it, what's the empty feel? It's really this feeling of relief. Right? The Sanskrit syllable is ar. Ahhh. Relief. Thank god, you know, that *Alice in Wonderland*, you know, when I was figuring out I was nonbinary, I was crying a lot, right? (01:40:03) Like, wow, you know, oh my god! And I had this vision of Alice, and she's on trial, and she's looking at the, she's gonna be, off with her head, right? The Queen of Hearts is gonna execute her. And at some point, she's like, wait a minute, you're nothing but a pack of cards.

That [snapping] that feeling, right? This is an illusion. That, right, the relief, oh, that, everything this motherfucker says, on the TV, with his stupid little patch, where is it on his head? You know. Everything that he does, all of the horrible, oppressive, bully faces that he makes is just nothing. It's nothing. It's made out of nothing. It's just a pack of cards. Right? Because you're 3D. You're not 2D. Right? You're, you're bigger than the empirical universe, cause you can understand what I just said. On the inside. You, you're like Dr. Who, the Tardis. You know, everything is a Tardis, really, everything has this infinite insight. Bigger on the inside, yeah?

There's a very moving bit in one of the Dr. Whos where the Tardis incarnates as a woman and she, the first thing she says, it's beautiful – she says, 'Are all people like this?' The doctor's like, what do you mean? And she's bigger on the inside. Yeah. That's how she's feeling, yeah. That feeling, that, ahhhh. It's all just bullshit. Right? That all the love, and the compassion, and the, the activism, the intensity, is coming out of that, right? This primordial feeling of I am the vast outer space. At this very moment, right. You know, like in a few billion years, the Andromeda galaxy – which is visible with your iPhone, I didn't realize this. Even in Houston, you can see it, like, kind of slightly to the north, there's a little, you can even see the elliptical shape of the galaxy, if you magnify it about eight times on the iPhone, you can almost see it. And in a, in a few billion years, this galaxy's gonna intersect with the Milky Way galaxy. Yeah, just remember that. Next time someone tries to make you feel terrible about the next few minutes, right. That's that feeling. Yeah. And that's not the, that's an aikido power, right, like that's using the enemy's energy so they slip on a, their own banana skin. You know, so you don't need the power. You don't need the power. You need the weak. But it sounds totally wrong. It sounds like bullshit. It sounds like, oh, this is just stupid, this is just some guy talking about the value of art to a group of dedicated artists, and funders of those artists, of course he's gonna say something like that, and it's not really gonna mean anything, and I go back to avoiding the world the next day. But I, I mean it. Right? This shimmery kind of, this kind of I have a dream thing is the ray gun, yeah? It's the death ray for the fascism.

Audience member: Hi, Timothy, thank you for your lecture. I would like to ask you about a very specific subject. So, what are your thoughts about abolition of prison system and restorative justice? And I'm interested [laughs] –

Morton: Mmhmmm.

Audience member: -- in knowing your thoughts about this, connecting with some of the core ideas that you were mentioning today, like being kind to each other –

Morton: Yeah.

Audience member: -- I think the experience of the meaningful, and also I can connect it, in a way, to mystery, in general –

Morton: Right on.

Audience member: -- mystery of universe, cause I think those are ongoing, very necessary discussions –

Morton: Right on.

Audience member: -- and it's also, I guess, maybe not, since it is an ongoing discussion, I think it's –

Morton: Mmhmm.

Audience member: -- also being open to like visualize possible scenarios where that system can change, or like, we can think of like actual abolition and –

Morton: Wow.

Audience member: -- restorative justice?

Morton: Yeah, gosh, nobody's asked me this question before.

Audience member: What, sorry?

Morton: Thank you. No one ever asked me this question.

Audience member: [laughs] Okay.

Morton: It's obvious that the USA is like the number one incarcerator of mostly Black people on the planet. And incarcerating so many more people than other countries, it's appalling, yeah? And the way people get, you know, not just, all the mechanics of it, like the pushing the head into the car thing, I never saw that until I came here, this horrible, coercive – you know, I went to get my green card, and they put my head in a clamp to get the perfect three-quarter angle of the, for the head, you know? And it's like what, why are you having to do this Peter Gabriel video level thing with my head? I can hold it perfectly still. And then they gripped my thumb, finger really hard, said, don't look, don't look while we take your fingerprint – why? Because the photons coming out of my eye are gonna interfere with the fingerprint process? What the hell is that all about? There's some kind of arbitrary, because we can thing, you know, because of the legacy of slavery, which by the way is the English people's fault, for creating this shingjang [?], you know, of Europe, you know? Colonizing everywhere.

It's so violent over here, you know – when I, when I think about Foucault, which I have been quite a lot recently, and I think about his concept of the carceral, you know, it's all very obviously explainable by saying plantation. Yeah? You know, and you've got these people with guns on these towers, pointing, just unbelievable from a growing up in Britain point of view. You know, it's the vio – whoa! I can't believe it.

So, you know, as Foucault would say, the first duty of the prisoner is to escape. You know. So I'm on the side of the, I guess I'm on the side of the abolition, yeah? But I'm gonna say something, which is that my, when I was a kid, I knew I was a socialist by the time I was ten years old, but I had this fantasy that Mrs. Thatcher would come with her nasty conservative cabinet, and arrest my father, and all the people responsible for all the bad stuff, and put them in jail. You know. And I, and I have some sympathy for that guy, who had that, who had that feeling. You know, and my, and my mom used to put major sexual abuse people in jail, as a social work, social worker manager person, you know? And my stepdad Morris, also, you know?

So, you know, I, I, I'm afraid I might be a little ambiguous about some of these things, because I haven't had to answer this question before. It's, it's nice to think about it in public, it's sort of exposing to think about it in public. Right? But my, but the big headline is, this is terrible over here. Whatever this is, and should be completely, like, wiped. Think of some other way. Yeah. As part of the restorative justice for the legacy of slavery. For, for a kickoff, you know.

And I'm terrified of going to prison now, because they're gonna define everything, you know, when the Project 2025 says all pornography is banned, it means they can define anything as pornography. So you have a newspaper with a sex advice column, you have pornography. You're gonna go to jail, the newspaper's gonna get, this is gonna happen, right? Everything I write has got weird sexy stuff in it; I'm gonna go to jail. So I'm figuring out what to say when I'm in court. And I, I've got as far as this, which is, you know, do you have anything to say, you nasty, horrible pervert? Yes. The president and this entire system is the pornography. You know, and then they will probably just execute me for saying a rude thing. [laughter]

So I haven't gotten much further than that with my court tactic. There. But that's what I would say if I was being sent down.

Audience member: Hi. What you said about creativity, or the creative practice and the divine really resonated with me, that's an idea that I think about in my practice, and I think it came from undergrad philosophy and Plato, and divine profession –

Morton: Mmm.

Audience member: -- and I just want to hear you talk more about that.

Morton: You, pardon me, I was in a little bit of a fugue state thinking about telling the judge that everything that Trump does is pornography. [audience member laughs] Can you –

Audience member: I'm changing the tone a little, I guess.

Morton: Please. Can you ask the question again, sorry.

Audience member: I want to hear you talk about the divine and its role in the creative practice.

Morton: Oh! Yeah! There was a whole bit of the talk that I deliberately missed out, because I was, it didn't feel like a logical place to go at that point, right? So, so you know there's this thing called Gnosticism, right, and Gnosticism believes that the problem with the world is that it was created by the wrong god. It was created by an idiot, right? We are beautiful, spiritual beings trapped in a universe of horrible matter created by an idiot, who is bungling the creation. Yeah.

I am a flipped gnostic, yeah? In this book, I figure out what I am, I'm a flipped gnostic. Flipped Gnosticism, which is namely, we are beautiful, fragile, vulnerable, finite, physical beings, including all the thoughts that come out of our heads. Yeah? Trapped in a universe of really horrible ideas. Yeah? The ideas are like the demons and the angels. (01:50:00) You can't destroy them, right? They're like cartoon characters, you cut them up, they come back, somebody hits retweet, they just, comes right back. Right? The saving grace of the physical world is that it's finite. Right?

Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's poem, yeah, I love this poem, in part narcissistically, Milton went to the same school I went to, and was also a very poor scholarship boy, learning the operating system of Greek, Latin. He also learned Hebrew. Yeah? And Satan lands on the wall of paradise, and he's looking at paradise, he's like, wow, this is an improvement. This is an improvement on heaven and hell. This is better. Yeah? And he is kind of right, you know, it's like when, when god decided, if the, if god exists, then god decided to create earth, was god really aiming for a worse grade than the grade that they got for the devils? Because that was a C-, right, you create these angels, and they turn into devils, you've got to get them into hell – that's a C- grade, in my class. You know. Now he's going for a D, by creating a physical universe? Really? So, so Satan's onto something there. But what is god was like, I'm giving up on getting a grade at all. I'm gonna totally screw up, completely, I'm gonna, beyond F, I'm just gonna, nothing. Yeah? And the word that the son of god says, that starts off creation, this is the ex deo theory of creation, right? Like the Catholic church is like, god is omnipotent, so god can do anything, so god could create something out of nothing, so god did create something out of nothing, and if you don't believe that, you're a bad person we should torture until you agree. Yeah?

This is ex deo, like what other moral materials does god have around except for god? Right? Like, what else have you got in your studio except for these extensions of your body, which are already extensions of your body? Your finger is already a prosthetic finger, your eye is already an artificial eye, everything is like a quote unquote body, extent, modification. That's your body. Then you have all this clay, and paper, and whatever, right? And the first thing the son of god says in the Milton is, shhhh. You know, all these crazy demon angel thoughts, good, evil, ahhh, shut up! Just for a minute. Quiet. Shhh. Yeah.

The physical world is the mystery of god. Right? The physical world is the, god going, shhhh. Yeah? The unspeakability of god, right, the, the unknowability, the intangibility, the finitude, yeah, god is also, in that sense, finite, not because god is tape

measure two inches big, or whatever, but because there is an intrinsic unknowability. Yeah? And this is the saving grace of the world, right? I've been in so many studios where there's the clay. My favorite smell is petrichor. Right? The smell of dust after rain, sort of the wet clay smell. I love that. This petrichor, to me, is how the mystery of the universe smells. If mystery has a smell, it's this beautiful wet clay smell. That sort of opacity. Beautiful, yeah?

The whole ceramic idea is really beautiful, you know, like this, Alan Marks [?] really mocks this thing he calls the ceramic model, you know. But that's really just mocking Aristotle, which is cool, cause it's this sort of white boy, sort of, I'm gonna create something out of this malleable plastic, that's not anything to do with actual clay. Yeah? And I've been learning so much about it from you guys these last few days.

But even there is petrichor in thought. There is opacity, not just in language, cause it's made of little squiggles, but in thought itself, there is this opacity. In truth, there is this opacity. It's called Gödel's incompleteness theorem. Any logical system, in order to be coherent, must be incomplete. In other words, it has to be able to say not just nonsense, which is ruled out by the logicity, but it's able to, you can twist it into a little yoga pretzel and make it say bullshit, that's the, Gödel's incompleteness theorem, but the other part of it is it can say true things that can't be proved. There are some things in this universe, potentially, that are true, but you can't prove them. That's beautiful. Yeah? You can't design a Google AI software to figure out every single thing in the universe. No AI will be able to predict when every other AI will or will not go into an infinite loop. That's the Alan Turing proof of Gödel's incompleteness theorem. Actually. You can't build a computer program powerful enough, even if you ran that program for trillions of times longer than the universe, it wouldn't be able to predict when every other one will or will not go into an infinite loop. Right? You can't, om, omniscience is impossible. Yeah, Google's trying for it, that's why it's so violent. Cause you can't achieve it. Yeah?

Or put it another way, to go back to a thing Daniel was saying, we're landing in Monty Python. Yay. You can't find a police officer with enough authority to arrest all the other police officers, and everybody else, in the argument sketch, because as soon as that police officer comes into the argument sketch, they're in the argument sketch. You need another police officer! It's this infinite regress. Right? There's never a powerful enough police officer to arrest all the other ones; there's never a powerful enough metalanguage to describe all the other languages without itself being an object language, that is, without being able to say mysterious things that it can't define. Yeah?

Fundamentally, the, the, the top level, or the bottom level, or the whatever level of the universe is this opaque, yeah, poetry. Yeah? It's the top level. The mystery, silence, and the, and the trick is to make things with words, and symbols, and, and paint, and meaningfulness, that convey this kind of sssshhhh quality, yeah? As a political act, because when you do it, and this is kind of left Kantianism, yeah? This is left – you can be a, you don't have to be Hegelian left, you can be Kantian left, and you can say, to allow people to remember that they are the Tardis, they are the infinite on the inside, and they're bigger than this. Transcendentally bigger, not tape measure bigger. But 3D. Yeah? 3D.

And so the smell of wet clay in your studio should be a very liberating smell, you know, or any kind of opaque paper surface, whatever that is that, whatever is that for you, that opacity quality is the saving grace of the world. Yeah. And that's what I have to say about the, about the divine. [applause, cheering]

END OF RECORDING