

Technological Multiplicity for Traversing the Anthropocene

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When I say “climate crisis,” or “Anthropocene,” what comes to mind? Biological and chemical pollutants saturating the air, water, and soil? Unstable climate ruining crops and resources, their scarcity skyrocketing prices and causing international conflict? Or mass extinctions and loss of biodiversity? “Anthropocene” as a geochronological term indicates an era where the changes of Earth and its environments are primarily and *detrimentally* defined by human activity. While prevalent notions of the Anthropocene as a discourse and narrative is characterised by its *impending* nature, it is in fact neither prophetic nor prognostic. The Anthropocene must be recognised as a phenomenon shaped and exacerbated by a continued process of historical and semiotic erasure, made possible by the intersection of colonial, imperial, and capital power. It is a past *and* present reality which will continue if we do not transform our awareness and inform our actions.

This presentation draws from my thesis, questioning hegemonic narratives in order to destabilise them—to open up what Deleuze would call a “smooth space” in place of a singular verticality, reestablishing a plurality of enunciations, a *multiplicity* of experience. To facilitate revolutions of thought and social relations—that is, relations with the self, others, and the Earth—we must first explore what constitutes our common understanding of the Anthropocene. Geographer Kathryn Yusoff posits that it began *not* with the Industrial Revolution or 20th century Great Acceleration, but with 16th century New World colonisation. This chronological dissonance implies centuries of stifled experiences. The displacement and extraction endured by

black and brown people is a perverse transubstantiation—a metamorphosis from human to object, turning subjectivity, vitality, and agency into silent, inert resources to be used in global North economies. Dehumanised and objectified into energy and material, they are easily condensed into and identified with extractive economies such as gold, cotton, oil, electricity, and most recently information, to mention a few. Current standards of global production and consumption are in fact made possible by the economic growth first generated by historical mass extractive practices like institutional slavery. Technological development, production, and consumption under what I term the “techno-industrial paradigm,” relies on the outsourced extraction of people, labor, and resources *as one*. The global South isn’t an unintended consequence, but rather an integral part of the now-industrialised continuation of the global economic formula. The reification of colonised people and the international establishment of the techno-industrial paradigm are manifestations of the same ontological transformation. On one hand, it delegitimises and suppresses expressions of precolonial life, and on the other it globally reproduces centralising, hegemonic notions of technology, production, and consumption. This singular, *vertical* conception of technology is utilised to sterilise Anthropocenic discourse of much of its complex socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and political contexts, reducing it to a scientific “climate crisis” matter which *ironically* concerns “all of humanity” equally.

The Anthropocene takes technology as essential, but only when discussed within the delineation of the techno-industrial paradigm—hindering any potential for radical changes in awareness and sustained action. The result instead is the belief and reliance on technology as the panacea for humanity’s problems—anything from the umbrella of “sustainable technology,” such as alternative energy sources and bioengineering, to escapist fantasies of terraforming and

colonising other planets sought by techno-optimistic billionaires. This technological soteriology assumes that unsustainable ways of being and operating can remain unchanged while saving humanity, caricaturing its potential. The techno-industrial paradigm's dominance in thought and language is even reflected in conventional definitions of technology, presupposing Eurocentric industrial standards and providing a center to which all other technological paradigms are compared—*regardless* of differing material culture and productive conditions.

My project is also to destabilise that primacy. This is why my discussion of technology, based on sociologist Read Bain's definition, includes "all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices, and—[most importantly]—the *skills* by which we produce and use them." This definition enables technology to be conceived of as a mediator between humans and their physical and social environments, manifesting disparate conceptions of social relations. Bain's definition encompasses technologies from different times and places, facilitating the expression of non-Euro-American traditional or indigenous lifestyles—toppling vertical hierarchy, establishing plurality, and encouraging equal evaluation of all technological paradigms. Even dichotomies like "culture vs nature," "sophisticated vs primitive," and "productivity vs inefficiency" globally taken as axioms can be subverted. Humans everywhere have developed technology to a state of excellence through their own culturally-bound systems of thought, such that each generative paradigm reaches a maturity within its social, cultural, and resource contexts. The pejorative "primitive" now only maintains a power relation between groups of people, used by those whose lack of awareness designates the deviating "other" as *inferior*. I thus construct a horizontal relation and interaction between

diverse technologies and their mediating principles, establishing a *plane of consistency* from which new conceptions and combinations of technology may proliferate.

I must clarify that my emphasis on nonwestern indigenous technologies is not to serve some noble savage argument romanticising an image of pure, primordial humanity, but rather to give much-needed attention to nonglobalised models of producing and consuming technology. These paradigms develop and operate *attending and according* to local immanent conditions and resources, *rather* than relying on international standards, commerce, and aesthetics which follow an alienating schema of modern rationality. My opposition of transcendent ideals with material immanence as modes of technological generation would be considered by Deleuze as tendencies which produce homogenous singularity in contrast to heterogeneous plurality. These polarities, however, are heuristic—temporarily constructed to analyse and compare technological mediation between humans and their environments. Technologies from the techno-industrial paradigm develop depending on international consumptive desires—the usage, production, and distribution of which tend to rely on automation without differentiation and regard to context. Their design intends to subjugate nature to humanistic brilliance, resulting in the alienation of users from their physical and social contexts. Contrarily, non-globalised indigenous paradigms tend to treat nature as a foundation of every aspect of technological development, serving to integrate its users with immanent social and material conditions. This encourages local self-sufficiency, which is especially relevant to our current situation where regional shortages are caused by a dependence on collapsed international distribution.

These practical, temporary dialectics set up an agonistic process which enables the interweaving of unique generative paradigms into a multiplicity of technology. This patchwork

assemblage prevents organisations of power from ossifying and constraining potentials for change. Technological multiplicity provides a mutually supportive dynamic for cross-referencing and supplementing appropriate alternatives to local conditions. It is a tool to rein in the harmful tendencies of *any* technological paradigm, not only the inhuman acceleration and subsumption of prevailing industrial technology, as *none* are immune to usage as hegemonic, exploitative systems. Any maintainable approach for recuperating the world from the Anthropocenic crisis needs to extend beyond mere discourse of “climate change” and technological salvation, to a post-Anthropocenic conception of social relations. As a self-critical epistemic framework, technological multiplicity alters our expectations of what technology *is* and *can be*, thus fundamentally reiterating its role within the Anthropocene. Furthermore, it cultivates an awareness of how each and every one of us participate in causative systems of hegemony—whether it’s called class consciousness or milieu awareness. To conclude, technological multiplicity can potentially restore our enunciation, agency, and resilience. Interwoven heterogenous technologies will inevitably evolve our ideas of the self, others, and Earth, an essential first step in a process of changing productive and consumptive paradigms. A means to navigate and potentially escape the current echo chamber that perpetuates the Anthropocene, I propose technological multiplicity as a way to re-humanise technology through healthy mediation, restoring social and physical environments, and cultivating new empathy. Thank you.