

individualistic colour of ideology. Enjoyment transgresses the biological coordinates of pleasure – enjoyment is not only located beyond the finitude of the individual, but beyond any determinate aim or determinate object relation. This is one of Freud’s principal theses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a thesis which is even more clearly furnished by Laplanche’s (and to an extent Lacan’s) reading of Freud. We enjoy abstractly, without any stable formula of enjoyment, divorced from the specific thing which we claim to enjoy – since this thing itself does not exist. Enjoyment is constructed on the ground of a non-relation (a ‘lack’ in Lacanian terms), and thus persists only by relinquishing any immediate pleasure.

The death drive signifies an enjoyment that denies pleasure, denies life. For example, the traumatic realisation of the absence of the maternal phallus, the recognition that castration is immanent, and that free, individualised desire is impossible. The coordinates, in other words, in which fetishism emerges – these events are not pleasurable, and yet lay the ground for an excessive, destructive enjoyment. Fetishist enjoyment turns away from life and towards death: an enjoyment (e.g. of a shoe) that counters reproduction.

What Zupančič fails to consider is an enjoyment that rejects pleasure (the pleasure in continuing to live as if ‘everything is okay’). Deleuze’s understanding of habit becomes relevant here: habit is a formal mode of constructing ‘sense’ by grounding what is repeated through the very act of repeating it. Habit is, according to this definition, a political factor: it is often not with a direct avowal, but with a retroactive justification, that political formations arise. It is by acting first, and grounding the

intention of this act after, that we can persistently drive ourselves towards catastrophe. Repetition justifies itself – it is not the thing being repeated, but the principle of repetition itself.

Disavowal as a ‘knowledge that does not know itself’ is an important political factor. Although it has been more popularised by Žižek, Zupančič remains faithful to its conceptual origin (discussing its implication for Freud and Mannoni) whilst impressively constructing her argument in accordance with the ontological categories of knowledge and being, thereby grounding disavowal as a social-ontological function in a way which eludes Žižek’s discussions of the concept. Yet disavowal obscures a more impersonal political factor: a habitual-destructive enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle.

In order to approach today’s dominant political antagonisms, the image of humanity as acting in the service of individualistic pleasure must be abandoned. The perceived ‘self-sacrifice’ of QAnon and related conspiracy theories, the desolate world-outlook of reactionary populism including its performative animation in Trump, and even the formless indifference with which liberal democracies support an increasingly exploitative and destructive techno-capitalism, reveal an ideological movement unaccounted for by pleasure alone. The colour of the contemporary political landscape is one in which a psychology of pleasure – under which disavowal can be subsumed – is insufficient. What should be stressed is the political dimension of the death drive, of an impersonal, pleasure-less enjoyment which retroactively formulates what it is repeating.

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Perpetually thinking beyond

Yuk Hui, *Machine and Sovereignty: For a Planetary Thinking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024). 368pp., £23.99 pb., 978 1 51791 741 8

When did the awareness of living on a planet first start to emerge? This is a difficult question since its various implications did not all arrive in the same time and place. Ideas of a spherical Earth and heliocentrism can be traced back at least to the writings of Ancient Greece. But the

likes of Aristarchus of Samos would have been unable to conceive of the Copernican trauma that now underlies the profane image of Planet Earth revealed by modern astronomy, 150 million kilometres from the sun, awaiting solar death 5 billion years in the future. Nor would

Copernicus, Galileo or Bruno have been able to foresee the increasing technological transformations of Earth and its inhabitants.

It is common now to hear that human societies are technologically determined, that technology is akin to an alien force rewriting human nature and that artificial technology will lead to catastrophic wars or even the end of humanity. We can think of the reaction of Martin Heidegger when he first saw the images of Earth made possible by the emerging technologies of space exploration and satellite imaging, declaring that Western metaphysics had culminated in cybernetics and that ‘only a God can save us’. We can only imagine what he would say of our current situation, in which many consider his warnings to have come to fruition.

It is this situation which Yuk Hui tackles in his recent work, *Machine and Sovereignty*, envisioned as the third volume in a series comprising *Recursivity and Contingency* (2019) and *Art and Cosmotronics* (2021). This recent work brings his excursion within the philosophy of technology into contact with political philosophy. These two domains, he argues, can no longer be thought in separation and he describes this work as a first attempt at writing a *Tractatus Politico-Technologicus*. The ultimate goal Hui sets himself is to imagine the conditions for peaceful and harmonious modes of life at the planetary scale through an embrace of cybernetics.

Unlike Heidegger, Hui is not fatally pessimistic about the potentials of cybernetics, which he argues is often uncritically reduced to ‘surveillance capitalism or societies of control’. Rather, Hui contends that new political possibilities can be opened through a reconceptualisation of technology and he seeks to understand how cybernetics can become the basis for ‘planetary happiness’, a notion he likens to Kant’s idea of ‘perpetual peace’, which is the telos of what Hui terms ‘planetary thinking’:

To think planetarily, first of all, means thinking beyond the configuration of modern nation-states, which have not been able to move away from vicious economic and military competition; second, it means formulating a language of coexistence that will allow diverse people and species to live on the same planet; and third, developing a new framework that will enable us to go beyond the question of territory, respond to the current ecological crisis, and reverse the accelerated entropic process of the Anthropocene.

Alongside Heidegger, Hui engages with a wide range of thinkers who engage with the philosophy of technology, ranging from Lewis Mumford, Gilbert Simondon and André Leroi-Gourhan to Bruno Latour and his mentor Bernard Stiegler. He also draws liberally on wider philosophy, including at times Chinese philosophers, although he is primarily concerned with critiquing and overcoming the limits of the Western philosophical tradition and its conceptualisation of an all consuming *technic*, which has animated his previous expositions of ‘cosmotronics’ and ‘technodiversity’. Yet, in line with his intention to embrace the political dimensions of technology, the book is largely centred around his engagement with Hegel and Schmitt, who both rejected Kant’s vision of a ‘world republic’ and who figure respectively as the thinkers of the nation-state and the *Großräume*.

A key concept that underlies Hui’s exploration of political philosophy is ‘political epistemology’. Hui argues that distinct political epistemologies emerge to justify the different iterations of the Mumfordian megamachine as it evolves and develops. The most prominent examples of political epistemologies are ‘mechanism’ and ‘organicism’, with Kant’s organicism in *The Critique of Judgement* figuring as the critical rupture between prior mechanistic philosophies and the organicist understanding of thinkers like Hegel. For Hui, the machine and the organism are not simply metaphors but serve as ‘ideal models of human society’ which can emerge within all aspects of existence. However, in line with wider attitudes to the binary logic of modernity, Hui argues that the dichotomy of mechanism-organicism has been overcome by the cybernetics of modern technology.

The first three chapters are dedicated to Hegel. Hui identifies ‘world spirit’ as a form of planetary thinking, exploring how Hegel’s philosophy can track and explain the emergence of planetary self-awareness through its synchronisation of all distinct civilisations and cultures into a single world history. At the same time, he criticises the limitations of Hegel’s Eurocentrism and turns to the work of Georgescu-Roegen on ‘bioeconomy’ to remedy the absence of entropy and other ecological limitations within Hegel’s dialectical framework.

Hegel is described on numerous occasions as a prototypical thinker of cybernetics, with ‘dialectics’ and ‘reflection’ being likened respectively to ‘recursivity’ and ‘feedback’. Hegel’s logic is not depicted as a romanti-

cist analogy of the organic, but is organicist because of its openness to individuation and contingency, with Hui likening it to ‘a monster capable of engulfing every form of existence’. The works of Teilhard de Chardin and Lovelock are described as having continued this Hegelian-esque cybernetics, both having positioned the evolution of intelligence within a more explicitly planetary-cybernetic model. Hui’s central interest lies in determining how these Hegelian cybernetic tendencies might ultimately surpass Hegel’s own state-centric vision articulated in the *Philosophy of Right*.



Hui’s main point of criticism concerns Hegel’s claim that the freedom of the world spirit culminates in a global order comprised of distinct and divided nation-states. For Hegel, ‘there is an organicity of the state but no organicity among the states’, a limitation which Hui strongly opposes in his search for a political form adequate to planetary happiness. In chapter six he discusses two possible ‘paths’ for cybernetic evolution: the ‘perfection’ of the nation-state system through artificial intelligence or the construction of a ‘digital earth’ which brings forth some new political form beyond Hegel’s organismic state.

It is attempting to determine what this new political form might be which draws Hui towards Schmitt.

The fourth and fifth chapters investigate the thought of Schmitt. As with Hegel, Hui seeks to draw upon Schmitt’s own conceptualisations to go beyond his conclusions. He first critiques the Christian bias of Schmitt’s ‘political theology’, arguing that political epistemology is a better tool for understanding the current political forms which should not be reduced to a Western perspective. Hui then affirms that Schmitt’s accomplishment was his overcoming of the mechanism-organicism binary within his theory of ‘decisionism’. Also termed ‘political vitalism’, decisionism disrupts the automation of the state through the sovereign’s decision over the state of exception, which figures as the vital force of the state.

Schmitt therefore provides a conceptual basis to imagine how the state of exception could resist a homogenising technologisation of the planet in favour of ‘technodiversity’. Hui is attracted by Schmitt’s understanding of technology and sovereignty and his desire for plurality, but he is simultaneously opposed to Schmitt’s Nazism, his state-centric conceptualisation of the political and the foundational role enmity plays in the political form of the *Großräume*.

Hui argues that Schmitt’s *Großräume* is insufficient to ensure true plurality in response to the homogenisation underlying the new spatial revolution of ‘digital earth’, whereby the megamachine and sovereignty are no longer bounded by the form of the state, proposing that ‘true plurality’ requires another political epistemology as its foundation, that of ‘organology’. This is a term originally used by Canguilhem in relation to Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* and inherited by Simondon and Steigler. It was previously discussed by Hui in *Recursivity and Contingency* and is about the overcoming of the boundary between humanity and machines. As the focus of the sixth chapter, it functions as an ‘alternative way to understand the relation between the state and technology’, one opposed to technological determinism.

Hui ultimately positions technodiversity alongside biodiversity and noodiversity as part of a framework for planetary thinking, with diversity seeming to figure as both a political ideal and practical means of resisting entropy, within which he argues that the ‘question of diversity has to be thought of fundamentally from the

perspective of technology.’ His concern is with how an organological conception of technology can lead to the necessary political forms, beyond the nation-state and the *Großräume*, to ensure such diversity.

In the final chapter, we find an elaboration and final discussion of how a planetary thinking framed by biodiversity, noodiversity and technodiversity can open up new possibilities outside of homogenising universalism, geopolitical hostility and technological determinism. Hui proposes ‘epistemological diplomacy’ as a basis for ‘new forms of communication beyond the state’ which would ensure the heterogeneity of localities. It remains somewhat underdeveloped, but he envisions it as superseding the current modes of diplomacy focused on economic and militaristic matters, towards the ‘development of programs that might facilitate the development of technodiversity, noodiversity, and biodiversity.’

He aligns his vision with Kant’s world republic, and also its recent reformulation by Karatani in *Structures of World History*, whom he agrees with in spirit if not in detail. Hui wants to imagine a planet beyond military and economic aggression, beyond the state and the market, in which technology, humanity and ecology can all flourish in diverse ways.

However, if one expects any clear and practical proposals then the final chapter will be disappointing. In concrete terms, it is much easier for Hui to tell us what his vision of planetary happiness does not consist of and at times it is easy to wonder if any substantial insights undergird all the neologisms and philosophical references. He can only approach planetary thinking in the most abstract terms, a world where organic diversity and mechanical production proliferate symbiotically and humanity has overcome competition and warfare without being subsumed into some homogenised universal.

In the sixth chapter he opens up a discussion concerning Bergson and mysticism, referring to it as ‘a much

larger and more powerful force capable of deploying mechanism for its own service.’ He also equates it with the Bergsonian term ‘attachment to life’ and positions it as a ‘deviation from the homogeneity of mechanization and a movement toward the new vocation of machines.’ From Bergson he also adopts the language of spiritualisation and part of his argument in the final chapter is that ‘the spiritualization of matter has to take place by contesting the homogenization of digital technology that has been solely guided by speed and efficiency.’

Hence, whilst Hui’s thinking is engagingly erudite, comprehensive and provocative, the reader will wonder what it would take for his abstract vision to truly become concretised. While the monotheistic bias of Heidegger might not befit Hui’s cosmological stance, are we still desperately awaiting some divine power to set our Spaceship Earth on the right course? It is hard to escape this question, but Hui’s turn to the mystical can also be seen as his attempt to dislocate his project from any homogenising rationality, to open up a space for what his occasional interlocutor, Viveiros de Castro, might term ‘ontological anarchism’, and hence to immanentise the negentropic possibilities of diversification.

Hui has become an increasingly influential philosophical voice concerning the question of technology and in this pursuit of its political dimensions there is much to engage with. While Hui cannot himself depict the future of planetary happiness in detail, the fact that he has not given up on it is undoubtedly a good sign. His work is a noble step towards the uncovering of regulative principles which could guide the development of a cybernetic planet beyond the current horizons of devastating warfare, economic uncertainty and ecological collapse, towards more bountiful, harmonious and spiritual possibilities. Whether such a planet can ever actualise, remains, perhaps perpetually, to be seen.

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