***Technès* Politics in *Porous-Ecosystem***

Chien-Hung Huang

The transindividual passes into the individual as an individual passes to another individual; the individual personalities are constituted as whole through anabiosis and not by agglomeration or by specializing organization as in the biological grouping of cooperation and specialization of working.”

Gilbert Simondon, 1964

As the Anthropocene becomes a much-debated subject in global contemporary art discourse (beginning with the research and exhibition project *Anthropocene Curriculum* inaugurated by Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) in 2010) and geology and thinking about technology have transformed the setting of art exhibitions, everything from colonial modernity and animism to techno-archaeology, climate change, critical zones and even synthesized critiques of the colonial domination of science and technology have drawn open a spectrum oriented towards interdisciplinary knowledge. Following her works related to the history of global energy coloniality, Ayoung Kim has reorganized the relationship between the avant-garde individual and ‘nature’ with the turn towards materiality, technology, knowledge (legends, cosmology and ecology) and identity in her artistic projects *Petrogenesis*, *Petra Genetrix* (2019, 2021), the *Porosity Valley* series (2017-2020) and the *Surisol Underwater Lab* series(2020, 2021, 2022). Twin types of individualization can be observed in these works: first, the ontological individuation of the avant-garde individual in narrative and second, the pre-individual state between individual and environment that serves as the *problématique* of the work itself (and even more so, of the project itself).

Polyphonic theater is a very important form of expression in the development of nonlinear narratives by Kim. The polyphonic theater developed following her audio recording work for the 56th Venice Biennale *All the World’s Futures* (2015)can be said to be the original form of her ecological narratives. This prototype is, above all, a convergence of heterogeneous narratives superimposed upon by the alternation of modernity and geopolitics, and moreover, is a global ecological narrative made up of historical connections, shaping a connection-spanning ecology out of the history of the Cold War and the Iraq War. However, the continuing development of the particular focus and research into minerals, wind flow, seawater, algae and the biological in the projects *Petrogenesis*, *Porosity Valley* and *Surisol* has made ‘nature’ a vividly portrayed subject in her work. Yuk Hui has shown that Schelling’s insight into how the limitless *organization* of matter is intrinsic to the ‘nature’ of the absolute ‘self’. This *organization* is both oriented toward the naturalization of the intentions and thoughts arising from the *Weitgeist* and also oriented toward individualization (existence and appearance) beingnaturalized. This kind of ‘nature’ that integrates the organic and the mechanic and unites the linear and the cyclical is a kind of open system, also allowing him (Schelling) to thereby connect Simondon’s ‘individuation’ and Georges Canguilhem and Bernard Stiegler’s *organologie générale*.[[1]](#footnote-0) This point of view allows us to come to a clearer understanding of Schelling-esque ‘nature’ in Kim’s turn from historical theater to material theater, from geopolitics to ecopolitics, just as Simondon’s *pré-individuel* essentially echoes the *problématique* of Kim’s artistic projects.[[2]](#footnote-1) In her *Zepheth, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You* series (2014, 2015), the ‘human’ descends into energy geopolitics and the mechanical operations dreamed of by South Korean futurists; the Gulf War and modernization become one illusory narrative of the South Korean petrochemical industry; and the oil reservoirs and shale deposits of ‘nature’, just like human beings as a species, become completely oppressed and flattened in political history. With her project *Petrogenesis, Petra Genetrix* and the *Porosity Valley* series, geopolitics enters into the conception of geological politics, as humans’ exploitation of the layers of the Earth has accelerated the material replacement occurring in pores of the Earth’s strata, therefore enabling the development of scientific knowledge and mythological legends; connecting materials, data, systems, firewalls, national borders, and communications protocols with one another; and also stringing together an inclusive, cyclic, and evolving ecosystem via the facilitation of fluxing ‘pores (*porus*)’.

From energy resource history theater to energy ecology theater, and then developing the narrative form of the *porous-*ecosystem, the ‘polyphonic’ or ‘symphonic’ in her works possesses a political nature surpassing that of Mikhail Bakhtin’s communist vision,[[3]](#footnote-2) spanning the inclusion of human relations into ecological connections that include energy resources, gender, species, materials, nationality, history and society. Kim’s ‘nature turn’ has already depicted a new field of biopolitics, a field of biopolitics separate from theories of power: if Édouard Glissant turned Gilles Deleuze’s proposal of the rhizome towards the poetics of the production of relations in postcolonial experience, then Kim thus advances Yuk Hui’s natural system, conceived of using cybernetic theory as a model, to the post-Anthropocene *porous-*ecosystem, having connected rhizomatic object orientation to the streaming of colonial domination (the para-colonial): a shift to radical nature.

**After Biopolitics: The Ecopolitics of the *porous-*Ecosystem**

‘Nature’ is no longer that observed and surveyed subject of Charles Darwin and Alexander von Humboldt, nor is it a self-contained object exterior to humans or surrounding them, but instead a totality of multiple Others, continuously connected, exchanged and interpenetrated. This new biopolitics involves non-human matter, elements, organisms, geological strata, ocean currents, along with intelligence generated from digital twin data, while this type of ‘nature’ is a kind of ‘supra-economic’ state that can no longer be defined by ‘economic governance’ or ‘state management’, a kind of relational fluxing of the ecological economy. In order to fully understand the *porous-*ecosystem created by Kim and the major significance of the *différant* of biopolitics into ecopolitics, we must first come to a summary understanding of the debates about biopolitics. Michel Foucault’s description of ‘biopolitics’ asserts that because the management of the economic field has entered into an age of ‘governance’, ‘justice’ and ‘truth’ have become important principles of neoliberalism.[[4]](#footnote-3) Rationalization amid competition has eliminated and oppressed objects and certain people, and it has therefore removed the possibility of politicization, becoming a depoliticized nature. Even if Jacques Rancière has also pointed out that ‘he [Foucault] only discussed biopower, not biopolitics’, indicating the fundamental disagreement between his and Foucault’s political thought,[[5]](#footnote-4) this argument is based only on the conceptual difference between ‘power’ (governance) and ‘politics’ (resistance), which like Foucault’s, overlooks the relationship between people and things, still yet unable to conceive of an eco-biopolitics that includes the subjects of science and technology. Even if the idea that ‘management is precisely a kind of depoliticized governance’ (meaning that society and the material world also appear as a kind of depoliticized second ‘nature’ under the principles of the free market) still remains a very strong critique of neoliberalism today, this second nature is in fact a kind of nature made up by a *Res-Politik* in which objects are fully defined by humans, while the envisioned *Ding-Politik* in which objects are introduced into political assembly by themselves has not yet been able to advance towards a relational description of how the metaphor of the political assembly corresponds to the relations between object and object, much less how to concretize the apparent state of ecopolitics.[[6]](#footnote-5)

However, *Parrhesia Politique* seems to have been unable to return with the arrival of the ‘post-truth age’, as Foucault dramatically left us on 25 June 1984, unable to witness the coincidence of Steve Jobs launching the ‘Macintosh’ on 24 January of the same year, which means that Foucault missed the chance to comprehend the arrival of another new age of *Technès* biopolitics. We can also see in the following year (1985) the different choices made by two important philosophers confronting the information age: Gilles Deleuze proposed the transmedia artistic movement and completed the publication of *Image-movement* and *Image-temps*, while François Lyotard collaborated with Thierry Chaput, curator of the City of Science and Industry, to curate *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Pompidou. With the beginnings of globalization, the abandonment of radical ideology and the development of new science and technology during the mid-1980s, the above thinkers chose different directions that had a notable influence from the 1990s to 2000. Moreover, even more recently it can be seen that Rancière and Stiegler advance different proletarian imaginaries, distinguishing between the perceptual sharing of human society and the information allocation of the age of science and technology. The digital age brought about by Jobs and other prominent entrepreneurs has clearly revealed a kind of conservative futurism, clearly betraying the spirit of the Macintosh commercial directed by Ridley Scott: the Big Brother of *1984* did not disappear with the empty promises of Apple in 1984. On the contrary, with the present-day trend towards radical hawkish politics (eg Trump, Xi Jinping and Putin), the internet has become a new grid of governance and Big Brother has officially entered into the generative stage of cybernetics: the dawn of an age of digital totalitarianism.

The age of internet totalitarianism has shaped a new phase of biopolitics, placing the datumization of life side by side with the algorithmic management of living bodies. Thus, Benjamin Bratton has proposed the ‘Stack’, depicting anew a societal field of comprehensive control with the accumulation of connections between software and hardware: ‘It is not only a way in which governance operates, but it has become governance itself.’[[7]](#footnote-6) No matter whether the path chosen is a commitment to the deepening of political thought or the diversification of the philosophy of science and technology, confronting this kind of new biopolitics – both a technology and a system – seems impossible. This has therefore led to the ‘cosmotechnics’ advanced by Yuk Hui based on cultural and organic systems and the anarcho-activism-like ‘Stacktivism’ with which Geert Lovink carries out micro-resistance against the environment of the ‘Stack’, both of which are dedicated to using ‘organicity’ to control the ‘pores’ in media systems and reshaping society into having a chance of surviving and being rebuilt.[[8]](#footnote-7) Kim’s *porous-*ecosystem spans the philosophical investigations and critiques of biopolitics from the past half-century. Rather than pursuing closed cybernetic theory or romanticized activism, Kim has, from the *Porosity Valley* project (the geological) to the *Surisol* project (the oceanic), elaborated a kind of composite narrative and image integrating the heterogeneity of culture, the *organization* of technology and the diversification of society. The ‘biological energy’ possessed by humans and other living beings, the ‘mass-stratified energy’ of minerals, the ‘algorithmic energy’ possessed by data, along with the ‘surreal energy’ from legends have all been incorporated into narratives of societal issues and future planets, culminating in the construction of a ‘trans-life planetary theater’ out of the lives of humans, minerals, plants, animals microorganisms (viruses) and even the lifetime of energy resources, which can also be termed a ‘quantum-entangled’ ecopolitics. The quantum-entangled symbiosis of ecopolitics provides us an imaginary that transcends new biopolitics, dealing with the conflicts and tensions of life-sustaining relations in planetary open organic circulation. Pores are the topological space of ‘long-distance entanglement’, and it is precisely the pores inserted between strata of the Earth that turn into the *porous-*ecosystem. Thus, Kim addresses various topics, from the trans-domain, trans-border, transgender and transcultural to the trans-species, as the interdependence and co-transformation of life with the exploitation of energy resources constitutes her works’ narrative axis and world imaginary. The production and resonance of sound and image; the accumulation and depletion of energy resources; the delimitation and mixture of identities, viruses, and antibodies; the coexistence and mutation of species; and the electric charge and half-life of inorganic substances – these all become reactants and actors within her works.

**The Everydayization of Fascism and Incidents of Dis-Colonization within Ecopolitics**

‘Fluxing’ is the core theme within the *porous-*ecosystem depicted by Kim, and yet in the imagination of the artist it seems that only in the midst of fluxing can various kinds of boundaries be penetrated. Only in the complex experience of forming connections (i.e., Édouard Glissant’s *poétique des relations*) can this fluxing be separated from the various kinds of bounds set by the corporation and the utopian landscape built up by advertising, and only with fluxing can the boundaries of cybernetic systems be addressed and both the excluded ‘Other’ and instrumentalized or discarded self be seen. This seemingly echoes *Her and Her Children*, Chen Chieh-jen’s latest artistic project since 2018 (from which *A Field of Non-Field* and *Worn Away* have already been exhibited), which marks the development outcomes of neoliberalism and the stagnation of societal distribution with the ‘no longer fluxing’ state of class and natural resources. This is also why Stiegler proposed ‘negentropy’ and Hui vigorously opposed the homogenization of technology and global time, because the homogenization of fluxing will end the fluxing of all dominated people, or subject them to ‘zombification’. Especially with the present-day advance towards the external reconstruction of memory and consciousness by the ‘exsomatization’ of big data algorithms and AI, when humans’ connected consciousness and power of imagination are both at risk of being programmed, only artists like David Wojnarowicz,[[9]](#footnote-8) Shu Lea Cheang, Chen Chieh-jen, Ho Tzu Nyen, Kader Attia, Park Chan-kyong, Chim-Pom and Ayoung Kim will resist the acceleration of zombified fluxing with a radicalized fluxing; this kind of accelerating zombified fluxing is precisely the everyday fascism of digital totalitarianism.

Therefore, Kim’s researcher (a refugee) in the *Surisol* seriesalready differs from Petra Genetrix (an immigrant) in the *Porosity Valley* series: two different expressions of the ‘para-colonial’ emerge from the polycolonial relations of *Porosity Valley* to the ecocolonial relations of *Surisol*,[[10]](#footnote-9) while the voiceover narrator and protagonist act as the ‘dis-paracolonization’ that continuously calibrates the direction of action and resistance against fascism within the ‘poetics of relation’. Unlike in the *Porosity Valley* seriesand *Petrogenesis*, *Petra Genetrix*, repair and negotiation become core values of ecological innovation in *Surisol*: the intervention of Yemeni refugees, carriers of COVID-19 antibodies, the biological control of carbon emissions and the contributions of algae and microorganisms into negotiations both repairs virus-stricken human society and also innovates ecological mechanisms of sustainable energy. Pores are not only a geological object from a quantum point of view, but are also the point of emphasis within thought and the environment (agency); this is precisely the *porous-*ecosystem brought to fruition in *Surisol*.

We can observe a spiritual manifestation that nearly completely echoes this kind of narrative of *porous-*ecological dis-colonization, which uses fluxing to resist everyday fascism, in Peter Chung’s *Æon Flux*. Sohila, the female researcher in the *Surisol* series, is the same as the female warrior *Æon Flux*: Chung utilizes wide-angle shots to emphasize the span of dynamic motion, ‘sex’ to intensify the cybernetic image, close-up shots to connect sexuality with science and technology and time skips to penetrate the confusion of identification, while Kim uses the space of a laboratory to link refugees with AI, spans space with the narrative voice, and juxtaposes the acquired trace images of human beings with particleized or crystallized people. Even though Kim’s work is more static than the animations of *Æon Flux*, the span of consciousness realized within the image is more than enough to drive the fluxing of cognition. The development of this female role is even clearer in the project *Delivery Dancer’s Sphere* (2022), in which the delivery person becomes a new material fluxing between the pores of the city and information, shuttling back and forth within the urban pores of digital twin technology (especially computer scans and modeling), engaging in conflict and reconciliation with the digitally-twinned self inside the system and resisting the deprivation of life carried out by a fascistized system with its surviving presence. In memory, the body, movement and the fluxing of the cybernetic environment, Kim’s female characters touch on various subjects spanning time and space, culture, species and gender, resisting different forms of fascist consciousness.

**The Cosmotechnics of Web 3.0-to-Come**

The ‘alter-totalities’ of mediated connectivity that cultivate to the ‘stack’ space proposed by Bratton reproduce new geopolitics that are both a spatial condition for the successful transformation and expansion of the para-colonial and a provision of countless routes for escape (dis-paracolonization), just as Lovin questioned this kind of ‘totality’ of planetary computation. In other words, with the development of digital science and technology promoting the acceleration of circulation and the topologization of space, the ‘para/dis-colonial’ has revealed an interpretive framework of the colonial and postcolonial, directly touching on the colonial mechanism interwoven and assembled out of power, natural resources, information and cultural customs. In doing so, the ‘para/dis-colonial’ brings about an understanding of colonial domination being a kind of relational field and moment of tension inside a circulatory system. The possibility and production of colonial domination is in the midst of occurring and circulating, while the possibility of variation also occurs in the fluxing between pores. The strata and pores of the *Porosity Valley* series and *In Search of Petra Genetrix* (2020)thus serve as the pathway to cultural diversity, allowing wind, legends and the heterogeneous to pass back and forth within. Moreover, within the contemporary space of negotiation that has been differentiated from that of advertising and interrogation, traversal of the Earth’s strata and the superimposition of image layers leads to a collaborative narration with a continuously changing voice. However, the shot composition of *Surisol Underwater Lab* (2020) is no longer a matter of traveling back and forth through pores, nor is it a closed space of negotiation, but rather an entry into a kind of relational setting and dynamic negotiation. In *Delivery Dancer’s Sphere*, human beings enter into a *porous-*ecosystem within geolocation algorithms, or in other words, enter into a *porous-*ecosystem formed by algorithms.

Only by re-understanding colonial domination (ie the para-colonial) from the circulatory system of ecological relations (ie cybernetic theory) can we understand our long-standing neglect of technology’s fundamental effect on historical change and our habituation to the ideologized production of many dishonest contentious arguments in the name of the ‘colonial’ and the ‘postcolonial’. These Hegelian ‘anthropocentrisms’ and, even more so, ecosystems that thoroughly separate human beings from the ecosystem of the Earth therefore use colonial domination over the long term to rectify the ideological conflicts of contemporary modernity and the mingled and entangled nature of the postmodern, often fulfilling ‘grand’ anti-colonial or decolonial narratives while neglecting many smaller-scale aspects of colonial domination. *Æon Flux* (1991–1995) is just like William Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (1959) and David Cronenberg’s remake of the same name (1991) in that these works connect memory, consciousness, a cybernetic environment, organisms, science and technology, sex, eco-political narratives of the body and a kind of the ‘para-colonial’ science fiction narratives emerging in the age of AIDS. And yet, without a doubt, under the conservative conditions of the ‘bustling ruins’ of today’s contemporary art and around the time of the global devastation wrought by COVID-19, Kim has created dis-colonial political works of the *porous-*ecosystem. Only with the intervention of the viewpoint of science and technology can we clearly see the cybernetic system behind relational networks, truly investigate an open-ended ‘circulatory’ system and understand why the fluxing *agencement* of machinery in fluxing differs from the mechanical ‘apparatus’ in structure. ‘Strata’ are the recurring form of fluxing within the *porous-*ecosystem, reproducing the landscape of geopolitics and the interpermeation of ideology from within and without. No matter whether it is Harun Forocki’s analysis of simulated images in computer graphics and video games (*Parallel I*–*IV*), Ho Tzu Nyen’s penetration of consciousness (*Voice of Void*) in his return to the interdisciplinary meeting of Japanese fascism (The Kyoto School), or Hsu Che-yu’s recreation of sites of death and memories of suicide (*Three Episodes of Mourning Exercises*), all these works echo the accumulated significance of the ‘strata’ created by Kim with digital scans and computer modeling, namely the moment of tension that occurs when the para-colonial and dis-colonial arise between one stratum and another. Without a doubt, Kim’s artistic politics create a kind of fluxing cosmotechnics, advancing a powerful rebuttal to the simplification of cosmotechnics into a techno-pluralism based on regional culturalism in which cultural specificity is inevitably involved in the generation of new technology. However, in the age of planetary computing and under new geopolitics (the politics of topological space), cosmotechnics does not at all correspond to specific regional cultures and cultural identities. Within the imaginary and composition of Kim, cosmotechnics is a twin moment of coupling constituted by ‘exsomatic deterritorialization’ and ‘immanent deterritorialization’.

With the present moment of ‘Web 3.0-to-come’, when the ‘media-person’ has already transformed into a ‘robot’, ‘cyborg’, ‘data-person’, or even ‘encryption-person’ and ‘*protocole*-person’, art also faces a moment in which it must re-understand the world at a planetary scale and make an important decision. In the imaginary of the ‘blockchaining age’, life has already been replaced with various partitions of mingled data and trace sequences of hash numbers: every partition is already not a ‘part of a person’, but rather a partitioned piece (data) of a ‘contract’ and ‘relationships’ (events), as that which is identified by ‘a person’s name’ is no longer only a ‘living human’ or a ‘media-person’, but rather a ‘*protocole*-person’ under computation, and therefore the human fully becomes an ‘event-person’ and ‘streaming person’ established on the basis of an ‘electronic signature’. After the ‘ist’ of the ‘specialist’ is completely disassociated, the genuine creativity that can only occur in the midst of ‘fluxing’ is simultaneously identified and evaluated; the subject of the artist is precisely a kind of ‘streaming person’; and the ‘physical brain’ then becomes the only place of subjectification that retains any ‘duration’. At this point, artistic workers must be divided into two of the most fundamental roles or positions: one is the event role of undertaking various kinds of connections and computations, that is to say the role of the blockchain, which also presents distinct manifestations via the algorithms of different platforms; second is the persistent (sustained) role of ‘duration’ that is carried out via the physical body –ie, the physical brain. Workers invested in this divided state of affairs (creators) are a kind of ‘streaming people’ who can no longer be separated from machines (digital tools), the environment of science and technology, and ecological relations. No matter whether life itself is in a state of consciousness or unconsciousness, it is simply a kind of productive tool continuously giving rise to variation. In other words, its original state does not possess the necessary conditions to serve as any continuous whole, but must instead be formed and fabricated from the continuity of the physical brain (the role of duration). Thus, because of the programming of mechanical computations and community relations, artistic value will always be a kind of value interdependent on community change and circulating strategies. Kim’s artistic creations and thought continuously return to the different plights of and paths forward for ‘human beings’. As AI and cybernetic technology brings in more species and mechanical interfaces into dialogue about the future of humankind, we can say that the artistic power of Kim has ‘arranged’ (*agencé*) the temporal convergence of AI, cybernetics, streaming persons and artists: the post-pandemic moment of *technès* politics.

Translated by Alan Dai

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1. Hui, Yuk, 2015, “De la forme organique de Schelling,” <https://www.academia.edu/15244123/De_la_forme_organique_de_Schelling>. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Simondon, Gilbert, 1964/2005. *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de form et d’information*. Paris: Millon, p. 305.“c’est le pré-individuel qui fonde le spirituel dans le collectif.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Bakhtine, Mikhaïl, 1977. *Le Marxisme et la philosophie du langage: Essai d'application de la méthode sociologique en linguistique*. Paris: Minuit. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Foucault, Michel, 2004. *La Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France (1978-1979)*. Paris: Seuil, pp. 31–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Rancière, Jacques, 2000. <https://www.multitudes.net/Biopolitique-ou-politique/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Latour, Bruno, 2005. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/96-MTP-DING.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. B. Bratton and K. Kuitenbrouwer, 29 Feburary 2015. *“Stack” and Posthuman User*. <https://tuinvanmachines.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/stack-and-posthuman-user-interview-benjamin-bratton>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Lovink, Geert, 2022. “Principles of Stacktivism,” in *Stuck on the Platform,* ch.8. Amsterdam: Valiz, pp. 179-197. Also see: <https://stacktivism.com/unconference> published on 13 July 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. David Wonjnarowicz, “Postcards from America: X-rays from Hell,” in catalogue of *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*, 1989: page 10. “I’m beginning to believe that one of the last frontiers left for radical gesture is the imagination. At least in my ungoverned imagination I can fuck somebody without a rubber or I can, in the privacy of my own skull, douse Helms with a bucket of gasoline and set his putrid ass on fire or throw rep.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. See Huang Chien-hung, *Fragments on Para-colonial* (Chinese, 2019) and *Demo-Art: Dis-paracolonization under Homophonic Processes* (Chinese, 2023). ‘Para-colonial’ implies the multi-colonial domination of accompanying, stratifying and agencing, and the reality of this kind of multi-colonial domination has been revealed in its entirety through the development of democratization,, globalization and digitalization at the end of the Cold War. We can understand this in terms of the ‘épi-colonial’ and ‘para-colonial’: ‘épi-colonial’ is the representation of the colonial form, generally known as colonialism and postcolonization, which uses history, politics and culture as frameworks of reproduction and forms of violence, while the ‘épi-colonial’ is a microscopic, concomitant and perhaps metaphorically ‘quantum’ relation of colonial domination. The former is the time of the anthropocentric, while the latter is the time of connections between quanta and the Earth (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, ch. 3 ‘La géologie de la morale’ [66-69] in *Mille Plateau* [1981]: The Relationship between Épi-strates and Para-strates), and thus the borders of systems of *machine vivant* are not the limits of function or the contours of mechanical implements, but rather the recursion and circulation of repeated ‘individualization’. (Yuk Hui) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)