

(written for the NoSchoolNevers publication The Internet of Dead Things)

“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of monsters appear.”
Antonio Gramsci

“The real power of a neganthropic and anti-anthropoc institution comes from its energetic potential, which it knows how to conserve and save for new transformations allowing it to postpone irreversible institutional sclerosis. Such an institution recognizes transformation as its mode of existence. The capacity to transform should therefore become the object of a specific and primordial institutional care.” (Bifurcate, Bernard Stiegler a.o., 2021)

The uprising against planned obsolescence is well underway: Extraction Rebellion. The solution will not just be less consumption + recycling, but it will come from a full-scale integration of old and new products and services. The challenge will be to design and scale up these modes of perma-hybridity. What Ocean-Cleanup is rolling out in the Pacific Ocean for plastics^[1] will soon be done for hardware, software and related infrastructures. Material nets collecting everything from record players, DVD and VHS players, PCs, tablets and laptops, synthesizers, mobile and smartphones, switches, motherboards and amplifiers, Walkman, iPods, radios, TVs to video projectors. Analog, digital, scheißegal. Gathering them will only be stage one, hybridizing them stage two; synthesizing past and present, high and low tech. The integration of second-life hardware into the everyday life of the billions is upon us. Welcome to the fifth industrial revolution.

Take the [Teufel internet radio](#) that Andreas Kallfelz proudly showed me (designed in Berlin), a sound box that combines FM with streaming audio. Or the story of the friend who received a first generation Tamagotchi for his birthday: “Everybody thought it was from the 2000s, but it’s brand new.” European offline romanticism and longing for a pre-notification life simply is not fading. The hype is on for the vintage phone with the latest or the oldest chip inside. No choice for you. Which one will be yours? *Surprise!* Tactical media commodity fetishism, brought to you as authenticity vibe. Finally, there will be sustainable universal software that works on all devices, regardless which age or version. No more MacBook Pros that can only run up until macOS Catalina. No more cloud services, no more subscriptions. If there is any use of AI, let’s demand of this demiurge to resolve the Software Question once and for all. The e-fairness approach is an integral one and restores to unity of hardware, software, content and user culture: interfacing

with holistic junk. Everything can and will be revived. Let's reanimate dead media and bring its mysterious-miraculous 'ghost in the shell' back to life again. Demand justice for the toxic electro dumps and their workers. Instead, there will be a range of planetary 'capture movements' of electronic heritage. The aim will be to reuse and reintegrate, and above all, bring back the spirit that once lived deep inside the device, as part of a new cultural alignment.

Let's demand the impossible and upscale the perma-computing project.[\[2\]](#) Instead of lamenting—time and again—the appropriation by vulture capitalism of a well-intended avant-garde tech movement, it will be important to envision real-world alternatives that can overcome this dead-end cultural logic. Another Scale is Possible. This is part of what Shintaro Miyazaki calls counter-dancing in digitality. But who's composing our counter tunes? It's fine to call for counter-algorithms and solidarity-oriented commoning.[\[3\]](#) It's one to call of creole techno-diversity but what's there to learn from the past decades? We cannot simply ignore the moral bankruptcy of open source/free software and its appropriation by Big Tech. The ethical insolvency of Linux is complete (not to mention wizard Richard Stallman). Everyone (except a dwindling group of ageing male hackers) can see that the choice between the proprietary 'black box' vs. FLOSS is no longer an issue—especially not for Gen Z that grew up with smooth, closed platforms. Platform capitalism has effectively rendered the 'open' and 'free' terms useless. Instead, the fight has shifted to digital literacy about discriminatory algorithms.[\[4\]](#) One thing remained: the power lies in the firm hands of Microsoft. All its software is now a cloud service, intrinsically black-boxed. There is no AI magic without black boxes after all. Individual refusal is not enough. We need to break these black boxes open. Expose them to light as a first stage and show the material side of AI as a second - its cables, datacentres and diagrams of algorithms, filters and profiling, so devastating for the chained user. The debate is on. Now what should happen after all the evidence is mapped and aesthetically visualized? If 'evidence art' is not part of a larger movement, it can easily become trapped in museum collections and the 'social practices' gallery circuit. There is enough experience gathered over the past decades how to overcome this dilemma.

We should no longer be content critiquing the black box from the outside. The long march of perma-hybrid art is happening underneath the institutions. Its aim is to break down the walls between the climate-controlled storage units of the museum and the sewers of Reddit and cross-

pollinate spheres that so far have been carefully separated. Smoke out curators and their marketing teams, customer journey designers, art historians and other gatekeepers of the black box. The synthetic aesthetics of perma-hybrid art is part of a broader infrastructural critique. The ruins of the black box will become hybrid palaces.

The world is eager for alternatives that scale up—but why are so many so clueless about how to roll them out? Why is hype, sell-out and betrayal the only available option? Reuse and Repair should indeed be thought of together with the third R: Refuse. The new sign of social class struggle, is a gesture, the right not to be summarized—as in the case of AI. Many agree that alt-tech movements from now on have to refuse to be neutralized, crushed and silenced. But this also implies refusing to give up, refusing to be fragmented and refusing to be reduced to the logic of fashion. [Reclaim the Tech](#), the Italian name for the movement under discussion here is mobilizing techno-social forces in society that refuse to be taken over by Big Tech as an ever-alienating, ever-regressive force.^[5]

Reclaim is indeed the fourth R. What does it imply to reclaim? At the time, the UK 1990s movement ‘Reclaim the Streets’ aimed to retake the street as a free public space, against police repression and surveillance, but also the car as the dominant mode of transportation in cities. This, in turn, built on a 1977 feminist protest called ‘Reclaim the Night’ against patriarchal violence. To reclaim means to take back lost territory. What does this mean for the ‘tech’ context? The answer can be simple: program or be programmed (as Douglas Rushkoff’s booklet is called). We are not talking about programming as in coding, but as programming as in political assembly, the program of a movement or a party. No need to know Javascript for that. What’s needed is a program for multiple and diverse commonalities.

Reclaim the Tech goes further by claiming “We are Tech”. This means that tech is no longer some passing phenomenon, enforced upon us. Tech is inside us, we carry it close to our skin (and in some medical cases even underneath). It is intimate, like the ‘femtech’ menstruation apps, as described by Morgane Billuart in her book *Cycles*.^[6] In the case of social media platforms, tech has shaped our mental wellbeing. We will learn to live with it and mobilize Care as a general principle and do a collective effort to transform the poison into a cure, the pharmakon Bernard Stiegler so often spoke about.

To make this happen techno-culture’s intent will have to be to sidestep both

authentic nostalgia for the old and artificial longing for the new. Let's overcome both retromania and 'future addiction' (as dictated by liberal donors) and start to get used to the idea of timeless tech. Reuse implies one-off assemblages of old tech that we use to create new styles and modes of expression. The aim is to prevent regression to a past that was—and still is—patriarchal, totalitarian, racist and violent. The past can be fully integrated into the future: hybridpunk, not cypherpunk. Forget the false romanticism for industrial ruins. Don't be lured by right-wing libertarian honeypots. And remember, neoliberal tech-misery is real. This movement aims to overcome involuntary regression and stagnation—the decease of our time. The cultural problem of today is that one can dream up and prototype no matter how many solutions we want but we're all running up against the thick corporate walls of technofeudalism. Instead of burnout and depression, let's extend the degrees of freedom. Liberatory movements in culture must be celebrated. Collective weirdness and ecstasy should be passed on to new generations, time and again. This is a techno-cultural rite de passage. Go mad but do not follow the footsteps of your celeb, influencer or guru. Become, and overcome your heroes of the past (and their peculiar techno-extensions).

The techno-cultural design can go in two directions: inside out and outside in. Both of them will include the weird.^[7] There is the Commodore 64 with a Nvidia Blackwell B200 chip to assist the solar punks in the image generation rituals. An Intel 386 was inserted in the slow phone to provide for human-speed communication. Also curious to find out what is low-tech online video? "Can it run Doom?"^[8] Think of generative AI freed of its data centre chains. At first, all this will look retro, clumsy and post-industrial.^[9] Once scaled up hybrid tech itself will appear normal and will no longer attract attention - unless we travel to other parts of the globe where different arrangements and techno customs will amaze us.

Old and new media do not just coexist in parallel time-space universes. During the roaring 1990s 'multi-media' era, the dream was to synthesize audio, video and text with smell, gestures and distance. To use the one digital gateway to push them all through, to forcefully converge all possible levels of meaning into one platform of universal understanding. In the theory of mixing from the same era, synthesis was not its cultural ideal. The mix allowed different technologies and rhythms. How privacy, anti-surveillance and crypto and blockchain can play a role in this, will have to be discussed and tried out.

Today's digital culture is stagnant, not escapist. It lacks direction and fate. The Will to Organize is absent now that even low-commitment networks have been superseded by the platform. The Zeitgeist is regressive, which is the opposite of accelerationist. There is no goal to move towards - at whatever speed. There is no dissolution of the self into the virtual realm either. The cloud is the new uncool. Nothing is more boring than the pure virtual. Nothing is more corporate than the data centre. What we experience is an endless sequence of short boosts of orgasmic ecstasy, followed by long periods of exhaustion. This dominant cultural rhythm has had a devastating effect on the search and implementation of sustainable alternatives. Predictive optimization has erased the inner energy to revolt. What's left are eruptions of anger, resulting in erratic social movements—a dynamic fuelled by short attention span social media usage.

A question of today is how to make (post)coloniality visible in technology and design. We see this coming up not just in the case of raw materials but also in the context of 'data colonialism'. It is one thing to demand the Decolonization of Everything. Tech will not voluntarily give up its dominance of the New in favour of 'tech creolization'.^[10] Decolonizing tech is not just one of many possible issues: it goes to the core of today's value production. Let's be cautious not again to speak on behalf/for others but act together, create cultures of 'hybrid togetherness'^[11] that overcomes new geo-political enclosures and other subliminal and explicit forms of techno-apartheid. Technological violence today ranges from algorithmic bias and exclusion to very real military destruction of land, cities and lives.

There's no shortage of alternatives, cool designs, roadmaps, and exit strategies. The exodus will not be streamed. The world cannot wait for data prevention principles to be implemented.^[12] Reject ethics washing, refuse governmentality. Dry up the data flows once and for all. As data 'privacy' has proven to be a legal abyss that cannot be guaranteed, the next option available will be built-in mechanisms, filters that prevent data from exiting devices and apps in the first place. This includes a worldwide ban on the (re)sale of stolen data. Betting on a planetary system crash due to entropy is nothing but nihilist strategy.

Alternatives are nothing if their principles are not localized. No matter how ugly, locality is where it all starts even though concept-memes such as 'perma-hybridity' can go global and become de-contextualized in the process, becoming transferable to other localities. Get the learning machines

up that work with small data and process contextual knowledge. Popping up after the Revolution (the Big R), Urban Tech for the People ‘corner shops’ will not just provide repair, have a paper printer and maybe even a fax machine and receive deliveries but also offer a one-off local range of emulators, cables, spare parts, old and new batteries. They are par excellence points of hybrid-social connection. The wetware aspect is an integral part of Operation Tech Clean-Up. There is also an aesthetic agenda: McLuhan’s proposition to beautify junkyards. Instead of externalizing rubbish, it will live with us. Most waste is already immaterial anyway—not to mention the mental damage that will backfire on society. First diagnosis, then repair. We’re confronted with the almost unimaginative task of creating clandestine resistance that will not be (immediately) captured and repressed. Goal: turning over the unholy alliance of totalitarian tech-control and right-wing/libertarian authoritarianism. We will not benefit from collapse, only from hybrid togetherness.

First task ahead is to make (mental) waste visible.

(Inspired by NoSchoolNevers, Aymeric, Jaromil, Letizia, Chloë, Victor, Felipe, UKRAiNATV and Luca, Emanuele, Donatella, Tiziana and other Reclaim the Tech comrades. A special thanks to Silvio and Sepp for their comments)

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Notes:

[1] The Largest Cleanup in History: <https://theoceancleanup.com/>.

[2] The project describes itself as “an invitation to collectively and radically rethink computational culture. It is not a tech solution searching for a problem.” <https://permacomputing.net/>. Needless to say that according to its belief system perma and scaling up do not go together.

[3] See: <https://meson.press/books/counter-dancing-digitality/>.

[4] In his book *What Design Can’t Do* (Set Margins, 2023), Silvio Lorusso speaks of the difference between the technical intellectual (who has access to the systems) versus the intellectual of technics, who is all about literacy, ethics.

[5] “Reclaim The Tech is a community on the move, fighting for digital justice. In a world marked by conflict and transformation, we seek a space for hybridization and reappropriation of technologies, open to alliances with struggles for social, gender, and climate justice. In 2023 Reclaim The Tech was a bet; today it is a collective reality based on participation and the sharing of ideas, projects, and alternative technologies.”

[6] <https://www.setmargins.press/books/cycles-the-sacred-and-the-doomed/>.

[7] Hybrids of old and new do feel weird—and they are already already surrounding us. See Silvio Lorusso’s essay *Deepdreaming Willy Wonka: AI Weird as the New Kitsch*, <https://silviolorusso.com/publication/ai-weird-as-the-new-kitsch/>. He writes: “When it comes to our technosocial environment, is there something that *doesn’t* feel weird nowadays? And yet, it seems that all this weirdness has anesthetized us, to the extent that if something makes total sense, we find it inauthentic and get suspicious. A touch of strangeness is what we expect, because *weird has become so normal that its very absence feels weird.*”

[8] <https://canitrundoom.org/>.

[9] But also remember that the retro and clumsy is still here: airlines that run on floppy disks, elderly using Windows 98, critical infrastructures such as bridges depending on 386 PCs and German bureaucracies running on fax machines.

[10] For more on this see:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/cambridge-journal-of-postcolonial-literary-inquiry/article/creolization-hybridity-and-archipelagic-thinking-interrogating-inscriptions-of-postcolonial-agency/>.

[11] Hybrid Togetherness is the motto of UKRAiNATV: <https://ukrainatv.streamart.studio/knowledge/>.

[12] <https://dataprevention.net/index.html>. The idea is migrate from the tired ‘protection’ discourse to data prevention – away from the neo-liberal ‘mentality’ emphasis to core design and architecture. “The idea is no longer to filter, install blockers and build walls, protecting ultimately instable and open architectures. Data prevention is not a strike, it is only perceived as sabotage by the apparatus needing to be fed by data. We do not believe in safe ways to deal with ‘big data’ collected to monitor, and control,

populations.”