



Time, Being and Resonance in the Anthropocene

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November 7, 2023

Suggested Citation: Morgan, T. (November 7, 2023). "Time Being Resonance in the Anthropocene". *Heliotrope*. <https://heliotropejournal.net/helio/time-being-and-resonance>

A field led down to a lake shore. This day had started out with what had become a regular occurrence - a distressing surge of cortisol from the anxiety of the pandemic and a dizzying workload. To try to calm down, I deferred some meetings until later, and I went outside with my camera and telephoto lens. I noticed myself frustrated that nature wasn't doing what I wanted it to do on my timescale. This got me thinking about contemporary temporalities and their violence. My miniature vignette of frustration amused me. From my wildlife photography I know well that nature doesn't oblige our human temporalities. The birds don't sing on command. They sing when the conditions in nature are right for singing. The sun doesn't shine and warm the reeds enough for dragonflies to fly, just because I've decided to take a few hours to grace nature with my efforts to document it.

I thought about this and scaled up its implications. The last 5-10 years have been seminal in increasing the violence of experienced temporalities. I say violent because they are in such crude opposition to the temporalities of nature that they break them. While eschewing determinism about technology, 'smart' technologies have brought about behaviour change, which has intensified the already existing temporalities of clock time. Clock time is augmented with click time, it seems. The idea of standing still watching for nature must seem terribly unproductive and wasteful to many people. The idea of pulling out a black mirror and grazing on information is much more palatable. Distraction instead of presence. There is a cultural celebration of the annihilation of space by time - the 'global village' and 'always on' global connectedness transcend former spatial limitations.

Scale that up further. The violence wrought against nature in the intensification of how these fields I cross could be managed - pesticide use, treatment of soil, 'production all the way down', increasing yields, all related to temporalities. Old temporalities were not efficient enough. Tending fields with newer mechanisation means that they can be harvested quicker and cut twice a season - along with the ground-nesting birds who perish beneath the juggernaut machinery. Gone are the inefficient temporalities of old, when people could get together convivially, work, and talk while tending the fields.

I feel the violence of our temporalities too - scheduling this time in nature with the nagging vigilance that I have to make up for it with a 3pm meeting. I can't be free of these temporalities for long. I need to stay aware, to 'check in'. This is a violence against the temporalities of our human species being. We are not designed for these temporalities. There is an annihilation of our species being by the encroachments of digital time into inner space. If we are not 'doing' we are not existing correctly. Hartmut Rosa describes these phenomena as 'dynamic stability' - the feeling of 'running to stand still', and suggests this is a feature of the last 20-30 years. He describes three 'motors' of technological acceleration, social acceleration, and acceleration of the pace of life, that drive this dynamic stability. Dynamic stability precludes a depth of temporal experience, just at the juncture that our species needs to deeply engage with the unyielding temporalities of epochal crisis. As a consequence, these incursions by digital time are eroding our inner space, that experience of a beingness, a spaciousness that comes from disconnecting, from slowing from digital time to (human?) nature time.

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As of July 2023, I am updating this article in digital-real-time, with a global temperature record announced in the media ... then again the next day then the following days after that. Epochal records broken in real-time. Heatwaves across vast swathes of the Earth are front-page headlines today. We are seeing more of a pattern, a signal over time, that the earth system is showing warning signs in increasingly robust indicators of distress. The last seven years are the warmest on record, and the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere is the highest in human history, but in epochal history also.

The concept of 'the Anthropocene' epoch has been critiqued for its narrow scope and implications that not all 'anthropos' have impacted the earth equally. Some say that this geological epoch should be called the 'Capitalocene', the 'Plantationocene', the 'Neganthropocene' or the 'Chthulucene'.

John Bellamy Foster argues for adopting the Anthropocene Epoch, because social scientists should use 'the standard nomenclature for the naming of geological ages' and

epochs. Therefore, Foster proposes that the first Age within the Anthropocene Epoch be called the Capitalinian. This helps situate our temporalities of the 'safe operating space' for humanity, our world-history time, and digital time. Identifying the Capitalinian Age within the Anthropocene Epoch raises potentials for 'a possible second geological age of the Anthropocene Epoch'. This reveals options, and even fragile hope, about how to think about our planetary temporalities. Foster suggests that unless there is an 'end-Anthropocene' event to end the Capitalinian age:

"the socioeconomic conditions defining the Capitalinian will have to give rise to a radically transformed set of socioeconomic relations, and indeed a new mode of sustainable human production, based on a more communal relation of human beings with each other and the earth"

Such a new age would be based on reversing the planetary impacts of the Capitalinian, to make a more sustainable society-nature metabolism that will become evident in the geological record to come. This is the Communian - proposed as it is derived from 'communal, community, commons'.

We cannot hope to move quickly towards a Communian time without considering this absolute disconnect between not only geological and world-historical time, but geological and digital time. It appears that fungible time and fungible space under capitalism are butting up against that which can't be exchanged. Our offsets and 'net zero' plans are based on temporal fungibility, temporal 'fixes'.

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Back to real-time updates. On the 11th of July 2023 an announcement was made by the Anthropocene Working Group of geologists, that a lake in Canada is to be chosen as the site to confirm the official adoption of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch. If this site is approved, the Anthropocene will no longer be a word for scholars to debate over - it will start in August 2024. The Holocene Epoch will cease to represent the climatic conditions that have supported human evolution and development.

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How do we begin to reconcile this epochal temporality with world-history temporality, and the violence of contemporary temporalities? The Anthropocene as a geological fact is far more visceral than the word-salad of alternatives. The irrefutable proof of the Anthropocene, the temporality of its commencement next year, require us to quickly acknowledge the first age within the Anthropocene. We are in the Capitalinian Age, but

we must also raise a hope that within the Anthropocene, we can exit the Capitalinian Age quickly, and not accept it as the first and only age within the Anthropocene.

What is stark amidst epochal crisis is the absolute juxtaposition between Anthropocene time, world-history time and the third temporality of digital time. This includes ephemeral experiences of digital time - being 'pressed for time', feelings of time acceleration, but also the absolute contradiction between geological time and digital time, and of course, in the hardware and infrastructure that underpins digital devices.

To help make sense of these planetary contradictions, Rosa's concept of 'resonance' is useful. Resonance is a two-way relationship between subjects and the world. This includes other people, political structures, institutions, and the very cultural (and environmental!) air we breathe. Resonant experiences are of connection, understanding and even fulfilment. Resonance can be thought of as a (metaphorical/hypothetical) vibrating 'wire' connecting between people and dimensions of the world. When resonance is prevented or precluded, for example when political structures fail to act environmentally, or when an organisation destroys an ecosystem, that resonant 'wire' falls mute. For Rosa, this is alienation. In our contemporary setting, I also suggest that digital barriers to resonance are important - someone can be in a potentially resonant situation with others, or with nature, and miss it because of the 'itch' to check media, consume, all of those distractions. They distract us from presence, from resonance.

For us concerned about the nature/society relationship, if the loss of resonance is as a result of the world going mute as far as that 'wire' stops resonating, we must point to social and political factors of inaction to restore resonance. But what about the world literally falling mute because of environmental crisis? This is a loss of resonance on the most profound level. An alienation that cannot be seen as dialectical. Restoration of resonance is the only way out of crisis. We are grappling with the most profound loss of resonance ever. We need to ask ourselves, how do we restore resonance through our being, our doing, our praxis?

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SEO Excerpt