The Challenge of Transculturality in the Era of the Misanthropocene

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Abstract

Anthropocene refers to the moment when humans recognized that their domination over "nature" was also the instrument of their own demise. One could have hoped for man to acknowledge that influencing the planet as a whole would have given way to a shared feeling of terrestrial belonging. However, that the Anthropocene means that Human Beings in general are responsible for Climate Change has been criticized by social-scientists: it's not Humanity in general but a small portion who are responsible for global ecological disruption. But there seems to be no agreement about naming the guilty "scapegoat" that "we" need to "sacrifice" on the long march toward "ecological equilibrium" and "human-nature harmony." To settle this polemical issue, we need to de-culturalize and re-historicize the Anthropocene: according to most scientists, the Anthropocene comes with post-1950 "Great Acceleration." In other words, the Anthropocene started when the colonization ceased to be the privilege of one region, the "West", and started to be available to the Global East & South. The "Anthropocene" is the name of an era in which every country is developing to its utmost in a race towards global or regional supremacy. Ultimately, the issue with the Anthropocene is not about the relation of humanity to nature but about the relationship of humanity with itself. This is why the Anthropocene should be re-labelled "Misanthropocene." Since reading the Anthropocene through the lens of an "East and West onto-cultural divide" and from a "Green Orientalism" perspective is so misleading, a transcultural approach to is necessary.

Keywords

Doubtless never has humanity as a whole found itself in a more alarming situation. For sure, diverse human populations have in the past been affected by severe demographic and cultural losses. The European arrival in the Americas has been stressed as the most emblematic case due to the 56 million deaths it caused between 1492 and 1600 (Koch et al. 13). If our History was less Eurocentric, our social memory would also remind us of the Mongolian conquest of Eurasia (50 million deaths) which brought the bubonic plague to the European continent and African shores (another 50 million deaths)—a total of 100 million deaths in a century. However, these two horrific events cannot be equated to the potential consequences of the current ecological crisis which has wiped out not individuals but entire species from the planet (680 vertebrate species driven to extinction since the sixteenth century) and in which human societies (especially the 6 billion people living in developing countries) are facing irreversibly degrading conditions.

For the degradation of the "climate" does not only concern the Earth's atmosphere but human society as a whole: degradation of the climate certainly, but also of the social, geopolitical and epistemological atmospheres. The list of endangered species not only contains land mammals and aquatic fauna but also (with the surge of fake news and illiberalism) truth and freedom. The problem is not only that the thresholds of planetary limits are crossed one by one, that livable space is shrinking, but it's also that humanity has only a short time to resolve a manifold set of issues: the 2030 or 2050 horizons being seen as points of no return.

"Anthropocene" names the fact that humans are the primary vector of the near collapse of the Earth's supportive system: The Earth is now part of the human metabolism itself, and affected by a severe autoimmune disease. In this, we are in a truly "Misanthropocenic" situation: the "healing" of the human immune system, of which the Earth has become a part, may not be possible without causing the death of the "host" itself: The Humanized Earth; the Terraformed Man. The "Misanthropocene" we are speaking about should not be understood in Raj Patel's sense of a cynical abandonment to the ineluctable: "We're surrounded by catastrophic narratives of almost every political persuasion, tales that allow us to sit and wait while humanity's End Times work themselves out. The Anthropocene can very easily become the Misanthropocene" (21). Misanthropocene here denotes the view that Humanity has entered into a state of prolonged hybrid war against itself.

For millennia, people have found the courage to sacrifice their lives for their soil but 50 years after the first Club of Rome Report on planetary boundaries no one wants to concede the slightest millimeter of their right to development, the right to a good life. Indeed, it is difficult to fight when the "enemy" is not someone else (another

nation, ethnic group, gender, or culture), but when the "other" *is* "us", ourselves. Man does not know how to overcome the trap he set by and for himself. The immensity of the task is demoralizing and leads us to look for scapegoats. According to Bruno Latour a: "Ecology is the new class struggle" ("L'écologie"). However, the fact that Ecology is the new frontline of geopolitical, social and cultural struggles contributes more to the dissemination of the problem than to its potential elucidation. Conversely, we think that the global nature of the social-environmental crisis calls for a renewed trans-national and trans-cultural approach.

The aim of this paper is to "de-culturalize" the notions of the Anthropocene (and Neganthropocene), to stress the transversality of the current socio-ecological challenges faced by humanity and other living beings on the basis of a new (post-Kantian transcendental) definition of "Transcultural." Our aim is also, ultimately, to (re)define the concept of Misanthropocene to express the metaphysical nature of our terrestrial predicament. To demonstrate the necessity of addressing the Anthropocene transculturally, we need to better define what we mean by "Transculturality" first, "the Anthropocene" second, and finally by "the Misanthropocene."

The notion of *transculturality* seems to express a new period of cultural studies which comes after the exhaustion of the conceptual apparatus ingrained in "*postological*" narratives. What we have today is a proliferation of "*trans*" prefixes replacing the former inflation of "*post*" ones: *trans*national, *trans*cultural, *trans*gender. The difference between the *postological* narrative and the *translogical* metaphor is that the former, the "post" narrative, supposed an ending of borders, frontiers, closed entities or "subjective" delimitations for a never-ending process of closing and overcoming, liberalizing and deconstructing while the latter, the "trans" metaphor, claims that the so-called "old" frontiers, borders and subject/object delimitations still exist but are not as mutually exclusive as in the modernist narrative nor as vanishing or dematerializing like in the postmodernist narrative, but are overlapping, mixing with each other in a process of continuous hybridization which alters irreversibly their original sense and meaning.

The notion of transculturality aims at interpreting the intertwined relations between "cultures" in a different way than the common cross-cultural or inter-cultural approaches.

The trouble with the cross-cultural approach to cultural interactions lies in its underlying assumptions: it supposes that a cross-cultural meeting is a meeting between two pure, homogenous, everlasting cultural isolates and that, in its destination, this meeting is aiming at reinforcing the specificity and unity of each culture involved: knowing better the other helps us to know ourselves better. The

dialectical definition of cultural identity through cross-culturality can be linked to thinkers such as Hegel, Lukács, Adorno, and Žižek. Heidegger's conception of the relation to the "foreign" best exemplifies the assumptions of dialectical cross-culturality (in its difference to differential transculturality): "For only where the foreign is known and acknowledged in its essential oppositional character (*Gegensätzlichkeit*) does there exist the possibility of a genuine relationship, that is, of a uniting (*Beziehung*) that is not a confused mixing but a conjoining in distinction (*figende Unterscheidung*)" (Heidegger 54). The "internal difference" understood in dialectical terms implies the separation from what in ourselves, unbeknownst to us, still belongs to the other. Indeed, the aim of the cross-cultural relationship with the "foreign" is to become more "ourselves," by contra-distinction.

The problem with the inter-cultural framework is more procedural: it seems to induce that the point of "cultural dialogue" is not culture but dialogue. The related cultural entities are supposed to express their willingness to cooperate and to take into account the other's core-values. It is based on the conceptual apparatus of recognition and on the political framework of peaceful agreement. The limits of this "Habermasian" perspective on cultural encounters is that its neo-Kantian model of perpetual peace under the enlightened banner of Reason seems both too programmatic to address the reality of global geopolitical coercion (Farrell and Newman 42) and the proliferation of bad-faith actors (Swimmer), and too Eurocentric (Mendieta 203).[1] Interculturality is framed in terms of rational cultural dialogue and hermeneutic self-recognition: ". . . [I]t is a fact that the activity of philosophy is always influenced by its own particular tradition. . . . If the foregoing is to be assumed, . . . if philosophy is culturally dependent, what possibilities do philosophers from different cultures have to engage in a philosophical dialogue with each other?" (Udeani 117). Cultural dialogue seems to be thus nothing but always recognizing and accepting "differences" as realities already existing: a practice bordering to auto-essentialism and self-othering.

However, both the cross-cultural and intercultural conceptions of cultural encounters are rooted on the fallacious assumption that "the foreign" is "naturally" *other* than oneself. As La Rochefoucauld and Rimbaud reminded us: "We are [...] as different from ourselves as from others" (La Rochefoucauld 86); "I am an-other" (Rimbaud 270). Transculturality means to go beyond the double identification of the relationship with oneself as identity and with the other as opposition. The intercultural eulogy of "diversity" as well as the cross-cultural deepening of

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[1] Mendieta: ". . . [W]hat promised to be a world history, . . . into yet another Eurocentric story about the invention of European subjective and political freedom" (202).

"identity" are equally misleading. One only discovers oneself in relation to others, but in the process the identity of both oneself and of the other is irreversibly transformed. This differs radically from the dialectical tradition of self-re-identifying by contradistinction with those we defined as "others." Derrida's "*differance*" provides a better conceptual basis for renewing the methodology of comparative studies today: "*What is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself.* Not to have no identity, but not to be able to identify oneself, to say 'me' or 'we'; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*]" (Derrida 16).

We are now in a situation of global transculturality. But, again, what does transcultural mean? At the most basic level, it can simply refer to the *empirical* fact of *hybridized* cultures. But if "transculturality" means "cultural hybridity" does that mean that, as far as Europe and China are concerned, it started only with twentieth-century globalization? But Chinese and European cultural interactions started much earlier. Not only with the opium wars of the nineteenth century, not only with the Chinoiseries of the eighteenth century, not only with the sixteenth-century Jesuit missions but already in the Yuan dynasty, even before Marco Polo's famous trip to China, with French and Papal envois to the court of the Great Khan. And even earlier: when the Christian Nestorian Church flourished during the Tang dynasty. Or earlier: with the introduction of Buddhism to China in the first centuries which went along with the contact with Greek art which shaped the representations of Buddha in the Gandhara region. Or even earlier: with the "Silk Road" connecting the Roman and Han Empires. Or even earlier, since the technological innovations of the Bronze Age came into China from Western Asia (Kuzmina 34). In other words, if transculturality means cultural hybridity, such hybridity is not a fact of modernity but has been always present.

However, empirical and vertical hybridity reduce transculturality to questions of cultural diffusion while true transculturality relates to transcendental and horizontal hybridity. Diverse human populations in different places at different times have reacted in different ways to similar problems: the similarity of social and metaphysical problems faced by humanity can be interpreted as a form of analogical transculturality. For example, there are many transcultural similarities between the Roman and Han empires despite the absence of direct and sustained cultural contact: for instance, in the way of performing the colonization of external territories, of rationalizing conquests in the name of civilization and pacification, and in the celestial nature of the Emperors (Scheidel 15). This mode of analogical transculturality is often overlooked by cultural studies scholars who navigate within

the scope of a geographically determined definition of culture. Moreover, transculturality goes deeper, to the meta-cultural level of transcendental principles.

The idea of the transcultural as transcendental comes from the necessity to avoid purely empirical statements and random case-studies of intellectual exchanges, interactions, analogies and other more or less metaphoric expressions of "cultural encounters."

The notion of transculturality is totally different—and is best expressed by resorting to the concept of transcendental not only in relation to its classical Kantian definition but also to its contemporary Deleuzian redefinition. In his paper analyzing the concept of transcultural philosophy in the works of Eric Nelson, Kwok-Ying Lau and myself, Timo Ennen rightly pointed out the articulation of Transcultural philosophy with Kant's conception of the transcendental (181). Regarding Kant's original concept, first we need reminding that transcendental is different from transcendent. Transcendent means knowledge beyond experience; transcendental means the possibility of knowledge about experience. Transcendental means the condition of possibility of the constitution of experience by a subject in relation to the plurality of phenomena: "The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience. . . . [A]nd without that sort of unity . . . thoroughgoing and universal, hence necessary unity of consciousness would not be encountered in the manifold perceptions." (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 234-35)

The transcendental relates to something that can't exist without experience while not originating from it: ''But although all our cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 136). The transcendental relates to a specific mode of thinking which is about the condition of possibility, not universals in general: ". . . [N]ot every *a priori* cognition must be called transcendental, but only that by means of which we cognize that and how certain representations (intuitions or concepts) are applied entirely *a priori*, or are possible . . ." (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 196). The articulation between the transcendental and transcultural can be understood analogically: Transcendental means the condition of possibility of knowledge about experience. Similarly, transcultural does not mean what is beyond culture but the condition of possibility of cultural knowledge. *Transculturality means that though all our philosophical knowledge begins with culture, it by no means follows that all arises out of culture*. Transcultural knowledge is neither empirically reducible to culture nor transcendently independent from it—it's immanent to all cultural

enunciations as their condition of possibility: *each culture's contribution to world philosophy is linked to its potential of transculturality.*

To this Kantian analogy, we could add a Deleuzian layer to help overcome the traditional framework of rational and good-faith "cultural dialogue": "The transcendental form of a faculty is indistinguishable from its disjointed, superior or transcendent exercise. . . . Each faculty must be borne to the extreme point of its dissolution, at which it falls prey to triple violence: the violence of that which forces it to be exercised, of that which it is forced to grasp and which it alone is able to grasp, yet also that of the ungraspable (from the point of view of its empirical exercise)" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 180). In Deleuze's redefinition, the transcendental no longer relates to the ordinary condition of possibility of phenomenon but becomes the singular and unique condition of impossibility of an emerging reality. This is why the transcultural neither refers to any empirical culture nor is beyond cultures altogether.

In his last paper "Immanence: A Life," Deleuze links transcendentality to the concept of "subjectivity without subject." While Kant's transcendental subject was framed by anthropological assumptions rooting its "universalism" into racial considerations (Heurtebise 64), Deleuze's transcendental refers to a process of subjectivation not subjected to gender/ethnical/cultural qualifications: "What is a transcendental field? It can be distinguished from experience, to the extent that it does not refer to any object nor belong to any subject (empirical representation). It is thus given as pure a-subjective stream of consciousness . . ." (Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness* 384). Deleuze gave the example of Dickens's scoundrel who in his agony opens to the indeterminate softness of a life: "No one has described what a life is better than Charles Dickens, when he takes the indefinite article as an index of the transcendental. A scoundrel, a bad apple, held in contempt by everyone, is found on the point of death, and suddenly those charged with his care display an urgency, respect, and even love for the dying man's least sign of life. . . . As a result, the wicked man himself, in the depths of his coma, *feels something soft and sweet* penetrate his soul" (Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness* 386; my emphasis). Transculturality refers to "*a* Culture" in the same sense that for Deleuze Transcendentality refers to "*a* Life." Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* expressed the idea that "the plane of immanence has two facets as Thought and as Nature" (38). We will propose that "a Life" refers to the Material side of the Plane of Immanence and "a Culture" to its Noetic side. We will even venture in saying that "a Life" is the softness which is met in the Depth of the Inside while "a Culture" is the sweetness which is met in the

Depth of the Outside: *Transculturality means that such a subjective contact with noetic softness has for the condition of possibility a meeting with cultural otherness.*

Transculturality as transcendental means the indefinite capacity to cultivation which has not yet taken the form of this *or* that *culture*; it's "a Culture" as something softening and sweetening the human soul out of its own "barbarity" (whether we think such a "barbarity" is innate or acquired, primitive or modern). It's not a simple mix (or "hybridization") of different cultures since a composite of empirical entities is still empirical. If it's related to the notion of hybridization, it's precisely in terms of its condition of possibility: their original non-separation, which is the transcendent *a priori* of the transcultural. In terms of the condition of production, the transcendental transcultural refers to what makes it impossible for cultures *not to* meet and mix. The transcultural as the possibility of the condition of cultural hybridization is both what stands beyond comparability and what forces cultures to meet. And this meeting is not something "you" and "me" decide on the basis of a rational decision or of a mutually beneficial relation ("intercultural dialogue")—it comes to us from the outside, via the unmeetable that forces us to meet. Agostino Cera is correct in claiming for a *transcendental* approach to the problem of the Anthropocene (3): Transculturality provides such a transcendental framework in terms of the condition of possibility.

Our claim is that the "(Mis)Anthropocene" embodies a transcendental encountering of cultures: as a dehumanizing and de-culturalizing event that forces humans and cultures to meet, as a radical deterritorialization process that confronts us ("culturalized animals") with the question of our *place* on Earth. But how to define and redefine what the (Mis)Anthropocene means?

The notion of the Anthropocene has been defined by contemporary geologists to characterize a new era for the Planet: "The Anthropocene label, proposed in the 2000s by specialists in Earth system sciences, is an essential tool for understanding what is happening to us. This is not just an environmental crisis, but a geological revolution of human origin" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 11).

The Anthropocene as a new geological era is defined by traces left by human activity in terrestrial soils (by chemical, organic, and mineral components extracted and transformed into non-recyclable compounds) whose residual accumulation in the atmosphere, rivers and oceans induce the disruption of natural cycles (carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen) and ecological equilibrium, leading to global warming and biodiversity extinction: "entirely new substances deposited in the planet's ecosystems over the last 150 years . . . constitute a typical signature of the Anthropocene in the sediments and fossils in the course of formation" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 13).

The Anthropocene manifests the extent to which humanity impacts nature, historically unprecedented in terms of ubiquity and velocity, and exceeds nature's adaptative and regenerative capacities:

> . . . [T]he Anthropocene—the "new" (καινός) brought about by the "human" (ἄνθρωπος)—designates an ecological *threshold*. It encompasses a vast number of different factors and locations, ranging from global climate change to disruptions in oceanic and atmospheric currents, the disturbance of the water cycle and of other important chemical cycles . . . soil degradation, the rapid loss of biological diversity, pollution with toxic and non-degradable substances, all accompanying a continuous growth in the number of humans and their domesticates. (Horn and Bergthaller 2)

Climate Change is one of the most obvious manifestations of how the planet as a whole reacts to this change and how this reaction to human change, global warming, is leading to deep and irreversible changes not only at the environmental level of ecological networks but also at the human level of the social fabric: "Climate change has brought into sharp focus the capability of contemporary human civilization to influence the environment at the scale of the Earth as a single, evolving planetary system" (Steffen et al. 842).

The Anthropocene era refers to a new period of history in which humans have become the main driver of an unprecedented ecological crisis, induced by the very success of their economic development: "Since the Industrial Revolution, a new era has arisen, the Anthropocene, in which human actions have become the main driver of global environmental change. This could see human activities push the Earth system outside the stable environmental state of the Holocene, with consequences that are detrimental or even catastrophic for large parts of the world" (Rockström et al. 472). In a nutshell, Anthropocene refers to the fact that the "Human Being" as a driving geological force has paradoxically "unified" Earth as a single collapsing planet. However, there are two main problems with the concept of the Anthropocene: social and historical.

First, the notion of the Anthropocene as meaning that "Humans" are responsible for climate change has been criticized by social-scientists. It's not humanity in general, it's argued, but a small portion of it who are socially and economically "responsible" for global disruption: "But what is this *anthropos*, the generic human being of the Anthropocene? Is it not eminently diverse, with

extremely different responsibilities in the global ecological disturbance?" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 13). Indeed, at the global level, economic unfairness (the 26 richest people owning as much as the poorest 50%) doubles down on ecological unfairness: the richest 10% of the population contribute 50% of world emissions (Oxfam).[2]

According to many social scientists (Blok and Jensen 1195), the Anthropocene cannot simply denote the age of "Man's domination and alteration of Nature" but should be understood as the age in which the nefarious consequences of the overexploitation of nature by a privileged group of people are suffered and experienced disproportionally by the less favored (in gender, economic, racial, geographic terms). In this regard, the Anthropocene is not simply the fatal outcome of human development but the contingent outcome of a mode of development based on a whole range of social inequalities: "To speak of a 'Capitalocene' signals that the Anthropocene did not arise fully armed from the brain of James Watt, the steam engine and coal, but rather from a long historical process of economic exploitation of human beings and the world, going back to the sixteenth century and making industrialization possible" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 13).

However, this framing of Anthropocene in terms of "Capitalocene" rises the complex question of its historical origin. If the Anthropocene does not refer to Humanity "in general," if it's not consubstantial with belonging to the human species, then it can't simply be a result of the emergence of *homo sapiens* but should be related to a specific historical event or period.

Then, if the Anthropocene is an historical reality then when did *Homo* become *Anthropos*?

First, it can be said that the Anthropocene started with the Neolithic Revolution, around ten thousand years ago (Gowdy and Krall 137): the Neolithic Revolution arrived with the end of nomadic and "primitive" ways of living, with the end of food foraging, picking and hunting.

The Neolithic Revolution marks the advent of agriculture, domestication, sedentarism, urbanism and the slow edification of a hierarchical and vertical distribution of power among members of communities. This thesis is supported by many scholars who praise "indigenous" ways of living as naturally "ecocentric": ". . . Indigenous societies had (or still have) an *ecocentric* (i.e., non-anthropocentric) worldview" (Washington et al. 287). Rousseau, arguably the first environmental philosopher, famously stressed the fact that the human fall from humanity started with the agrarian and mineral exploitation of natural resources, i.e. with the

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[2] Oxfam: "The average footprint of the richest 1% of people globally could be 175 times that of the poorest 10%."

emergence of agriculture and metallurgy: "Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts which produced this great revolution. The poets tell us it was gold and silver, but, for the philosophers, it was iron and corn, which first civilised men, and ruined humanity." (215). The rationale behind this claim is that only with the development of such human activities emerged the notion of property, and that in turn led to an asymmetric accumulation of capital and the exploitation of the majority for the benefit of the few.

Second, we could also suppose that the Anthropocene started with the development of Empires: in America, Africa, Asia, Europe, everywhere the age of metals coincided with the emergence of Empires and led to massive wars, a slave trade, and the extraction of resources (mining), going along with a strongly asymmetric distribution of power. Empirical evidence can be found to ground the Anthropocene in the Iron Imperial Age: "Although a noticeable environmental impact of humans, caused by hunting, the use of fire, forest clearance, animal domestication and agriculture had already occurred in the Neolithic, these early signals are strongly diachronous and localised [sic]. . . . A first regional lead contamination event in the Northern Hemisphere is recognized during the (Eastern Mediterranean) Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age, between 3500 and 2800 BP, with a peak at around 3000 BP" (Wagreich and Draganits 177). In this case, the Anthropocene starts with the social-economic structure of Empires (Aztec, Babylonian, Roman, and Han).

Third, even if neither colonization nor slavery did wait for Europeans to take place, nor the exploitation and domestication of man and other living beings waited for the scientific revolution to occur, it's often argued that the Anthropocene began with European colonialism:

> . . . European colonialism from AD 1500 to the early 1800s marked a fundamental transformation in human–environment interactions across much of the world. The rapid founding of various colonial enterprises, particularly mission and managerial colonies, unleashed mission agrarian systems, plantations, fur trade outposts, and commercial fishing and whaling ventures into various tropical and temperate ecosystems in the Americas, Oceania, India, Asia, and Africa, which had tremendous repercussions for indigenous faunal and floral populations. (Lightfoot et al. 101)

According to Pomeranz's *Great Divergence*, it was the exploitation of the Americas that propelled the economic foundation of both the scientific and industrial revolutions: ". . . [W]estern Europe, was able to escape the proto-industrial cul de sac and transfer handicraft workers into modern industries . . . in large part, because [of] the exploitation of the New World . . ." (Pomeranz 264). The Anthropocene is thus said to emerge with the European Renaissance because Humanism is said to induce "anthropocentrism" and the "human/nature dichotomy": ". . . humanism has arguably helped us to lose touch with ourselves as beings who are *also natural*, and have their roots in the Earth." (Washington et al. 287).

Fourth, the Anthropocene is often said to begin with the Western Industrial Revolution: "From the perspective of economic history, . . . [t]he Industrial Revolution has opened up a Pandora's Box of unintended environmental change." (Jonsson 680). According to Wrigley's *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution*, the Industrial Revolution was above all, an "energy revolution" with the shift from an "organic" energy regime to a new coal-based industrial economy (239). Philippe Descola also equates the beginning of the Anthropocene with industrial modernity when Europeans separated "culture" from "nature":

> the Anthropocene has become both symptom and symbol of humanity's catastrophic failures. . . . It is not humanity in general that has brought about the Anthropocene, but a particular system. . . . What does this system consist of? First, it is founded on the claim, unprecedented in all the history of humanity, that there is a difference in kind between humans and non-humans and not just a difference in degree. . . . The result of this belief is the construction of a hypostasized 'nature' from which human beings are removed. (Descola 2; 11-12)

Similarly, for Bruno Latour: "for Westerners and those who have imitated them, 'nature' has made the *world* uninhabitable" (36).

Sixth and finally, the present scientific consensus is to advocate for a mid-century twentieth-century "origin" of the Anthropocene:

> Of the three main levels suggested—an "early Anthropocene" level some thousands of years ago; the beginning of the Industrial Revolution at~1800 CE (Common Era); and the "Great Acceleration" of the mid-twentieth century—current evidence suggests that the last of these has the most pronounced and globally synchronous signal. . . .

> We propose an appropriate boundary level here to be the time of the
> world's first nuclear bomb explosion, on July 16th 1945 at
> Alamogordo, New Mexico. . . . (Zalasiewicz et al. 196)

In other words, if human impact on nature is a continuous phenomenon and not an instantaneous event, at the same time, it accelerates and precipitates dramatically in the middle of the twentieth century:

> The global spread of populations and increasingly intensive land use
> appears largely gradual over the past 12,000 y [sic], although a global
> acceleration is evident in the late 19th century. This acceleration,
> which levels off by the middle of the 20th century . . . is best explained
> by the use of green revolution technologies to increase agricultural
> production on lands already in use, a trend that continues today." (Ellis
> 1)

According to most scientists today, the Anthropocene follows the post-1950 "Great Acceleration." The Great Acceleration refers to the era of the Cold War, Western decolonization, market globalization and the Asian rise. Thus, the (Misanthropocenic) Anthropocene names an era in which every country is developing to its utmost in a race towards global or regional supremacy. It marks the age of the global exploitation of natural resources to sustain the development of competing national economies in both East and West (China and US), North and South (UK and India). It started when colonization ceased to be the privilege of one region of the world, the "West", and started to be available to the Global East & South.

The fact that the socio-culturalization of the Anthropocene, reducing its guilt and responsibility to one specific social or cultural (essentialized) human group fails to recognize the global nature of the predicament has been noticed by scholars such as the post-colonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty rightly stresses that a more equal distribution of emissions among nations will make little difference regarding our current environmental crisis, perhaps making things even worse:

> Only a few nations (some twelve or fourteen, including China and
> India in the last decade or so) and a fragment of humanity (about one-
> fifth) are historically responsible for most of the emissions of
> greenhouse gases so far. . . . Historically speaking, it is, of course, true

that the richer nations are responsible for most of the emissions of greenhouse gases as they pursued models of development that produced an unequal world. But imagine the counterfactual reality of a more evenly prosperous and just world made up of the same number of people as today and based on exploitation of cheap energy sourced from fossil fuel. Such a world would undoubtedly be more egalitarian and just—at least in terms of distribution of income and wealth—but the climate crisis could be worse! (57)

It's from this perspective that the *de-culturalizing* of the "Anthropocene" is necessary.

This project runs contrary to the two main narratives ("Eco-Modernist" and "Eco-Primitivist") framing our understanding of the Anthropocene (Bergthaller 51; Cera 2). The neo-Enlightenment narrative promoted by "Eco-Modernists" states that the Anthropocene is the moment in which humanity as a whole comes to term with its own overarching power: this moment of recognition will lead "humanity" to act as one single force to engineer radical changes in "our" stewardship of the planet. It's by improving our technology, by modifying the Earth through geo-engineering and the living species by genetic modifications that humanity will reassert control and domination: "Humans are made from the Earth, and the Earth is remade by human hands. . . . . [M]odern technologies, by using natural ecosystem flows and services more efficiently, offer a real chance of reducing the totality of human impacts on the biosphere" (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 6, 17).

Conversely, the neo-Romantic narrative promoted by "Eco-Primitivists" states that the Anthropocene marks the moment when humanity, acknowledging the delusional nature of its will to dominate the Earth, gives way to its non-Western, non-Male, non-Bourgeois "other" to foster a more "authentic" and "equalitarian" relationship with its living environment. The neo-Enlightenment narrative sees the Anthropocene as an opportunity for humanity to re-appropriate its post-natural self via technological enhancement; the neo-Romantic narrative sees the Anthropocene as an opportunity for humanity to re-appropriate its pre-human other via social norms of restraint.

However, both the future-oriented narrative of post-human high-tech revelation and the past-oriented narrative of pre-modern "low-tech" redemption in their attempt to prescribe a "remedy" to the Anthropocene fail to face the now-and-there metaphysical (Misanthropocenic) conundrum.

Our project is set in opposition to the scholarly trend to culturalize both the Anthropocene and its opposite "Neganthropocene" (Stiegler 45). Stiegler's "Neganthropocene" is culturalized in the sense that his interpretation of the Anthropocene is framed by Heidegger's concept of the end of "Western metaphysics" and by its Derridian reading in terms of "Western logocentrism." Since Heidegger's teleological concept of the end of Western metaphysics and of the liberation of the inauthentic "American" *Gestell* can be interpreted as the culmination of the national-culturalist logic of "true Germanity" started by Fichte (Ronell 118; Heurtebise 76), we don't feel obliged to endorse it. Even more so as Derrida's "logocentrism" is based on an exoticist reading of Chinese writing that has been proved wrong by comparative scholars (Chang 6; Castaño 150).

Our claim about the transculturality of the Anthropocene runs counter to "Brown Occidentalism" and the claim about the *culturally* "Western nature" of the Anthropocene as well as "Green Orientalism" and the claim about the *culturally* "Asian nature" of the Neganthropocene.

Brown Occidentalism goes with the idea that everything that is "Western" is by the very fact of its Westernity responsible for and guilty of causing the Anthropocene: ". . . it is important to understand *why* modern industrial (or Western) society adopted strong anthropocentrism. The decisive socio-historical influences put forward are: Ancient Greek philosophy; The Judeo-Christian tradition; The mechanistic thought of the Renaissance/Reformation . . ." (Washington et al. 287). It is impossible to debunk these claims which all seem so self-evident that the authors didn't even try to demonstrate them.

Let's consider one of the most common. According to Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," our current ecological crisis is due to the influence of Christianity on European modes of living: ". . . modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature" (1203). This thesis has been widely discussed (LeVasseur and Peterson 2-3) and harshly criticized, notably by James A. Nash who noted that such a claim tends "to reduce the explanation of the complex ecological crisis to a single cause . . . to minimize the fact that non-Christian cultures also have been environmental despoilers, [and] to overlook the number of dissenting opinions in Christian history" (Nash 74). But the weakest point of White's argument lies in the fact that the Industrial Revolution coincided with the gradual secularization of Europe; thus, it can be argued that it was not Christian ideas but their gradual disappearance that made unsustainable industrial capitalism possible. Indeed, Biblical virtues such as

Frugality, Humility, and Chastity could be described as "ecologically-friendly"; moreover, the eschatological idea that life after death mattered more than our bodily life in this world has been the greatest deterrent against the ephemeral enjoyment of capitalistic consumerism.

The narrative according to which everything "Western" should be discarded because it contributed ideologically to the Anthropocene due to its inherent anti-ecological humanism seems to conflict with the desire to propose a multicultural approach and inclusive solution to our current ecological predicament. It can be seen also as counterproductive since, as Katherine Blouin pointed out:

> For both the Anthropocene and academia's common relationships to "modernity" show through a series of binaries. These are commonly used to articulate the present-day climate crisis and to structure knowledge (production and transmission) about the ancient past: Holocene/Anthropocene; pre-1500/post 1500; human/environment; culture/nature; rational/subjective; "West"/"East"; "North"/"South"; linear/nonlinear time. . . . One notable problem with pointing to European colonial Empires as the root of our current climate crisis is that by doing so, one also unduly inflates the levels of novelties brought about by modern European Empires."

By indicting "Western modernity" for all our misgivings, we are reinforcing its "centrality."

The most paradoxical and puzzling part of this narrative is the internal contradiction manifested in post-colonial attitudes towards Westernity in cultural and ecological terms.

On one hand, it's deemed epistemologically necessary to provincialize Europe and to stress the historical contributions of non-European civilizations to world history: ". . . the Eurocentric denial of Eastern agency and its omission of the East in the progressive story of world history is entirely inadequate. . . . [T]he East has significantly and actively contributed to the rise of the West by pioneering and delivering many advanced 'resource portfolios' (e.g. technologies, institutions and ideas) to Europe" (Hobson 5). According to post-colonial historians (Blaut 90), most of that was said to be uniquely "Western"—science, technology, capitalism—has a non-European origin.

But, on the other hand, it's deemed "morally" necessary to stress that all the major breakthroughs leading to the anti-ecological modern way of life (that is, again:

science, technology and capitalism) come from a specifically Western "anthropocentric" and "dualistic" mindset: "The primary catalyst of the Anthropocene was the development of a particular ontology first in Western Europe and subsequently in other parts of the world, that first emerged a few centuries ago" (Descola 11). But if it's true that Europe is Europe thanks to Asia, Africa and the Americas, not only materially speaking but socially and culturally speaking (Powers 60; Rubiès 116, 172), then how can we only attribute to the West such a unique causal role in the cultural production of the Anthropocene? *If the origin of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions are to be found outside of Europe, as post-modern and anti-Eurocentric historians have (rightly) stressed, then why should the ecological disaster they induced be associated only with the so-called "Western mentality"?*

The trouble with the belief that to undo the Anthropocence by reverting to the Neganthropocene, we will have simply to discard one "culture" (the Western one) and embrace another (Chinese? "Aboriginal"?) is that it goes along with endorsing a culturalist notion of "culture." Interestingly enough, while most of the cultural and human studies scholars debating the issue of the Anthropocene have fiercely argued over the limits of the notion of "nature", only a few, if any, have pointed out the trouble with the notion of *culture*. The cultural essentialism of many proponents of an "alternative-culture" solution is rather confounding: their narrative is based on a monolithic conception of "culture" which overlooks most historical, regional and conceptual internal differences. "Green exoticism", the desire to believe in the "noble-savageness" of the "other," in all its different variants (such as "Green Orientalism"), is too often the hallmark of "eco-critical" studies.

The notion of "Chinese Ecological Civilization" exemplifies perfectly what "Green Orientalism" is about. In 2007 China became the primary emitter of CO_2 in the world. A year before, Pan introduced the concept of Ecological Civilization to express the need to cope with environmental degradation caused by economic development. The culturalist aspect of the concept is manifested in the fact that, according to Pan, environmental problems in China are due to the adoption of a Western model of development: "We live with Chinese culture, but our modernization drive is based on Western logic. However, it's not a wise choice to copy the Western model of industrial modernization, especially in China, because that model will result in serious conflicts with the environment and resources in such a developing country as China." Since environmental threats come from the "West," to reduce the exposition of Chinese society to environmental risks, it will be necessary to curb "Western cultural influence" and promote instead "Chinese cultural tradition": ". . . it's necessary to turn to the traditional Chinese culture for a correct

guideline in our modernization and our cultural structure and to make the ecological wisdom in the Chinese civilization an important component of the ecological civilization." The notion that there is an intrinsic ecological component in Chinese culture has been advocated by Weiming Tu: "New Confucians fully acknowledge that . . . ecological turn has great significance for China's spiritual self-definition, for it urges the nation to rediscover its soul. It also has profound implications for the sustainable future of the global community" (261). A *People's Daily* (Lina Yang and Hongyi Cheng) 2015 editorial merged Pan's concept with Tu's claim to contend that PRC environmental policies are rooted in a concern for nature that is specific to Chinese traditional culture: the "Taoist" notion that "men and nature are one" and that men "must coexist peacefully with Nature, and not try to dominate it" is "one of the most essential components of Chinese tradition and China's most important contributions to humanity."

The culturalist aspect in this claim lies in the hypothesis that it's in virtue of its inherent "Western-culture" component that industrial development is threatening natural environments and that, as a consequence, by changing its "cultural DNA," liberated from "Western influence," China, and the world under its benevolent lead, will become ecological. The famous eco-critic scholar Scott Slovic also embraced this view: "When we speak today of the emergence of an ecological civilization in China, we are, in a sense, referring to a re-assertion of traditional Chinese values rather than the creation of entirely new concepts, vocabularies, or attitudes."

However, the notion that Chinese *civilization* has always been "ecological" does not fit with the historical record. As one of the largest and most durable empires in the world, China has always placed the colonial development and intensive exploitation of its conquests above ecological considerations: ". . . the effects of human disturbance on vegetation at local scales intensified gradually from archaeological to intermediate sites since the middle Holocene . . . which coincided with a noticeable increase in the number of archaeological sites after 3,500 cal a BP in southern China" (He et al. 10); "According to historical records, vegetation destruction occurred nationwide and frequently in preindustrial China" (Fang and Xie 983); "From 1650 to 1949 the area of cropland generally increased, while the forest cover decreased. Over the long history, approximately half of cropland expansion came from deforestation in China" (Miao et al. 5). Not only was massive deforestation caused by extensive rice cultivation already a concern in imperial China but, during the Maoist period, the Great Leap Forward promoted man's conquest of nature (人定勝天) and praised deforestation to plant grain (開荒種糧食) (Elvin 460; Shapiro 9-10). It should also be remembered that, until recently, Asian leaders have

considered environmental regulations as means used by "Western powers" to limit their rightful development: "to many Asian leaders, Western concern for areas such as human rights and the environment is often seen as unwarranted interference at best and as revealing ulterior motives at worst." (Han 9).

To avoid the many traps of "environmental exoticism" (be it positive Green Orientalism or negative Brown Occidentalism), *ecologically*-critical studies should become *culturally*-critical. So far it seems that scholars' critical views about the notion of "nature" have come at the expense of an uncritical view of the concept of "culture." More precisely, in terms of the history of ideas, it seems that a ("German") Romantic conception of "culture" (as the unique mindset, linguistically based, of a specific *Volk*) has been used to criticize the ("English") Romantic conception of "nature" (as something to contemplate for spiritual elevation, as a gateway to divine morality).

This discarding of the European Romantic nineteenth-century conception of "nature" is one of the strangest aspects of the critique of "naturalism." What is the basis of asserting the radical estrangement of nineteenth-century moderns to "other natural beings" when poets like Wordsworth wrote: "To every natural form, rock, fruit, and flower, Even the loose stones that cover the highway I gave a moral life: I saw them feel?" (qtd. in Alexander 25) Baptiste Morizot goes as far as contending that Capitalistic extractivism and Romantic eco-mysticism are equally at fault in their relation to nature:

> As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro explains, the heirs of Western modernity such as ourselves think that they maintain "natural" type relationships with the entire world of non-human living things, because any other relationship towards them is impossible. The possible relationships in the modern cosmos are of two orders: either natural or socio-political, with socio-political relationships reserved exclusively for humans. Consequently, this implies that we consider the living essentially as a setting, as a reserve of resources available for production, as a place of rejuvenation or as an emotional and symbolic projection support. (17)

Apparently, the fault of the moderns regarding "nature" is to be not post-modern enough, i.e. to fail to *socialize* every aspect of human interaction with others including non-human ones: only a socialized relation to nature will be said "natural" . . . provided that this mode of socialization is made on the basis of equal

ownership. Any relation to the environment which does not follow the model of "primitive communism" will be said ecocidal:

> There is only one way to live on this Earth without degrading people and without degrading the ecological health of the land-base, waterways, forests, and air upon which we all rely. That way of life is anarcho-primitivism: a radically simple living, low-tech, primarily hunter-gatherer existence, without much agriculture and without a centralised governance system that we used to call 'the state.' To live otherwise is to initiate a civilisational sickness unto death. (Alexander and Burdan 72)

From this Eco-Primitivist perspective, there is only one way to escape the Anthropocene and to reverse its course (Neganthropocene): to destroy, symbolically or practically, the destroyers. The Anthropocene is not the suicide of humanity through the degradation of their terrestrial condition of living but it's murderous contamination by Westerners' mode of life. The only way to escape annihilation is to get rid of the murderers by fomenting the global Indigenous insurrection against it:

> It is not suicide we are dealing with, but the murder of one part of the species by another part of the same species. . . . We would thus all be indigenous, that is, Terrans, invaded by Europeans, that is, Humans. . . . lt is not against "civilization," "progress," . . . or "humankind" that Terrans are fighting, but against these entities acting *on behalf of* Humans. These [Humans] are . . . none other than the *Moderns*. . . ." (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 83, 108, 103, 92-93)

With Chinese Ecological Civilization and the Indigenous Terran Insurrection, we have two examples of Green Exoticism leading to global culture wars. Since culturalization of the Anthropocene could lead to more violence, resentment and despair, we need a transcultural approach.

In *Death for Gaia*, am environmental conscious radical scientist embraced the killing of humans as the sole solution for the safeguarding of (the only truly valuable) Gaia: "industrial civilization, in its historically short existence, was in the process of undermining the ecological conditions for wellbeing—not just human wellbeing but the wellbeing of the entire community of life . . . If we account for that in the utilitarian calculus, the good derived from the release of Hemlock-42 [the fictional

virus that killed 90% of humanity] clearly outweighs the admittedly horrid, but nevertheless short term, suffering caused to humanity" (Alexander and Burdan 53-54).

Such literary statements help us to disclose the *Misanthropocenic* nature of the proposed "neganthropocenic" solution to the Anthropocene problem. According to Stiegler, the negentropic reversal of the Anthropocene and the escape from the proletarianization induced by the industrial economy will be made possible by its transvaluation into an "economy of care": "The *question* of the Anthropocene is how to *exit* from the Anthropocene qua toxic period in order to enter into a new epoch that we are calling the Neganthropocene, as a curative, careful epoch" (Stiegler 45). Stiegler's Neganthropocene is prescriptive while our concept of Misanthropocene is descriptive. Indeed, there are many new terms crafted around the notion of Anthropocene: Agostino Cera provides an impressive list of more or less esoteric terms: from Agnotocene to Wasteocene via Jolyonocene, Naufragocene or Soterocene (48-49). Most of these terms aim at providing a specific entry to the issue by stressing its Capitalistic, Western, Phallocentric, etc. basis—with the idea that this core component is both essential *and* removable by a Neganthropic *conversion* to a non-Capitalistic, non-Western, non-Male (for Eco-Primitivists) or more Technological and Rational (for Eco-Modernists) eco-society. Cera rightly stresses that, the "basic assumption and the limit of the new field of Anthropological Studies . . . consist in . . . the conviction that the question concerning the Anthropocene would automatically disappear once the ecological and eco-political problems are solved" (2); in so "we risk mistaking the symptom for the disease" (3). *Anthropocene is the symptom of which Misanthropocene is the disease*.

Our point with the notion of "Misanthropocene" is that "Anthropocene" is a misnomer: it seems to imply the idea of a total "humanization" of the Earth (for both Eco-Modernists who want technology to achieve it and Eco-Primitivists who want "savagery" to undo it) while it manifests the overtaking of opposite forces of deshumanization. In this regard, we quite agree with Clive Hamilton's pronouncement: "[T]he problem is not that humans are anthropocentric, but that *we are not anthropocentric enough*" (43). With the caveat that this is not simply a matter of external factors ("the system of technological industrialism and profit-driven consumerism that gave rise to the ecological crisis") (Hamilton 88). but an inherent feature of the "unsocial sociability" of inhuman humans. Eco-Modernist and Eco-Primitivist narratives fail to grasp how our metaphysical uneasiness *vis-à-vis* our very presence in this world leads us to "self-destructivism." As Nancy wrote in *Vérité de la démocratie* (*The Truth of Democracy*): "Nothing is more common than the death

impulse—and the point is not to know if State technological policies that allowed Auschwitz and Hiroshima unleashed impulses of this magnitude, but rather to know if humanity, overburdened by its millions of years, has not chosen the path of its own annihilation over the last few centuries" (55).

However, there is still something in Stiegler's reading that can be related to Misanthropocene: the understanding of the Anthropocene not as a manifestation of human power over the Earth (that should be continued and deepened for "Eco-Modernists") but as its unmaking: "In the age of disruption, the technical system, which permanently changes beyond all limits, amounts to an extreme stage of a process of disinhibition" (Stiegler 105). *The Misanthropocene is indeed the age of the disinhibition from inhumanity*, the age of uninhibitedness for being inhumane. The problem is not that humanity has lost its "primitive connection to nature" or its "moral responsibility towards other humans (present or yet to come)" and so the solution is neither to embrace other humans in our definition of ourselves (intergenerational responsibility) nor to repudiate anthropocentrism and to start to care for natural realities in themselves, for their intrinsic value (deep ecology). The real issue with the human destruction of Earth is not that it's "unfair," or "white," or "Western," or "anthropocentric," or "speciesist," or "de-socializing-nature," but that it is made in the name of a "civilization" that seems to have lost its *cultural* destination.

In this respect, we can understand both the naïve urge for and the radical limitation of the culturalization of the Anthropocene (and Neganthropocene). The claim that changing the "cultural mindset" (from a Western one to a Chinese or Aboriginal one) will "save humanity" (or, at least, the "good" portion of it) demonstrates that Eco-Primitivists at least have some sense of what is going wrong… while Eco-Modernists are so lost in their capitalistic high-tech idealism that they fail to sense it. However, they are still mistaken in thinking that it is just a problem of one specific culture, whereas the issue is actually about "culture" in the transcendental and transcultural sense of the term, as a force pushing humanity to its conceptual and sensible limit.

In this regard, Chakrabarty is also right to say that "Humanity's current predicament renews for the humanist the question of the human condition" (20). With the important caveat that the question of the "human condition" raised by the "Anthropocene" is not a "humanist question" but an "anti-humanist" one. In this respect, Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology* can act as a useful complement: not only because for him culturizing, ethnicizing and socializing the Anthropocene amounts to its "denial" but also because ecological awareness is understood in terms of dread:

"the darkness of ecological awareness is the darkness of *noir*" (14, 9). Perhaps the best approximation to understanding the Anthropocene in Misanthropocenic terms can be found in Poe's *Black Cat*: ". . . I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?" (102)

Eco-Primitivists with their egalitarian state of socialized nature as well as Eco-Modernists with their hyper-technological meritocratic Utopia fail to grasp the link between human evolution and "perversity," the anti-Socratic desire to do wrong simply for the pleasure of going against your feeling that it's wrong: we did not start pollute and emit CO_2 because we ignored what we were doing and we are not stopping now even though we know what we are doing.

At a deeper level, anti-ecological perverseness should be understood in relation to the trans-natural, inherently *cultural*, goal of human development: ". . . culture alone can be the ultimate purpose which we have cause for ascribing to nature in respect to the human race (not man's earthly happiness or the fact that he is the chief instrument of instituting order and harmony in irrational nature external to himself)" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 189). The ecological catastrophe of our age is Misanthropocenic in the sense that it reflects human transcendentality in a dark and ironic way: while the purpose of nature in man is to go beyond nature, the Misanthropocene shows that man is not simply what is instituting order into reality but also chaos into it. By destroying the Earth, humanity perversely reminds itself of its "cultural destination." Misanthropocene refers to this uncanny moment at which human cultural ends are "achieved" through global deculturalization. Misanthropocene is not only *transcultural* as the event forcing cultures to reach their own limits in their encountering, it's also *de-cultural* in the sense that it's destroying the softness of "a culture" by hardening the rigidity of the different ethnic, social and gender cultures which struggle against each other to be recognized as the single one whose historical resentment is legitimate. The transcultural potential of the Anthropocene is compromised by the de-cultural reality of the Misanthropocene: the over-culturalization of our current terrestrial predicament being one of its manifestations.

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