

CLIMATE CAPITALISM CONTROL

Ian Alan Paul



CLIMATE, CAPITALISM, CONTROL

An experimental video essay produced by
Ian Alan Paul
2019

ianalanpaul.com/climate-capitalism-control-text/

Dispersed across the surface of Earth, computer clusters electronically hum in vast air-conditioned rooms. One models sea level rises, precipitation rates, temperature increases, and property values in coastal metropolises over the coming thousand years. Another runs simulations of various military strategies designed to respond to the ensemble of armed insurgencies and mass migrations that are predicted to accompany expanding droughts and crop failures. This cluster runs affect recognition algorithms on videos streamed from malls, schools, bridges, beaches, cafes, prisons, subway cars, and stadiums in order to forecast the spatial distribution of criminal activity in a bustling financial district. That cluster hosts a seemingly endless grid of lush virtual gardens that users digitally water by periodically tapping on their phones while commuting to work. These clusters compete with one another to mine cryptocurrencies while quantitatively speculating in weather derivatives markets. All of this silicon only senses, analyzes, and simulates the planet in order to grow as a more total power over it.

02.

All of Earth is mediated by climate, capitalism, and control, three assemblages that have come to be entangled with one another at planetary scales. Climate, as a planetary ontology, decomposes and decodes the way Earth has historically been ordered by political, ecological, cultural, economic, and geological processes. Capitalism, as a planetary economy, captures and subsumes the disintegrating wreckage of climate in planetary markets by speculating about and commodifying it in ever finer spatial and temporal resolutions. Control, as a planetary governmentality, modulates between the deterritorializing forces of climate and the reterritorializing forces of capitalism while cybernetically regulating whatever anomalous hostilities inevitably emerge. Exposed to weather, abstracted by price, and processed as data, all life on Earth is now propelled towards exhaustion, exploitation, and eventual extinction by the conjunctive force of these three planetary assemblages.

The planetary mediation of life's domination is facilitated by a multiplicity of interoperable systems composed of technical, economic, cultural, biological, ecological, and political components that disintegrate and reintegrate the planet as a means of recursively reinstantiating themselves ever more intensely and totally. A relentless deluge of molecular and recombinatorial forces inundate Earth, rendering it ever more programmed, securitized, privatized, surveilled, polluted, networked, militarized, and alienated. Whether in the halls of government, in financial markets, in global logistics systems, or in military war rooms, what already exists has become operationally and strategically superseded by what could possibly be instead. Construction sites and ruins are proliferated in a recurring planetary gesture, remaking all of Earth into a disastrous bricolage of fragile storm shelters, camouflaged military outposts, makeshift tent cities, fortified server farms, mobile border checkpoints, abandoned suburbs, improvised barricades, sprawling concentration camps, luxury compounds, squatted high-rises, radioactive trash dumps, plastic oceans, hyperactive distribution hubs, and flooded subways.

04.

Every disastrous cycle that churns through the present is interrupted by the arrival of the next, their frequency accelerating and their momentum accumulating to the degree that it has become difficult to discern the actual from the virtual. Chaotic disorganizations and reorganizations of matter unfold simultaneously over and across one another as everything solid melts into the turbulent storm systems and buzzing drone swarms that gather in the air all around. To be alive today is to live many different times at once, to be saturated by the immense accumulated violence of unresolved pasts and to be swept up within the wild potentialities of innumerable futures that flood the present together. The postmodern, postcolonial, postnational, postdigital, and post-industrial are each fragmentary descriptors of this nonlinear, heterogeneous, and volatile temporality that simultaneously unfolds so imperceptibly that it seems to stretch out to eternity and arrives so suddenly that it threatens to snap each of our necks. Even the angel of history can no longer witness all of the accumulating wreckage, having drowned within the circulating debris that concurrently disassembles and reassembles all around.

As the planet is subsumed within the process of its own formal disintegration and dissolution, it is also interminably being reintegrated and refabricated into a billion different versions of the same digital screen: always more expensive, always more surveilled, always more luminous, always more connected, always already more obsolete, disposable, and toxic. Recalculated, rerendered, and refreshed as the smallest and thus most controllable elements of a planetary screen, more and more of Earth is recursively captured and displayed as pixels so that more and more of Earth can be algorithmically acted upon. Planetary power swipes in every direction across the responsive surface of our pixelated reality, dominating and commanding an increasingly programmed present where steady increases in resolution always correspond with steady increases in control. People equipped with arsenals of glossy, networked, and responsive phones, tablets, and watches act as sensors for planetary power, and thus are also tenaciously sensed. Neither microsequences of DNA, nor city-wide protests, nor continental-scale sandstorms escape the relentless scanning of this planetary digital capture.

06.

As the assemblages of climate, capitalism, and control become integrated within a singular planetary logic, the planet's epistemological structures will produce greater and greater volumes of data as a consequence of the planet becoming more and more intimately dominated. In other words, we will come to more totally know Earth as planetary power more totally facilitates its destruction. Networks of planetary sensing technologies capture higher and higher volumes of data about ocean temperatures only in order to protect carbon-emitting global supply chains from threatening storms, while data that tracks planetary deforestation will also be used to recalibrate the distribution of border technologies intended to control the movement of climate refugees. In increasingly high resolution detail, we will be presented with evidence of accelerating extinctions, deepening corruption, collapsing ecosystems, multiplying drownings, sharpening inequalities, and melting ice shelves while financial markets move in tight dances with weather systems and social networks algorithmically parse the latest planetary disasters into a billion personalized, tracked, and monetized feeds.

As planetary cultures struggle to digest the catastrophes that arise all around, the aesthetic regimes of ecological nostalgia, of immersive realism, and of universal alienation will each emerge as ways of making those catastrophes sensible. The aesthetics of ecological nostalgia will be concerned with what can still be sensed and experienced, but can only be sensed and experienced as already disappearing and vanishing. The taste of clean water, the sound of a wild untamed forest, the sight of dazzling insect colors, the feeling of a cool summer breeze, and the smell of fresh fruit will all be central to this aesthetic. The sanctity of each species will be sensually coupled with the sublimity of its impending extinction. The aesthetics of immersive realism will aim to mimetically reproduce the most extreme planetary environments for those who remain most sheltered and distant from them. Business executives at self-actualization summits will strap on headsets so they can virtually stand on tropical beaches as the latest record-breaking hurricanes make landfall, while families on vacation at militarized resorts will pay to pilot recreated migrant boats across holographic Mediterranean waters.

The experience of the immersive realist aesthetic will principally be cathartic, but nonetheless it will be marketed and advertised as authentic, ethical, participatory documentary. The aesthetics of universal alienation will abandon the frame of the planet altogether as it gestures instead towards the referenceless void of deep interstellar space. Zero gravity sex, vacuum-packed meals, starless skies, seamless space suits, and sterile sleeping pods will each symbolize a liberation from planetary constraints, and those who can afford it will pay exorbitant amounts to ride in privatized rockets where all earthly references, relationships, and responsibilities fleetingly evaporate in the surrounding vacuum until gravity violently drags them back into the atmosphere. Our planetary catastrophe will only be outpaced by its manifold aestheticization.

Climate, capitalism, and control are located nowhere in particular because they are differentially expressed everywhere at once. A car, an ocean, a battlefield, a city, an economy, a forest, a university, a refrigerator, a living room, an atmosphere, a factory, and a body are all equally subsumed within the abstract flatness of a digital universality and interoperability as Earth itself comes to serve as the material substrate for, as well as the object of, programming. Adversarial geoengineering, additive manufacturing, atmospheric modeling, and artificial intelligence multiply in every direction as the means of production become indistinguishable from the means of control, while life finds itself reproducing and being reproduced by innumerable orders of personal and planetary cybernetic processes. The movement of commodities, the management of populations, the maneuvers of security forces, the measurement of global temperatures, and the modulation of affects are all processed within networked media technologies that unify all things, but unify them only in vast reservoirs of atomized data points. This discrete unification of Earth ultimately has the effect of neutralizing it, as the force of life is computationally curtailed to its dividuated circulation within the digitized circuits of planetary apparatuses. As a consequence of this networked mediation, the totalization of power is only matched by a corresponding totalization of human alienation and technical isolation.

09.

The planetary assemblages of climate, capitalism, and control shape and command the present to the extent that they are able to conjunctively mediate it. Torrential storms, televised spectacles, armed conflicts, package deliveries, police patrols, traffic backups, grocery purchases, intimate conversations, academic research, casual sex, and art markets are all captured, analyzed, and acted upon by networked systems that do not differentiate between planetary and personal scales. The macro-logistics of global supply chains are technically and infrastructurally indistinguishable from the micro-logistics of everyday life, and across every node of the planet's networks maximum circulation coincides with maximum control. The same kinds of algorithms that digitally capture biometric identifiers from social media photos also help predator drones locate targets on the landscapes they survey below, just as the same kinds of systems that store data about consumer behavior also store data about prison populations and extinction rates. The mediated domination of the present is equally plotted on scientists' charts, aggregated by data brokers, speculated about in financial markets, streamed on digital platforms, encrypted in surveillance databases, and simulated for high-budget video games.

Power is no longer oriented towards establishing rigid orders over this or that territory, but instead is only concerned with proliferating, intensifying, steering, and contouring greater and greater degrees of planetary disorder. In every instance, indecision and indeterminacy are cultivated as a means of cultivating permanent crises where exceptional measures are made to be permissible in perpetuity. A hurricane makes way for a complex choreography of police raids, refinery construction, and market speculation, while persistent flooding provides the context for forced evacuations, mass demolitions, and infrastructure privatization. The automation of the workforce takes place alongside the automation of warfare, generating unrelenting economic disruptions and diffuse yet persistent offensive operations, while expanding crises only expand the territory upon which power desires to act. Every enduring state of being comes to be overwhelmed by programmed processes of perpetual becoming as the order of things gives way to a growing plurality of planetary disordering and ordering processes. All that was fixed comes to circulate in the regulated and calibrated turbulences of transcontinental flows.

11.

The forces of climate, capitalism, and control disperse, disintegrate, and dissolve stable territories into multiplicities of imbricated molecular confrontations that unfold at multidimensional scales and speeds. Violence that was enacted extensively across the delineated interiors and exteriors of bordered space has taken on new form as intensive violence that is topologically and differentially expressed across all of the planet at once. A devastating heat wave, a mutating cyberweapon, a cascade of drone strikes, an overwhelming flood, a contagious financial crisis, and a debilitating power outage all wash over any attempt to contain or curtail them. Borders that were once rigid and fixed become mobile and modular. The entanglement of climate, capitalism, and control has unified the expression of violence at a planetary scale, intensively saturating all of Earth. The theater of war and the agora of politics have been blown away by the atmospheric pressure of a billion hybrid conflicts. Cause and effect, here and there, possibility and potentiality, and yesterday and tomorrow all decompose and bleed together.

The manifold violence of planetary power is expressed everywhere always differentially. Legacies of capitalist accumulation, colonial expansion, and sovereign domination all steer, filter, and technically rearticulate sexualized and racialized inheritances and hierarchies in arrays of cybernetic apparatuses that recursively command the intensive present. The mass incarceration of black populations in panoptic prison architectures is infrastructurally reinstantiated as dispersed networks of ankle monitors that stream location data and audio to police databases. Counterinsurgency operations, counterterrorism interventions, and countermigration measures are potentially expressed anywhere at any time yet inevitably are enacted across a dynamic series of algorithmically shifting somewheres. Queers are surveilled, outed, and entrapped on state-infiltrated hookup sites, while women have their fertility monitored and monetized on menstrual cycle tracking apps. Toxic mines multiply in impoverished areas so solar panels and microprocessors composed of rare earth metals can be shipped to wealthy ones, and only exclusive beach resorts are repaired after devastating hurricanes pass over colonized islands. Entire regions are rendered uninhabitable by unprecedented droughts, while otherwise uninhabitable regions have profuse water resources channeled towards them. In all of these ways and many more, the planetary expression of power in the present is entirely continuous with past historical violence, a molar inheritance made increasingly molecular.

Climate, capitalism, and control all contribute to a generalized intensification of Earth, energetically accelerating carbon, commodities, and communication as the entire planet literally heats up. The pulses of light that stream between server farms on fiber optic cables, the GPS signals used to track the movement of shipping containers between continents, and the beams of sunlight radiating through an increasingly carbon-dense atmosphere are all luminous lines in an increasingly catastrophic planetary poem. Autonomous electric cars will reroute trips around flooded highways while filtering carcinogenic particulates from the air and playing cli-fi audiobooks for their passengers. Smart speakers will answer questions about record heat waves as digital home security systems send data to police forces during regular episodes of social unrest and political revolt. The drifting smoke from enormous wildfires will send people sprinting to 3D printers to reassemble spools of toxic plastic into disposable breathing masks. As photos of climate refugees detained in concentration camps circulate and go viral, users will be prompted to tag each distressed face and verify the image's location. As protesters are bluntly beaten with police batons and densely coated in pepper spray outside of environmental policy summits, they will be pinged with reminders to update their status so their networks can click and comment upon their situation. As police drones patrol above flooded neighborhoods in search of looters while streaming crisp HD footage framed with colorful ads, online audiences will be asked if they'd like to post the algorithmically suggested comment "So Sad! #ClimateChangeIsReal" in the video's group chat. This profound alienation, which is at once technical, economic, cultural, political, and ecological, both produces and pacifies the cybernetic subjects of the disastrous present.

As molecular forces more energetically ripple across and through Earth, the planet will come to overflow with innumerable derivative fantasies of what it must become instead. Nation states will oscillate between ever more extreme parliamentary expressions of the Left and Right, generating an endless call and response of increasingly intense rhetoric while climate, capitalism, and control only intensify one another. Whether these fantasies take on the form of a militant ethnonationalism, cybernetic socialism, fatalist accelerationism, technocratic managerialism, suicidal fascism, or green authoritarianism, the instantiation and enactment of planetary power in the present, and of the scale and intensity of violence that making planetary life conform to planetary power necessarily entails, will only ever culminate in a planet made totally uninhabitable. Ultimately, the question upon which the possibility of living itself depends is: How can life grow not as a power, but as a growing cancellation of it?

15.

We live in a historical moment when the domination of life has become irrevocably coupled with the destruction of all of the social, economic, technical, and ecological conditions that make life possible. As a consequence, living a pacified and neutralized life in the present disaster, a life that is lived only as a sum of its digitized predicates and the operations of power enacted upon them, will mean committing to dying along with the planet. In contrast, the forms of life that in some way exceed the present, the lives that arise from within the waves and folds of present forces but nonetheless imminently contain the forceful possibility of the present's negation, the lives that are born within and against the present, may be the only remaining possibility of a future Earth with any life at all. Perhaps the only virtue of our disastrous present is that there are no political programs, parties, or platforms that offer even a modicum of hope. In their absence, however, remain the ineradicable possibilities negatively afforded by collective acts of refusal. A repertoire composed of blockades, glitches, cuts, disruptions, leaks, riots, hacks, strikes, slowdowns, and sabotage can each in their own way help disconnect life from the planetary violence of climate, capitalism, and control. Perhaps more urgently, this negative repertoire can also generate opportunities to find one another, to concentrate and gather together, to care for and cultivate something beyond the reach of planetary power, and to produce places to live, speculate, dream, love, and conspire, places from which counterattack becomes possible.

Life must become attractively drawn towards destroying the infrastructures that dominate the planet and planetary life just as it is towards constructing, defending, and proliferating the infrastructures that cultivate the otherwise of a planet and planetary life beyond domination. An internet outage has more potential to spoil a political summit than a thousand of the most militant rioters do, while blocking highways and thoroughfares or setting up an encampment in the heart of a metropolis can slow an economy just as it creates an urban commons that isn't dependent upon the circulations of planetary power. A sabotaged construction project can produce space for a garden, and a computer virus can give everyone a day off from work. Being on the side of life entails actively undoing the many ways in which death now accumulates and gathers all around. Whether in the form of borders, prisons, banks, camps, factories, mines, or distribution warehouses, this will require not only attacking the ways death is concentrated in architectural forms but, more importantly, the ways death circulates on highways and railways, across seas, underground, and through the air, and within and between data centers. The more we research and become familiar with the technologies, processes, and flows of planetary power, the more effective our strikes will be. In almost every instance, blocking infrastructure clears the way. Every channel and flow can be a potential target, every disruption both a wound for power and an opening for life.

17.

Social networks, search engines, and digital platforms of almost every kind are above all else algorithmic techniques of governing thought, affect, and social relations, and thus of governing life itself. As such, the most liberating and dangerous potential of revolt is unquestionably that it can produce times and spaces for practices of thinking, experiencing, and relating which aren't already captured by planetary power in advance of their enactment. Thinking with others outside of the algorithmic domination of thought, sharing experiences which do not circulate within and are not reliant upon the connectivity of social networks, and strengthening relationships which are imperceptible to, and incompatible with, cybernetic power are all urgently necessary tasks. Living a militant life entails destituting whatever power dominates life on Earth just as it entails living a life with others as part of a planetary otherwise that refuses the procedures, processing, and programming of planetary power.

If life is to act as a growing negation of the planetary power conjunctively produced by climate, capitalism, and control, it will have to continue to collectively experiment with new forms of solidarity, refusal, kinship, compassion, militancy, care, and thought, practices which will then have to be cultivated and materially instantiated in a growing constellation of liberated zones, infrastructures, ecosystems, hideouts, commons, and refuges. Those fleeing the intensities of planetary violence must be embraced and fought alongside with. Learning how to salvage will be just as essential as learning how to farm. Fending off capture will entail communizing everything, and the autonomy of creativity will find an accomplice in the potency of refusal. The circulatory flows of planetary power have to be swept away by incommensurable circulations of a qualitatively different kind.

19.

Centuries of power's consolidation have brought us to a point where the mediated process of totally alienating us from ourselves, from each other, and from the planet is nearly complete. It is here, at the stage of near total separation and dividuation, that the possibility of a planetary otherwise nonetheless persists. As the planetary entanglement of climate, capitalism, and control threatens to suffocate not only the possibility of life's flourishing but of life itself, the violent intensity of the planetary situation will give rise to increasingly militant and desperate forms of revolt. Those revolts will only have a chance to persist, endure, and grow in strength if they manage to resonate and reverberate ever more widely and intensely with one another, just as they must manage to assist one another in escaping and eluding the always encroaching capture and control of planetary power. Life itself will come to depend upon fostering, nurturing, defending, and tending to all of the intimate bonds formed across social difference and geographic distance that constitute an adversarial otherwise to all of the disastrous present.

The planet must become a planet where many different planets can flourish beyond the regulation of planetary power, where life persists as radically multiple, heterogeneous, and indeterminate, and thus persists to some degree as ungovernable. The question of revolt is principally a formal question, and those who are already most impacted by the forces of climate, capitalism, and control, those who have been ecologically expelled, economically dispossessed, and algorithmically commanded, will also be those who can most intimately give form to the collective project of dismantling and destroying planetary power. Migrant caravans, refugee squats, smuggling networks, pipeline saboteurs, rescue vessels, indigenous blockades, safe houses, anarchist hackers, militant flotillas, tree sitters, and maroon encampments must be understood as historical actualizations of a planetary ungovernable potential, as expanding reservoirs of militant solidarity, of loving insurgency, and ultimately of a future unlike the present.

21.

Just as power is no longer concentrated in palaces or parliaments but instead is technically distributed in diffuse networks and architectures of mediation, so too does resistance and revolt become immanent to, and thus possible within, every avenue, channel, intersection, junction, and flow. Distribution warehouse workers sabotaging automated sorting equipment, sex workers striking against corporate and state surveillance, delivery drivers blockading highways, informal encampments defending themselves against state eviction, undocumented migrants occupying airport terminals, the coordinated looting of supplies following climate catastrophe, the hacking and erasure of biometric databases and financial records, and the cutting of fiber optic cables between border fences and data centers can each become cacophonous notes in the discordant harmonies of a planetary revolt.

22.

As the possibility of life on Earth is more forcefully called into question, life will more forcefully be called to revolt in ways that offer not the promise but the possibility of canceling the ongoing planetary cancellation of life. The accelerating intensification of climate, capitalism, and control has made the question of our collective survival indistinguishable from the question of our finding, assisting, and militantly acting with one another as a planetary destituent force that can bring ruin to planetary power and decisively leave nothing in its place. In the creases between Earth and its computation, between life and its coded predicates, between collective fugitivity and algorithmic domination, life must become totally ungovernable to be able to grasp the possibility of annihilating what presently threatens to annihilate everything.

Climate, Capitalism, Control is a video essay, originally authored and produced by Ian Alan Paul in 2019.

This essay and accompanying video can be found on his website:
<http://www.ianalanpaul.com/climate-capitalism-control-text/>

This zine was produced using the text provided at Ian Alan Paul's website.

Formatting and cover design by **[deletia] distro.**

deletia-distro.tumblr.com

As the possibility of life on Earth is more forcefully called into question, life will more forcefully be called to revolt in ways that offer not the promise but the possibility of canceling the ongoing planetary cancellation of life. The accelerating intensification of climate, capitalism, and control has made the question of our collective survival indistinguishable from the question of our finding, assisting, and militantly acting with one another as a planetary destituent force that can bring ruin to planetary power and decisively leave nothing in its place. In the creases between Earth and its computation, between life and its coded predicates, between collective fugitivity and algorithmic domination, life must become totally ungovernable to be able to grasp the possibility of annihilating what presently threatens to annihilate everything.

