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Relocalizing Technology

Contribution to GTI Forum Technology and the Future

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If a future great transition manages to address the two key challenges facing humanity today, then I expect convivial and environmentally appropriate technologies to play a role. Such technologies will be more commonly thought of as techniques of living, subject to co-governance, demystified, and user-friendly.

The two challenges of global concern are, on the one hand, diverse and complex socio-political and economic inequalities and, on the other hand, deep planetary ecological unsustainability. Both are generated and reproduced by money, relations of credit and debt, at the hub of capitalism's wheel.

In our current economic system, capitalist managers and owners direct technological innovation and steer it in the direction of enabling growth following the formulaic management of production for trade, which boils down to money making more money. Of course, there are quasi-political regulatory limits and influences related to market demand and preferences that must be taken into account. However, capitalist logic and power are in the driving seat. Even as technologies are released as consumer commodities, those offered are regularly intended to become functionally or otherwise obsolete or unrepairable, and come in the form of services rather than goods, with a demand for continuous fee payments.

Although capitalist technologies are neo-imperialist more by nurture than by nature, they are likely to be barriers to a real transition, one that achieves equity and sustainability. It stands to reason that transitional processes require that means incorporate end visions as quickly, directly, and completely as possible. Unsurprisingly, many movements working for a transition—such

as the degrowth movement, ecosocialism, ecofeminism, and ecoanarchism—in various ways and to varying extents support slow and small “alternative technologies,” using human energy and minimal materials, re-use of natural renewable materials rather than artificial ones, and repairable tools. Such technologies honor human ingenuity and crafts, and respect the multivarious qualities and limits of Earth.

In contrast, genetically modified organisms are intended to improve on and master both Earth and work/ers, with capitalist owners and managers patenting, owning, and controlling a seemingly continuously more artificial environment, more intensively and extensively divorcing humans from their life sources. Such alienation reaches its apogee in so-called “artificial intelligence,” which often commodifies erstwhile human skills in machines with simplified forms of human intelligence, robbing people of developing and expressing their creative intelligence and multiple skills.

Even if [drones](#) can replace human monitors in forests more effectively at one or a small suite of skills, they fail to fulfill the plethora of functions of [community-based foresters](#) who simultaneously and directly fulfill various human needs as well as those of the forest. Few studies on drones’ efficiency take account of the back-end embodied material and energy, including human, to create and maintain the drone. Such studies are framed monetarily, sidelining social and ecological values.

Arguments in the technology chapter of my upcoming book [Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy](#) parallel points made by social scientist [Jathan Sadowski for a neo-Luddism](#) that “treat[s] technology as a political and economic phenomenon that deserves to be critically scrutinised and democratically governed.” Unsurprisingly, *Beyond Money* analyzes digital technologies and digital currencies. A transformational social formation, the [Cooperativa Integral Catalana](#) (Catalan Integral Cooperative, or CIC) demonstrates associated arguments.

CIC aspires to decentralized production and exchange; an autonomous communalism; and open, transparent, direct participatory decision-making processes. CIC and the P2P Foundation have developed a global digital cryptocurrency, FairCoin, with the significant advance of using a fraction of the energy Bitcoin requires to operate. This is just one of a suite of [Fair open-source tools](#) for financial and non-financial purposes and “copyleft” licenses.

However, to the extent that CIC replicates market-oriented and money-based relations, it fails to deconstruct the building blocks of our current dilemmas, which are deeply associated with monetary processes that originate and facilitate inequality and unsustainability. Monetary values and production for the market suffocate, contort, and even obliterate the advance of local community-based decision-making using the real social and ecological values necessary to respect the needs of Earth and people.

Digital techniques might be applied in convivial and appropriate ways, say in a postcapitalism in which digital techniques are servants not masters, used minimally and appropriately. But, most importantly, for authentic co-governance of production to simply fulfill people's basic needs within Earth's limits, we need to produce on demand via collective and localized sufficiency. Here neither money nor market exist, and humans are transparently part of nature, of Earth. As such, techniques and technologies of living are ecologically and socially functional, fit for purpose, durable, friendly, and accessible to all.

About the Author



Anitra Nelson is Honorary Principal Fellow at University of Melbourne, author of *Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy* and *Small is Necessary: Shared Living on a Shared Planet*, and co-author of *Exploring Degrowth*. She was the co-editor of *Housing for Degrowth: Principles, Models, Challenges and Opportunities* and *Food for Degrowth: Perspectives and Practices*. Her research focuses on affordability and sustainability in housing policy as well as the potential for non-monetary economies. She holds a PhD from LaTrobe University.

About the Publication

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