

Anthropocene and Social Time
Presentation of a Philosophical Research Trajectory

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This research project, *Anthropocene and Social Time*, is structured around the articulation of two major concepts in contemporary thought: the Anthropocene and social time. My intention was to deepen our understanding of each through the mutual illumination they can offer one another.

Five years ago, I was searching for the question that would guide my future research. Inspired by the Saint Lawrence River, it soon became clear that my inquiry concerned the modes of appearing of the living world, and how these are modulated by our attentional and emotional dispositions. Quite concretely, I was asking how to describe and analyze what the river was doing to me, and what it was expressing.

A few months later, I attended a conference on climate change at the Sorbonne. There, I fully and painfully grasped the scale of the ecological crisis. It became clear that I needed to integrate this awareness into my research perspective and to place these risks at the heart of my work.

I thus turned to the cluster of environmental transformations caused by human activity, what is now commonly referred to as the Anthropocene. In parallel, I was developing an interest in questions of time, which struck me as a decisive factor in my initial concern: our availability to the world—attentive, emotional, existential—is itself shaped by our availability in time.

I therefore decided to work on the notions of the Anthropocene and social time, guided by the intuition that there was a knot between them that needed to be unraveled.

This work is a first attempt at doing so. It was conceived as a preliminary exploration, laying the foundations for future research. My goal was to define the concepts I was mobilizing with precision, to establish their internal consistency, and to assemble the theoretical and bibliographic resources necessary for constructing a problem-space I could later develop in greater depth.

In this sense, the work retains an exploratory character and positions itself as the establishment of a basis for further inquiry.

From the outset, working on the intersection of time and the Anthropocene meant engaging with two vast and intensively studied fields. I found myself confronted with an overwhelming abundance of sources, stemming from a wide range of disciplines. This was intellectually

exhilarating, but also methodologically challenging, particularly when trying to maintain a coherent and rigorous framework.

The structure of the research emerged gradually, through a process of back-and-forth between the two key concepts. I began by clarifying the notion of the Anthropocene, progressively drawing out its temporal implications. Simultaneously, I delved into the literature on social time. Two thinkers left a lasting impression early on: Pierre Bourdieu and Hartmut Rosa.

A quote from Bourdieu reinforced the intuition that had initially guided me: "Practice is not in time; it makes time." This felt especially resonant in the context of the Anthropocene. Beyond this citation—which itself merits contextualization—Bourdieu's analyses of domination as it operates through the imposition of social time, and his reflections on the dehistoricization and desocialization of time as vectors for naturalizing relations of power, oriented my work toward a critical genealogy of time.

This direction was further encouraged by Hartmut Rosa, particularly through the subtitle of his first book: *Acceleration: A Social Critique of Time*, which seemed to call explicitly for the kind of social critique I was undertaking. I shared his view that "time is the point of juncture between actor and system."

Guided by these perspectives, I initiated a critical genealogy of time. Drawing on the invitation by James C. Scott to adopt a deep historical lens, I chose to begin with the domestication of fire—a pivotal moment both in human history and in the history of the planet. It marks the first gesture of emancipation from natural rhythms, and the beginning of human transformation of the environment.

This approach intersects with the debate over the beginning of the Anthropocene. Several hypotheses exist, and I find two of them particularly complementary: the first proposes a "weak Anthropocene," beginning with the domestication of fire and early anthropogenic ecological changes; the second, a "strong Anthropocene," begins with nuclear testing—even if one may argue that the half-life of particles used for dating is too short to serve as geological markers. This latter proposal is nonetheless valuable in that it introduces the specific temporality of the nuclear, a temporality I wasn't able to develop fully in this project, but which raises important questions about time in the Anthropocene. Under this view, the Anthropocene becomes not so much a geological epoch as an event or rupture, akin to the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction.

My treatment of the Anthropocene does not depend on its geological framing, which remains contentious. The term itself is debated across the many disciplines it traverses. Nonetheless, I chose to retain it—fully aware of its limits—for its heuristic power in helping us understand the narrative the present society constructs about itself and about time.

In this narrative dimension, I found important guidance in the work of Donna Haraway, particularly in *Staying with the Trouble*, invites us to pay attention to the stories we tell about the world. In this work, she proposes a complementary term to the Anthropocene: the *Cthulucene*, which aims to displace the centrality of the human and foreground the entanglement of humans with more-than-human beings.

As Bruno Latour puts it: "The principal philosophical contribution of the Anthropocene is that the narrative dimension [...] is no longer an added layer upon brute 'physical reality,' but rather what the world itself is made of." It is precisely this narrative aspect that I found most compelling in the analysis of the Anthropocene.

I turned, then, to the temporal narratives carried by the Anthropocene. What emerged was a dense landscape of paradoxes, frictions, and dissonances. The Anthropocene appeared to me as both a sign of attempts to reconfigure temporal representations, and a symptom of a deeper crisis of time, generating suffering for humans and more-than-humans alike.

I returned to the history of time and its variations under different socio-cultural regimes. The reading multiplied, and I faced the challenge of articulating the diverse theoretical perspectives I wished to include. The result is a body of work that varies in depth: some analyses are precise and detailed; others remain more exploratory.

This unevenness reflects a difficulty inherent to my subject: when time is naturalized and stripped of its social construction, it often ceases to appear as a historical object. Rather than a unified narrative, we encounter a multiplicity of temporalities. The works I drew upon differed widely in scope and orientation, and the limited scale of this research did not always allow me to fully reconcile them. Some analyses, in consequence, remain provisional.

Between this genealogical approach and the study of how the notion of social time arose and evolved, I was able to arrive at a working definition of social time. It is understood as a shared frame of reference for the synchronization of practices, specific to a given group or society. It is articulated through narrative and contributes to social cohesion by organizing a constellation of representations, uses, and practices that orient, synchronize, and inform individual experience.

Social time, in this sense, forms the very fabric of social life. It is essentially relational: it rests on the interconnection of processes, actualizes itself through relationships, and synchronizes and expresses the tempo of social relations.

It also involves dynamics of domination and normative force, expressed in the individual's relation to themselves (through internalized self-discipline), to others (through hierarchies in the value of each person's time), and to the world (through the imposition of anthropogenic time, often at the expense of the rhythms of the living).

It is in this way that social time intersects with the Anthropocene, understood here minimally as the ensemble of environmental transformations of anthropogenic origin, and more precisely, as a disjunction and desynchronization between human temporalities and the rhythms of the living. This disarticulation has led to an alienation of those rhythms, the emergence of ecological and temporal thresholds, and growing dissonance in human experiences of time.

This entire project was shaped by a constant interplay between these two notions, out of which emerged a common thread: the question of our relation to more-than-human beings. I thus focused on the temporal forms that emerge in more-than-human life, working through the intuition of a distinct *time of the living*.

These analyses initially formed the basis of a third section, which I later continued in my socio-anthropological research. That work draws on philosophy, but also integrates anthropology, biology, ecology, psychology, and phenomenology. It was there that these reflections found their fullest development.

The main contribution of this research lies in the articulation of the Anthropocene and social time, which allows for the emergence of their shared narrative dimension. This articulation also reveals the disjunction between the rhythms of the living and the temporalities of human activity, as well as the dissonance between the horizons of expectation embedded within those temporalities—an important key for understanding contemporary temporal and ecological suffering.

A second contribution, which opens onto the next phase of this work, lies in the necessity of reflecting on how we produce time, and in identifying ways to reclaim and reconfigure it. This paves the way for a critical inquiry into liberatory and resilient practices—for humans and more-than-humans alike.

The notion of a *time of the living*, which emerged as the original substrate of social time—eventually distanced and alienated—appears to me as a fertile site from which to imagine and organize alternative temporal narratives, more coherent with both human and more-than-human existence.

My research continues along two complementary paths:

On the one hand, in socio-anthropology, where I aim to ground these theoretical insights in a field capable of observing and experimenting with this *time of the living*. I explore it through three interrelated dimensions: phenomenological time (how time appears to embodied subjective consciousness); biological time (the entangled rhythms of living beings, synchronized with astral movements); and ecosystemic time (the interwoven tempos of human and more-than-human life specific to a given practical context).

The garden has emerged as a privileged space for observing such interactions—a space that makes visible the interagency of humans, more-than-humans, biotic and abiotic forces, all of which participate in the weaving of the time of the living. At the heart of this work lies the dimension of attention, with its deep temporal and relational implications.

On the other hand, I pursue this work in the field of ecopoetics, through a program in creative writing focused on exploring ways of saying and thinking *with* more-than-humans. My aim here is to experiment with new narrative forms—narratives of time and relation—that open up collective imaginaries and enrich our ways of seeing and inhabiting the world.

These two directions are animated by the same underlying question: *how can we live with the Anthropocene?*

The responses proposed throughout this research are those that gradually emerged from within it:

- by rethinking our relation to time,
- by reclaiming its narratives,
- by reconfiguring them around an alternative center: a time that emerges from the totality of the terrestrial ecosystem : the time of the living

so that we might sustain the possibility of life for the human species and all that exceeds it.