Content for Change

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Former environmental activist Paul Kingsnorth, and author of *Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture* Mark Bould, both hold the perspective that humanity is in some way trapped by the climate crisis. Bould's work implies a more optimistic take: while we (humans) have limited options for handling the crisis, we do still have a chance to do so. Kingsnorth, on the other hand, is more pessimistic. He ultimately believes there is no longer **any** chance of stopping the climate crisis. Both Bould and Kingsnorth appear to agree that if there **is** any possibility for human intervention and action regarding this global issue having a significant impact, the ultimate solution(s) do not lay with the development and application of new technology but rather in a shift of mentality and ideology. A stance combining these philosophical perspectives of both Kingsnorth and Bould is not only reasonable-it is **essential** for any substantial progress to be made in mitigating the climate crisis. In that storytelling is one of the primary ways mentalities are formed and changed, such philosophy **must** be adopted into media narratives.

Paul Kingsnorth takes a powerfully critical, and justified, stance on *Transhumanism.* Transhumanism may be understood as a movement that advocates for and works toward human advancements using technology. Such advancements may include the voluntary use of technologically advanced prosthetics, genetic modification, the implanting of a computer chip(s) into one's brain for improved cognitive capabilities, and the transfer of one's consciousness into a digital medium with the intention of digital immortality. Kingsnorth takes particular issue with

the transhumanist endeavor of seeking digital immortality; he holds that using technological means to become immortal and "escape" the consequences of climate change and other current woes being experienced on Earth, is rooted in the exact mentality that has led to the climate crisis in the first place.

To contextualize the problematic nature of seeking digital immortality to escape climate change, one may compare it to pursuits for Earth-like planets as "backups." Present ideas of terraforming mars or finding an Earth 2.0 are innately riddled with colonialism, anthropocentrism, elitism, and a capitalistic mindset. In reference to the star-bound pursuits of Billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, Professor Ted McCormick in *The billionaire space race reflects a colonial mindset that fails to imagine a different world and* argues "They offer colonialism as a panacea for complex social, political and economic ills, rather than attempting to work towards a better world within the constraints of our environment. And rather than facing the palpably devastating consequences of an ideology of limitless growth on our planet, they seek to export it, unaltered, into space. They imagine themselves capable of creating liveable environments where none exist. But for all their futuristic imagery, they have failed to imagine a different world. And they have ignored the history of colonialism on this one." (McCormick)

Looking to other planets for escapism ignores the issues of inequity across gender, race, sexuality, and economic class. Such issues are already prevalent on Earth and escaping to another planet in no way guarantees leaving behind social inequity. It **does** guarantee possibly leaving behind those who are already disenfranchised. The idea of a planet solely populated and run by the wealthy does not sound like the utopian opportunity that Musk and Bezos may think

of it: it sounds like an outright nightmare. Ironically, in being populated by the wealthy, these pursuits would leave out the very populations that could make a more positive social environment than that of Earth: the non-wealthy. In a study published by the American Psychological Association, "Across 4 studies, lower class individuals proved to be more generous (Study 1), charitable (Study 2), trusting (Study 3), and helpful (Study 4) compared with their upper-class counterparts. Mediator and moderator data showed that lower class individuals acted in a more prosocial fashion because of a greater commitment to egalitarian values and feelings of compassion." (Piff et al.)

One may compare pursuits of digital existence with those of extraterrestrial colonization, as they both entail seeking out a "new world". Similarly, the same issues of economic inequality present with extraterrestrial colonization would be at play with digital colonization. In that tickets for star-bound ships would likely be astronomically expensive, so would be access to technology that permits digital-reality residence.

The aforementioned issue of inequity is only one of many social factors at play in the problems with extraterrestrial colonization and the development of digital worlds. Built into both of these pursuits are ideas of entitlement and expansion. Both of which are already at play on Earth. Both of which inherently justify wasteful habits. Both of which have directly contributed to the climate crisis at hand. Anthropocentric and colonial perspectives have long been used to justify human use, and abuse, of natural resources. As such, these kinds of pursuits and mentalities should **not** be encouraged or lauded as solutions for the climate crisis.

It would be unfair to apply this argument to all technology-based pursuits regarding the climate crisis. There are justified critiques of tactics focused on swapping out "bad" technology for "better" technology. For example, swapping out fossil-fuel-based energy for wind turbine energy is problematic for multiple reasons, especially in that the construction of wind turbines in natural spaces foundationally contains the same anthropocentric and expansion-rooted ideals previously mentioned. However, harm-reducing tactics and technology are still worthwhile in hindering the climate crisis. Their role cannot and should not be thought of as a final fix but rather as a stalling mechanism to delay the crisis long enough for more substantial changes to be made.

There is numerical evidence to support the idea that **media content** can incite direct, real-life change. Following the release of *Blackfish,* a documentary about the suffering of a captive orca at U.S marine park SeaWorld, "One year after the release of *Blackfish,* SeaWorld's stock market price fell by 33%." ("How the Documentary Blackfish Negatively Impacted the Marine Park Seaworld") Popular Youtuber Jimmy Donaldson, known by his screenname *Mr. Beast,* has amassed roughly 53 billion subscribers to his channel. (Leskin et al.) While much of his content does encourage wealth accumulation, Donaldson is known for donating grandiose sums of money to strangers. Donaldson also spearheaded the *#Teamtrees* digital campaign, in which he and fellow creator Mark Rober embarked to raise funding to plant twenty million trees by the end of 2022 with the intention of offsetting the harms of deforestation done unto global populations and the environment. According to Business Wire, "-the campaign set an audacious fundraising target of crowdfunding $20,000,000 by January 1, 2020. #TeamTrees defied the

odds and met its $20M funding goal in just 56 days, powered by more than 800,000 donors from 200+ countries and territories. While the campaign drew support from notable tech founders like Elon Musk (Tesla), Jack Dorsey (Twitter), Tobi Lutke (Shopify) and Marc Benioff (Salesforce), the vast majority of funds came from small-dollar donors. The most common donation amount was $5." (Eusebio)

Shifting public mentalities away from expansion, anthropocentrism, and entitlement may very well be the substantial change necessary for humanity to have a proper chance at preventing progression of the climate crisis. The most efficient and effective way to shift mentalities on a wide enough scale to make significant impact may be through the use and application of storytelling in media. If media content were, on a wide scale, to deliberately shift narratives to encourage compassion, action, and concern for the environment, to discourage wastefulness and mentalities of expansion and colonialism, it may be possible to halt progression of the climate crisis. Such a mentality shift would need to be accompanied by foundational, institutional, and structural changes to be sustainable, but creating content that helps that shift begin holds the power to push humanity in the right, and necessary, direction.

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