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The Sedanthropocene: Nomadism, Ecology, Hypernormalization: Toward Reimagining the Holocene

David Selsky

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2R3, Canada; selsky@ualberta.ca

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Abstract: The various (s)cenes of Anthropocene discourse are attempts to conceptualize the problem of anthropogenic global warming and to better understand the problem with a view to possible solutions. This paper explores, in a series of theoretic vignettes, ways that these attempts are too myopic and narrow, and tend to ignore the possibility that the most fundamental levels of social organization might be the very conditions under which other ‘cenes’ can function at all. Specifically, Jason Moore’s Capitalocene describes and explains many symptoms of a world enraptured by capital. However, the beginning of the Holocene marks an historical stage wherein humans changed their thoughts and behaviours in such a way as to make something like capitalism possible at all. The dualism that Moore cites as fundamental to the Capitalocene did not begin with Descartes, it began with anatomically modern humans circa 10,000 years ago.

Keywords: Anthropocene; dualism; colonialism; capitalism; nomadism; sedentism; ecology; global warming; climate change; hypernormalization

1. Introduction: And Still the Earth

As Heraclitus argued, there is only one universal principle, one absolute, in the universe. Change. From cosmic expansion to the vibration of theoretic ‘strings’, existence breathes. The fundamental mechanism of this universal change is movement. Change qua movement is the condition of possibility of everything of which we are aware—and everything that we are. Given this axiom, it is no wonder that we see, at varying intersecting levels, that movement characterizes all life on earth both in practice and in principle. Nearly. At some point in human prehistory, populations of *Homo sapiens* gave up the nomadic life and established permanent settlements¹. The subject of this essay is the so-called Anthropocene—the notion of a geological epoch characterized by the predominance of humans and their activities. Theorists such as Jason Moore and Donna Haraway have argued that our current epoch might be better termed the Capitalocene (Moore), Plantationocene or Chthulucene (Haraway), to narrow (or problematize) the unqualified laying of blame on humans in toto, to focus the problem on a subset or particular system within a human framework, to capture the effective causes of the biospheric degradation we appear to be living with at present—or to theorize living in such an epoch; “staying with the trouble” (Haraway). I propose to challenge this tactic—in particular, the naming of capitalism as the disease, not the symptom—and suggest that all of the ‘cenes’ so far proposed as characterizing our current condition are premised on at least two conditions obtained around the beginning of the Holocene.

¹ Not entirely, of course; there are still many nomadic populations across the globe which, understandably, are relatively small and therefore fly somewhat under the radar.

The first condition is the shift from nomadic to sedentary populations, as noted above. This is a necessary condition. I claim that it is this development which made possible things like population expansion (uncontroversially), notions of private property, domineering hierarchies, and borders (perhaps more controversial). The establishment of settled populations is the necessary condition of possibility for everything—crisis and not-so-crisis alike—that we, in settled populations, experience today². What's more, the massive expansion made possible by sedentism, and the concepts that emerged from it, affected virtually every human population—whether 'indirectly', through globalization, or 'directly', through colonization—as well as the matrix of biological life. The second condition, herein defined as the 'sufficient condition', is an ideological schism in which some *Homo sapiens* conceptualized themselves as separate from and superior to nature. This condition may be satisfied at Göbekli Tepe as exemplary of the earliest depictions of humans as 'above', (i.e., bigger than) nature. Göbekli Tepe was founded c. 12,000–14,000 years ago, right around the time that sedentary cultures were beginning to emerge³.

2. Göbekli Tepe: Where Beginnings End and Ends Begin

The standard anthropological theory prior to the 1990s posited that the founding of agriculture drove the shift from nomadism to sedentism, and that cultural technologies, like religion, followed. However, since the work of Jacques Cauvin (1994) and especially the (re)discovery of Göbekli Tepe in Southeastern Turkey by Klaus Schmidt, new theories have emerged that reverse the logic of the standard anthropological model, positing religion as a catalyst for sedentism, not agriculture. More recent work suggests that there was a confluence of factors leading from nomadism to sedentism as the norm.

First, the end of the last ice age brought abundance to an area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf that is commonly known as the Fertile Crescent. Increased average temperatures, rising sea levels, and reduced aridity meant that there were more plants more consistently and that animals were more numerous and less likely to migrate. This, in turn, made it feasible for human groups to settle, if they chose to. Some did [1]. As Kebaran culture—emblematic of highly mobile nomads—gave way to Natufian culture—one of the first sedentary cultures in the region—which gave way to Khiamian culture—one of the first instances of Female and Taurine gods, according to Cauvin⁴—the increasing longevity of settlements seems to have initiated desires to erect permanent structures for religious ritual, of which Göbekli Tepe appears to have been among the first^{5,6}. Trevor Watkins, University of Edinburgh, suggests that such ritual places may have been a means to establish a moral code for the cooperation of increasingly large populations who did not all know each other, as would have been the case in smaller, mobile bands. As settlement became normalized, technologies like plant and animal husbandry were developed and flourished as ways to cope with climatic inconsistencies⁷. So, without the need for speciation, bands of *Homo sapiens* managed, in a relatively short time (a few thousand years), to go from nomadic scavengers to hunter-gatherers to sedentary agriculturalists. The absence of speciation is crucial here, because it means that *Homo sapiens* did not fundamentally adapt to its environment, but rather 'invented' ways to *not have to*. I am treating Göbekli

² As Western, sedentary populations. It is always important to note that 'we' do not represent the entirety of humanity—and not necessarily the 'best' or 'pinnacle' of it, either.

³ The title of Section 1 is borrowed from a novel of the same name by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, about a future where the poor suffer under lethal levels of solar radiation, draconian water ration, and forced consumerism, while the rich and powerful are protected somewhere unseen, ostensibly in a state of plenty. Translated from the Portuguese by Ellen Watson. 1985/2013. Dalkey Archive, Dublin. Print.

⁴ When I say, "gave way to," I intend only to imply the archaeological continuity attributed to the approximate chronological distribution of various cultures in the region, c. 18,000–11,000 BP.

⁵ In this respect, it should be noted that Göbekli Tepe is to be taken as exemplary of regional changes in the behaviours of Neolithic *Homo sapiens* but not as absolutely determinate of all future changes.

⁶ Dates are as follows: Kebaran: c. 18,000–c. 12,500 BP; Natufian: c. 15,000–9500 BP; Khiamian: c. 12,000–c. 11,000 BP.

⁷ For example, the Younger Dryas. See [1], Chapter 6.

Tepe as a well-developed exemplar of this shift and so a fundamental part of the theoretic intervention that I am attempting. Below is a sketch of some key features of Göbekli Tepe and some of the salient theoretic implications.

The architecture at Göbekli Tepe is unprecedented for the period—thousands of years older than the oldest Egyptian pyramids (3rd millennium BCE, before the common era) or Stonehenge (c. 4th millennium BCE)—in which it had been previously believed that humans lacked the organizational and artisanal capacity to construct such sites. As can be seen in the Figure A2 (Appendix A), the site consists of a series of circular enclosures, bordered by limestone pillars, with two central pillars in each. It appears that each enclosure is an iteration. That is, one enclosure was constructed, used for a time, then backfilled, and a new enclosure built nearby. The succession of backfilled and replaced enclosures—which appear to get smaller over time—created the hill (or *tell*) that is Göbekli Tepe—literally, ‘potbelly hill’. The pillars present the most interesting part of Göbekli Tepe, particularly the use of animal and anthropomorphic iconography. The bulk of the peripheral pillars—especially in the oldest iterations—are exclusively devoted to bas- and high-relief representations of animals, both prey and not (big cats, bulls⁸, scorpions, snakes, etc.). The central pillars, however, were themselves anthropomorphic representations of human or human-like beings (see Figure A1). Joris Peters of Ludwig Maximilian University Munich speculates boldly that the depiction of anthropomorphic shapes that substantially dwarf the depictions of non-human animals suggests that the builders of Göbekli Tepe had begun to perceive themselves as superior to the natural world around them: “These central pillars may indicate a different mentality. All of a sudden, human beings are in the center of things.” The change in representation (see Appendix A) “suggests that human beings are superior to animals” (27:45) [2]⁹. Klaus Schmidt, lead Archaeologist at the site until his death in 2014, is more reserved, claiming only that Göbekli Tepe shows that spirituality had become dominated by ‘man’, as opposed to older, animal-dominated cosmologies. “In the caves [e.g., Chauvet], the nature is depicted, and nearly no humans, or the humans are inferior to them” (27:31). Suddenly—or seemingly so—at Göbekli Tepe, humans (or humanoid gods or ancestor gods) take on the role of central player in a new, dualistic cosmology, premised on humans’ new belief in their superiority over nature.

If we take Peters’ interpretation as having some merit, then we have, in Göbekli Tepe, a possible birthplace of the nature/culture dualism that will come to threaten our very survival, in the form of capital-driven global warming. This separation of nature and culture, or human and extra-human nature (Moore), is the sufficient condition of the Sedanthropocene, and makes it possible to *think* in terms necessary for extractive economies, as well as the total dehumanization that made the colonial project an initial—and overall still resounding—success, for Europeans¹⁰.

3. The Colonial Thing: Hypernormalization in the Anthropocene

The virus took on many shapes
The bear, the elk, the antelope, the elephant, the deer
The mineral, the iron, the copper, the coltan, the rubber
The coffee, the cotton, the sugar
The germ traveled faster than the bullet
They harvest the mountainside, protect the crops, herd the cattle
The women and children were separated from the men

⁸ At this point in time, animal husbandry had not yet emerged, and so native cattle would have been prey, in the traditional sense.

⁹ One of the reasons that there is a mixture of speculation and more reserved inference, with regard to causes or implications of the religion(s) represented at Göbekli Tepe is that there is no way of knowing exactly what those causes might be. The archaeological record can show us that these changes occurred, but it cannot show us why.

¹⁰ I use the word ‘success’ with tongue planted firmly in cheek.

*They divided us according to the regional filters of their minds
The violence of arrogance crawls into the air, nestles into the geospatial cortex
We are not a conquered people [3].*

—A Tribe Called Red

We came. We fought you. We took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. When we took still more land, and then we took your children, and then we tried to take your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and the Creator gave you. We didn't respect you, we polluted your Earth, we've hurt you in so many ways but we've come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service and we beg for your forgiveness [4].

—Wesley Clark Jr. (5 December 2016)

Kathryn Yusoff (2018) argues that there is a color line in the grammar of Western geology that ties the ownership of minerals to colonialism and the ownership of human beings. The ideology of colonialism is a paternalism that privileges the interests of the colonizer over those of the colonized, and in fact posits the colonized as bereft of legitimate interests—or of interests at all. (Posthumanists like Haraway, and inhumanists like Yusoff, argue that the paternalism of colonialism and industrial resource extraction are essentially isomorphic.) It marks the colonized as below the threshold of personhood, as ‘uncivilized’, for not living as the colonizer does, or under the same illusions of supremacy—as more akin to a ‘mere animal’ than a ‘man’, because they do not know what it might mean to ‘own’ the forest, much less the land itself, or the river¹¹—might as well own the sky, the moon, the sun, and all the stars. The logic of ownership, particularly the kind of ownership at the scale of immovable things—land, rivers—is antithetical to a life that can be moved. That is, nomadic autochthonous peoples have no use for private property because it is not helpful if floods or droughts come, or if game fails to return. So, like the herds themselves, or the wolf, perhaps the problem was never that the colonizers marked the colonized as ‘animal’, but rather that the *colonizers* forgot that they too were animals all along. A problematization of colonialism—as well as the current state of things—must consider the repudiation of individualized culpability¹². Nothing will come of the repeated heaping of blame onto people long dead. Instead, we ought to look to the attempt to understand, first, how these logics came into being, and second, how they’ve persisted despite brave rhetorical movements to counteract them. To aid in this endeavor, I hope that Alexei Yurchak’s notion of *hypernormalization* will prove a fruitful guide.

In the last decades of the Soviet Union, a phenomenon began to emerge whereby, despite the obviousness to anyone living in the Union of the decline of things, the language of the state and, somewhat counterintuitively, the dissidents as well, was both eerily the same and apparently oblivious to the ‘real’ state of the Union. Yurchak draws on Sergei Oushakine, who argues that the relation between dissident and state discourses was intra- rather than inter-discursive, and that “neither the dominant nor the dominated could situate themselves ‘outside’ this vocabulary” [5]. I call this the problem of ‘speaking the language of the enemy’, a genuine paradox wherein one cannot break out of intradiscursivity with the dominant language because (a) it is the only language common to both the dominant and dominated, and (b) both the problem and possible solutions are always already framed by the paradox, itself. In other words, all there seems to be available are the master’s tools (Lorde). The situation of colonialism in Canada provides an excellent example.

¹¹ This theme in particular is being taken up by Kelly Struthers Montford, in her dissertation work. Although I am unable to cite her work directly, as it is not published, and currently inaccessible, I feel it is necessary to mention that this notion of the ‘making animal’ of colonized people (in Canada, particularly) is something that I acquired through my studies under Kelly.

¹² Like Émile Zola, we must accuse structures, not people.

Virtually all of the discourse around Indigenous issues¹³ turns on the notion of rights, whether it be land claim rights, sovereignty rights, spiritual rights, and so on. But the language of rights as we know them today is a peculiarly (and in particular, Enlightenment) European—settler—language. The language of rights is the same that justified the land theft (*Terra nullius*) of states, settlers, and corporations (Hudson’s Bay Company) from Indigenous people. To speak the language of rights will always mean the rights of the colonizer first. This needs not go further into history than the Dakota Access and Trans Mountain pipelines (in the US and Canada, respectively) threatening to further desecrate so-called Indigenous rights. The language of rights is the same that marked the autochthonous peoples as subhuman, as uncivilized. The language of rights is a language of domination, a language of violence, of divisions, of borders¹⁴. Typically, the language of rights requires a subject of rights. This is, however, the root of the problem. For in a colonial context, the subject of rights is always the colonizer. That is, the colonized can never be a subject of rights so long as they remain a ‘native’. Or as Fanon puts it, “The settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values.” [6] But as we’ll see in the next section, this can never occur under the logic of colonialism, and so “the native” can never be a subject of rights, and so to speak the language of rights is to succumb to “the white man’s values”. Speaking the language of rights, for the colonized, is precisely to be under conditions of hypernormalization. The current crisis of global warming, too, is under those conditions. One can see this in the normalization of the treatment of colonized peoples that are, more often than not, relegated to the category of ‘waste’—and will be the first to suffer the worst effects of climate change.

4. “Prospectors of Land Would Rather See Us Disappear”: Qualitative Deterritorialization in the Anthropocene

—*What was their civilization? Vast, I allow: but vile. Cloacae: sewers. The Jews in the wilderness and on the mountaintop said: It is meet to be here. Let us build an altar to Jehovah. The Roman, like the Englishman who follows in his footsteps, brought to every new shore on which he set his foot (on our shore he never set it) only his cloacal obsession. He gazed about him in his toga and he said: It is meet to be here. Let us construct a water closet* [7].

Perry Zurn (American University, University of Pennsylvania) spoke recently (2016) here at the University of Alberta. Their talk was from a forthcoming paper on prisons as eliminative spaces. That is, spaces where “waste management uses layers of isolation to sanctify the social body” [8]. Zurn’s argument is actually focused on the functioning of prisons vis-à-vis trans persons, and the general carceral logic of sequestration as social organization [8]. I’ve plucked their notion of eliminative spaces out of the prison (and toilet) and placed it in the colonial context more broadly. Namely, I claim that the reserve system is precisely one of creating eliminative spaces for the ‘disposal’ of Indigenous peoples. This is the same process that constructed the concentration camps in Nazi Europe—the Nazis in fact took cues from the Canadian reserve system—and the same process and logic that produces externalities in the capitalist market¹⁵ [9].

¹³ I am referring primarily to the Indigenous rights discourse and the people it and ongoing colonization affect, in Canada. There may be many similarities and differences between the Canadian case and cases in other col-onized places; not to mention differences within the Canadian context, across the many Nations of Turtle Is-land, in their struggle against the colonial state.

¹⁴ Similar arguments have been made by Indigenous scholars, such as Janice Makokis, Sylvia McAdams, and Darcy Lindberg (Angele Alook, University of Alberta, York University, personal communication).

¹⁵ In the entangled analogue of capitalism, the civilized-uncivilized dichotomy is replaced by profitable-unprofitable, productive-unproductive, etc. On the entanglement of capital and colonialism, see Marx, *Capital I*: VIII. “The different moments of primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection. These methods depend in part on brute force, for instance the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the state, the concentrated and organized force of society, to hasten, as in a hothouse, the process of transformation of the

I believe this is because the logic of colonialism requires a colonized people that never quite disappears completely. (I'll explain this in terms of Zurn's argument shortly.) In Nazi Europe, the targeted groups were swept into a campaign of *elimination*, while the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the US were taken up by a campaign of *eliminating*. That is, the Nazi telos was the eradication of certain populations, whereas the telos of colonialism is genocide in perpetuity. Or, as Andrea Smith argues, "this logic [of genocide/colonialism] holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must *always* be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land." [10]. Upon close examination of the language of Zurn's argument, in conjunction with the economic environment of the carceral state and the burgeoning capitalism of the colonial period, this follows. To wit, 'Indians' are worth more in jail (or on reservations) than on the street (or dead). But they are still waste; they live in "death-zones" (Balibar), and are often *left* to die, but not *made* to.

They are *qualitatively* "deterritorialized," as Deleuze would say, in an intensive rather than extensive sense: they "live" on the edge of the city, under permanent threat of elimination; but also, conversely, they live and are perceived as "nomads," even when they are fixed in their homelands, i.e., their mere existence, their quantity, their movements, their claims of rights and citizenship are perceived as a threat to "civilization" [11].

This formulation has three faces.

The first comes in the form of an observation made by Foucault in a 1973 lecture about 18th-century theories of criminality. In particular, the physiocratic "analysis of delinquency conducted in the form of an analysis of economic processes" [12]. This analysis "fixes the position, role, and function of delinquency, not in relation to consumption . . . but in relation to the mechanisms and processes of production," and defines the delinquent "as an enemy of society" [12]. In particular, Foucault points to a work by Guillaume-François Le Trosne, a principal figure among the physiocrats, who says of vagabondage (or economic nomadism) that "the fact of traveling around, of not being settled on an estate, of not being defined by a job" [12] (p. 46), becomes "the general matrix of crime that contains eminently all other forms of delinquency, not as potentialities, but as elements that constitute it and make it up" [12] (p. 45). Very much like the 19th- and 20th-century 'hobos' analyzed by George Caffentzis (2010), who were viewed as "deviant 'white men' who had become 'homeless' and without the restraints of 'home,' hence they were dangerous to capital" [13], "it is in fact the *set* of vagabonds, that is to say a type of shared life, a social group that appears as a counter-society" [12] (Foucault, p. 46). What we see here is precisely the qualitative deterritorialization of which Balibar speaks. The criminalization of the nomad and the 'nomadic' alike—the latter being not strictly nomadic, but itinerant in the sense that they are placed outside of the orthodoxy of European cum settler-colonialist capitalism and its monosemic markers of 'civilized' life, much like the settler-colonial categorization of autochthonous peoples as 'uncivilized'.

A brief aside, tying this latter point back into Yurchak's discussion: This *qualitative* deterritorialization of autochthonous peoples can also be seen as a *linguistic* deterritorialization:

In 1982, the journal *Issues in Linguistics* published an article that compared "lexical meaning" in Russian and bourgeois political discourses. In line with the semantic model of language, the author, a professional linguist, argued [*mutatis mutandis*] that "in the consciousness of the native speakers of *English*" economic terms had lost their polysemic meanings and had become monosemic—that is, they conveyed meanings that were "ideologically bound" to the single *Capitalist* reality in all contexts of *Western European* life [5] (p. 50).

Despite the usual Western critique of Soviet authoritative language, it was precisely this kind of language that made it possible to mark autochthonous people as they were so marked. The fact

feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power" pp. 915–916.

that settlers were unable to reconcile their narrow understanding of economics and economic life with the lives of Indigenous tribes made them (i.e., the autochthonous folk) easy targets for the qualitative deterritorialization which rendered them *nomadic*, of the “set of vagabonds,” and “a threat to ‘civilization’”. All, of course, serving to *reterritorialize* them by sequestration.

A more direct connection to Zurn’s discussion of eliminative spaces is presented by Robert Nichols, who argues that “settler colonialism is a distinctive ideological and material formation,” and to which he adds, “It should be clear here that the prison industrial complex in North America is one technique in its operation today.” [14] Nichols’ “Indigenous critique” of the carceral state, among other things, seeks to “situate critical prison studies within the broader horizon of settler colonialism and *territorialized* sovereignty” [14] (p. 437). That is, and in terms of my overall argument, the eliminative space of “that other archipelago of spatial containment—the Indian reservation and reserve system” [14] (p. 454) is expanded and repurposed within the originally European carceral logic structure of the prison. Like Michelle Alexander’s claim [15] that the prison industrial complex in the US has replaced slavery in its function of segregating and effectively enslaving black Americans (as per the 13th amendment), Nichols alludes to the functioning of prisons for Indigenous peoples as a stand-in for the defunct residential school system, as a ‘legitimate’ means of continuing to assimilate autochthonous peoples, and as an extension of the reservation system—it continues the work of colonization and, in terms of this section’s general thesis, consequently the work of perpetual disposal of (indigenous) waste. This is necessary for the colonial logic because the ‘Indian’ is, as we’ve seen, a danger to colonial sovereignty. Or, in Nichols’s words, “The contemporary carceral system colonizes and re-colonizes in a classical sense: by providing a solution to that which exceeds and destabilizes sovereignty via a spatial reorganization of populations and a depoliticization of that process.” [14]. The process is, ultimately, normalized.

A particularly insidious result of the normalization of the process of *eliminating* autochthonous populations is that while we have been speaking of a colonizing process, it is meet to remember that we are always also speaking of a dehumanizing process. In Judith Butler’s essay, “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, she lays out a theory of identity portraying relationality as inter-vulnerability—vulnerability to both desire and violence. In a word, identity is always already public. But this is—and why not—a double-edged sword; we are publicly constituted, but therefore also publicly sanitized, cleansed of identity. Crucial is the ‘inter,’ and lack of that relationality is dehumanizing. In turn, the dehumanizing aspect of colonization legitimizes the violence of the colonizer:

If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (*and again*). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never “were,” and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object [16].

This notion is echoed by both James Stanescu and Balibar. The former, in his notion of *deading life*—“life whose production is fundamentally about its death” [17]—and the latter, when he claims that “we are led to admit”, in the face of death-zones, “that the current mode of production and reproduction”—which, recall, is fundamentally antithetical to pre-colonial Indigenous ‘economics’—“has become a mode of *production for elimination*” [11]. All of these instances—Butler, originally speaking of people in the Middle East; Stanescu, of ‘animals’ in factory farms; and Balibar, of migrants, refugees, and all living on the periphery—relate to Butler’s thesis inasmuch as the fundamental emotion of relationality is mourning. The political, the taxonomic, and the economic, all converge in the colonized as ‘legitimate’ acts of violence. As they do in the Sedanthropocene.

5. The Sedanthropocene: Waiting for Crisis

We do not own the land, the land owns us.

—Chief Leonard Crow Dog, Standing Rock Sioux Nation (5 December 2016)

The oceans are acidifying, toxifying, and overfished. The loss of biodiversity in the oceans means there is not much standing in the way of unprecedented blooms of species like jellyfish, which are having an easier time adapting to the warming and acidification, which is also aiding the temperature rise that is affecting the ocean currents and causing severe and unusual weather due to shifts in overall climate patterns. Increasing demand for agricultural land to graze or grow feed for a literally ridiculous number of livestock animals, for which there is also an increasing demand [18], increases deforestation levels and soil erosion, and mitigates carbon sequestration, which contributes to the warming of the atmosphere, changing average surface temperatures that, according to a recent study [19], increases carbon and other GHG emissions from the soil [20]. Increased human populations and expansion of the dominant mode of production-distribution-consumption results in literally ridiculous levels of distributive inequality [21], coextensive with waste ratios that are too infuriating to discuss in ‘polite’ company, and increasing social unrest that contributes to events including—but not limited to,—civil wars, revolutions, migrant ‘crises’, Donald Trump.

Wait. Let’s go back. Somewhere around 10–15,000 years ago, bands of *Homo sapiens* in the Fertile Crescent, hunter-gatherers, sometime scavengers, nomads, began forming more permanent settlements. It would appear that they settled largely because the end of the ice age meant that they didn’t need to remain as mobile (Mithen). The settling of populations led to three key events. First, it made it feasible to increase the birth rate, resulting in expanding populations—something that nomadic peoples tend to avoid. The need to keep larger populations organized may have been one possible impetus to temple building, a significant change from the more portable lithic representations of religion. Second, at some point, social stratification expanded, hierarchies rigidified—class emerged [22]. Third, settlement allowed for the storing and amassing of grain, as well as other possessions. This became, at some point, the basis for the notion of exclusive property—private property. The propensity for amassing possessions required stable property holdings in which to store and protect those possessions—protection only necessary at all because of the emergent stratification. Eventually, this propensity was encoded into social organization—it in many ways *became* social organization. It became capitalism. This particular mode of social organization is currently *hypernormalized*. That is, despite all of the above mentioned problems and more, we are woefully unequipped to think up a solution outside of the framework of that mode. Or rather, we are unequipped to think up a *concrete* solution because, as Marx notes, “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations,” [23] and, as we are immersed in a risk management society, the fact that genuinely divergent solutions entail unknown (i.e., unmanageable) ‘risks’, we cannot think, let alone act, in an uncertain direction. Yet this ‘excuse’ is always already thinking still within the dominant framework. To wit, the universe is deterministic; we have never been able to ‘manage’ risk to the degree that we believe we can within dominant (economic) discourse.

Marx also argued that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every *epoch* the ruling ideas . . . The ruling ideas are nothing more than . . . the dominant material relations grasped as ideas” [24]. In terms of the current debate, there have only been two epochs that *could* have had classes at all, and my claim is that there is only one (the Sedanthropocene). However, it is the latter part of Marx’s famous proclamations that interests me here. In the discussion of hypernormalization, it was noted that “neither the dominant nor the dominated could situate themselves ‘outside’ [the dominant] vocabulary” [5]. Our dilemma with regard to anthropogenic “climate suicide” [25] and the concurrent, subsidiary effects that the “dominant material relations” are having is that every ‘viable’ solution is framed precisely (and only) in terms of those relations. That is, the best that the world’s brightest seem to be able to propose in the way of mitigating the ills of capitalism is still more capitalism. ‘Nicer’ capitalism, ‘green’

capitalism, carbon levies, Green New Deal, Elon Musk¹⁶. Technological solutions; mass-produced solar panels, electronic gizmos with key parts made from coltan—a mineral mined in colonies: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Congo, Rwanda, and other parts of Africa. Micro loans to spread the debt around even further—because all the people of Bangladesh, India, Venezuela, they just need an influx of capital, you know, to jump start their ‘entrepreneurial spirit’. We’re desperately trying to cure cancer with more cancer. But dominant discourse “makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies”, says Marshall Sahlins, pointing out the problems of economic thinking; for he suggests, counter to the belief “that man’s [sic] wants are great, not to say infinite”, that “there are two possible courses to affluence: wants may be ‘easily satisfied’ either by producing much or desiring little” [26]. Technological fixes, under capitalism, are not the solution. As my colleague Charles Stubblefield notes (this issue), the trinity of ‘business as usual’, mitigation strategies, and geoengineering schemes present “false choices” that only maintain the “Anthropocene imaginary”—the schism between humans and the rest of nature that I argue emerged as early as 15,000 years ago [27]. This schism allows us to maintain projects of colonialism, reconfigured to quell the increasing discomfort of Western populations with ‘that shameful past’, as though it is not ongoing¹⁷¹⁸.

So when, or how, did this cancer begin to develop? My claim is that the first multiplications of cancer cells began at Göbekli Tepe. Speculations by scholars like Joris Peters posit that Göbekli Tepe was the site of an ideological shift in *Homo sapiens*’ thinking, as well as their living arrangements. If it was the site of a human supremacist religion, it is perhaps the first place where humans asserted a belief that they were not, in fact, only a small part of nature, but rather superior to nature [28]. If Göbekli Tepe marks the emergence of the belief that ‘man’ is superior to ‘nature,’ then it also marks the birth of the binary—the separation of ‘man’ from nature. It marks what is believed to be the beginning of *Homo sapiens*’ transition from nomadism to sedentism. Enter the Sedanthropocene. And yet, the colonized peoples of Turtle Island¹⁹ include nations that were, prior to contact, both settled and nomadic. This simple fact demonstrates the importance of the sufficient condition of the schism for this speculative history that I am exploring. That is, the binarism that appears to have spread out from Göbekli Tepe did not affect the inhabitants of Turtle Island, who made their way here somewhere between 40,000 and 20,000 years ago [29,30]. So, even many sedentary Indigenous groups did not have the configuration of thought sufficient to the exclusionary and exploitative kind of social organization that we find in the heirs to the Fertile Crescent Holocene²⁰.

It is my central claim that, contrary to the other proposed ways of conceptualizing our epoch and its catastrophic effects, the epoch we find ourselves in is not as recent as others suggest (Moore, Crutzen), nor that there is any sharp line in history, like the industrial revolution, where one could point and say “there, that is when man went too far!” The notion of the Sedanthropocene is more akin to the Sorites paradox. If Göbekli Tepe is a single grain of sand, at what point exactly did we find ourselves in a heap? Well, the thing about cancer is that you can have it for years without any symptoms [31]. And like cancer, it is not something external; it is something *of* nature that is happening *within* nature. The upshot is that where this analogy breaks down is at the point where even a terminal dose of this cancer in no way spells the end of nature—cheap or otherwise.

¹⁶ I always find it fascinating to note that a proposed solution to the problem of mass produced fossil fuel driven vehicles is mass produced electric vehicles. This is the face of the new green revolution. Don’t worry, he’ll be safe on Mars when the worst comes.

¹⁷ Although it may appear that I am making the argument that Holocene settlements understood ethics in terms of land rights, I am not. In fact, I would argue that there was no such thing as rights, in the Holocene cultures under consideration—the argument about the language of rights is not tied directly to the emergence of settlement but to the point on hypernormalization (see Section 2).

¹⁸ It is also important to note that I do not claim that the Sedanthropocene is responsible for the nature/culture divide but, rather that the Sedanthropocene is characterized by the emergence of the nature/culture divide—as well as human sedentism.

¹⁹ What the European colonial powers refer to as North America.

²⁰ That is not to say that this kind of thinking didn’t or couldn’t also emerge elsewhere; take, for example the Inca, who had a very stratified society, and engaged in colonization and conquest.

There have been five previous mass extinction events, documented in the archaeological record, on this planet. If we are living in the build-up to a sixth, then we are living in the build-up to a sixth. This is not merely a tautology. To the extent that we know our mode of social organization is accelerating mass extinction, we should damn well do something about it. But if pathogenic organisms like *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*²¹ are occurring—as it were, naturally—then the above tautology is, as I said, not merely a tautology²². If we are facing down a sixth extinction, then—according to the IPCC—we have reached a point where ‘all’ we’re really doing is fanning the fire. I repeat, however, that this is in no way a rationale for just ‘lettin’er rip’. That’s not a logic becoming a meaning-making species. Nevertheless, given that we *do* know that there are species extinctions occurring ‘on our watch’, and that we *do* know that we are accelerating the uninhabitability of our biosphere, we are, in a sense, just sitting²³ around waiting for the crisis—taking pictures of a tidal wave.

If we are, or what amounts to for us, living in the end times. If we are not only widely implicated in, but to some extent responsible for, a significant portion of that end. If Gaia’s intrusion is indeed blind, brutal but blind [32]. If the universe simply is intrinsically hostile; if the one absolute (change) sometimes means hasta la vista, baby. In any case we need, if we wish to have a decent chance at survival, to consider what it might mean to live in crisis. This means that we may be newly living in crisis, or we may have always been, or that life itself *just is* crisis. In any case, we cannot afford to merely sit around, waiting for it to arrive. Or if it is always already here, to consume us as it has everything before. We may have to consider moving to Mars, perhaps with an arc²⁴, fleeing a flood of either stupidity or inevitability. We might just have to try to speak a language other than the one we have—a language, it often seems, of death. But in either case, we genuinely need to consider what it might mean to reclaim our nomadic past. This might involve adopting something like Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic politics. Or it might mean literally breaking ourselves down into nomadic bands and wandering what’s left of the environment that we first met at the end of the last ice age. Or the former might imply the latter. This might mean seeking solutions through a nomadic science, as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) suggest, which does not operate by plans and blueprints but by molecular, rather than molar, telos. This is echoed in Howe and Pandian’s Betacene, “a time to test, engage, and experiment with new ways of being in the world” [27]. At bottom, *Homo sapiens* appear to be unsustainable in our sedentary configuration. Perhaps what is needed is not nomadism at all but, in fact, *Nomanism*. That is, perhaps, if the problem has always been *both* settlement *and* the emergence of the anthropos, then we need to bring to an end the age of ‘man’, settled or otherwise.

I have received some criticism to the effect that I appear not to want to take a stand regarding the anthropogenic nature of global warming. This is both true and false. On the one hand, I have in no way argued that global warming—to the crisis level it is occurring—is anything but ‘anthropogenic’ but, following the lead of (especially) feminist posthumanists and Indigenous theorists, to say that something, some event or phenomenon, is anthropogenic tout court is itself highly problematic. To take a stand on anthropogenic global warming is precisely to remain in the hypernormalized discourse that is a nontrivial part of the problem. On the other hand, to cite some form of nomadism as a potential starting place for a reconfigured ‘human’ means that we won’t solve this problem by taking a stand but rather, we’re going to have to walk out of it. The alternative is learning to live with crisis, and perhaps, as Roy Scranton suggests, learning to die. This would require a metaphorical, intellectual, in fact cognitive form of nomadism. “Learning to die as an individual means letting go of our predispositions and fear. Learning to die as a civilization means letting go of this particular way of life and its ideas

²¹ Bd, for short—the frog-killer. See Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. Henry Holt & Company. 2014.

²² It’s worth noting that the global spread of Bd is pretty likely due to human intervention; but again, if humans are as nature as anything else, then even human ‘intervention’ is still, at bottom, natural.

²³ I use the word sitting, not to be glib, but because the Proto Indo-European root *sed-* (sedentary, Sedanthropo-cene, etc.) literally means “to sit.”

²⁴ If you’ve missed the sarcasm, here, I hope this footnote clarifies it for you, dear reader.

of identity, freedom, success, and progress.” [33] I would argue that they are one and the same thing. That our way of life is fundamentally each individual’s way of life. That our ideas about identity, our identities; of freedom, our freedom; of success, our successes—and failures—of progress . . . our hubris.

Exit the Sedanthropocene.

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Appendix A

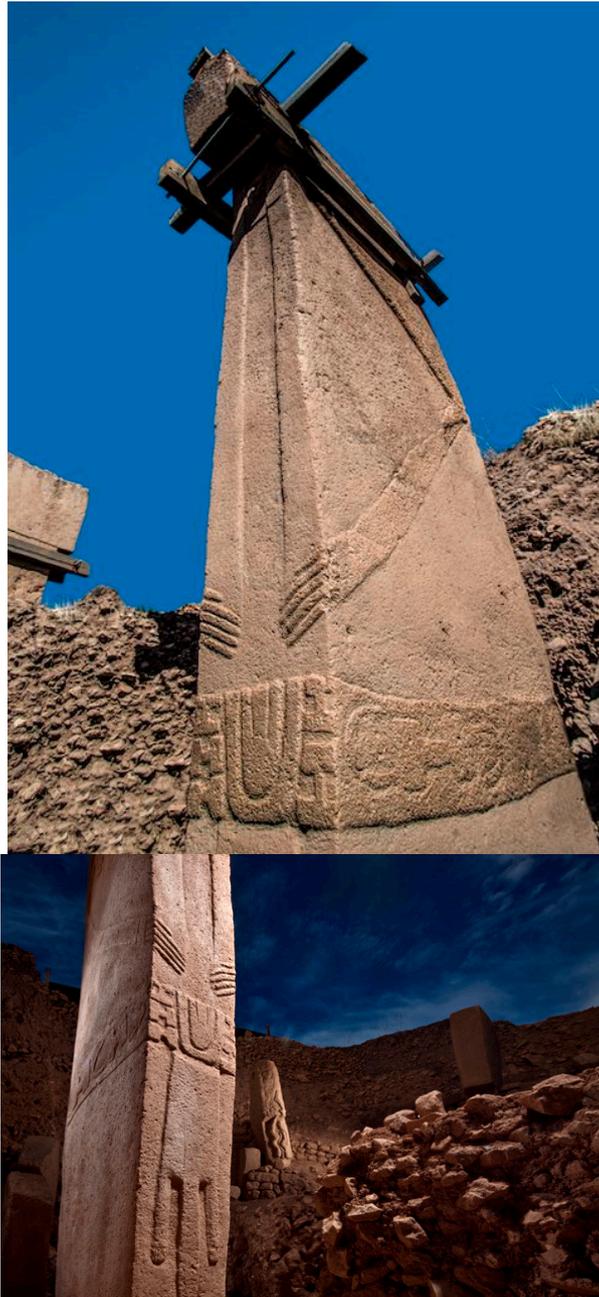


Figure A1. Photographs of anthropomorphic pillars from Göbekli Tepe, showing clear detail of arms, hands, belt, and loincloth. These pillars reached as much as 5 m in height and were centrally located in each enclosure. (Google Images).

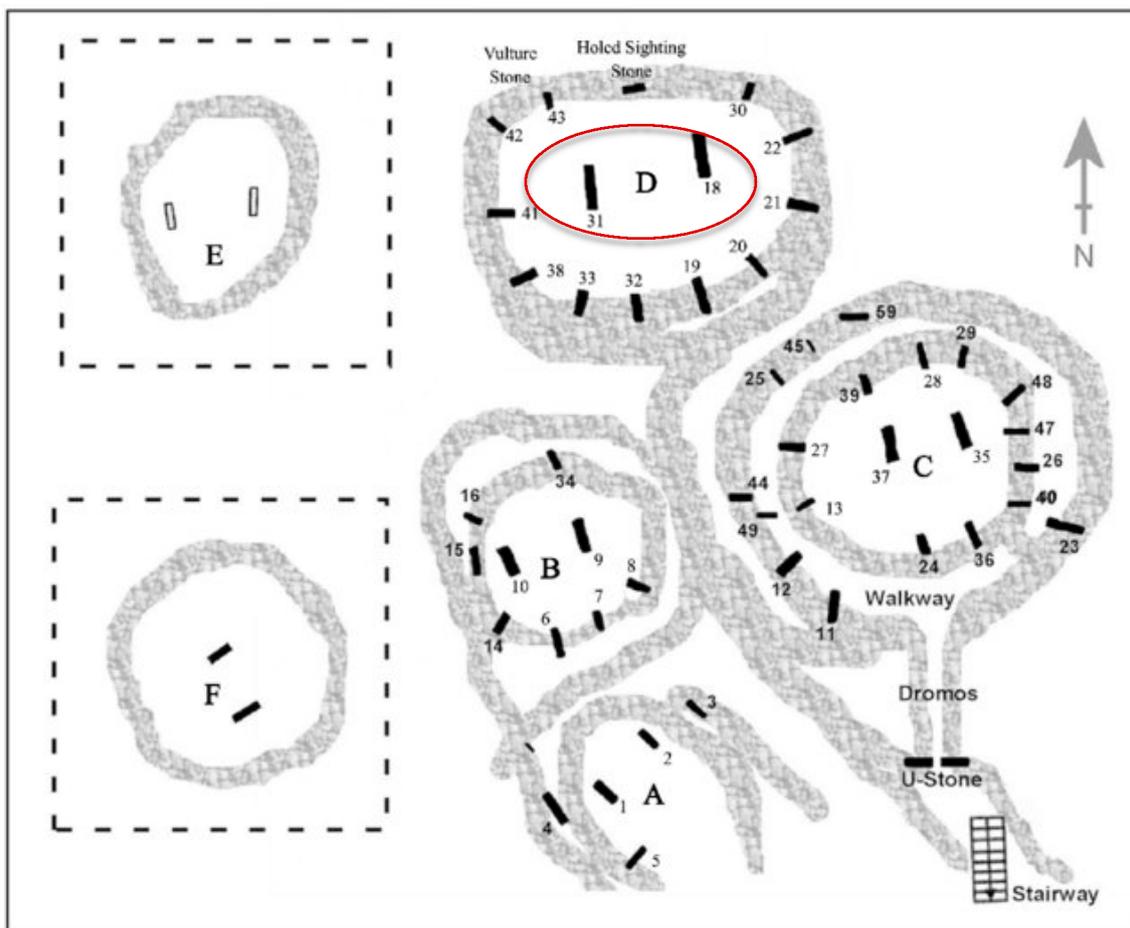


Figure A2. Layout of the excavated enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. The top image in Figure A1 is of one of the central pillars from enclosure D (circled; enclosure D is the oldest, to date). (Researchgate).

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