

Department for Speculative Transformation

INTRO

The Anthropocene is a fact. Today, nature and culture, technology and environment, are inseparable. From the planetary scale of climate change to the manipulation of molecular structures through nanotechnologies, human life is intimately related to and contingent upon new technologies. Our goal is to rethink how we design technology in order to deal with the changing relations between science, humanity, and environment. This means rethinking design and engineering processes, challenging normative assumptions about human habitats, behaviors, and cultures, and reimagining how we approach scale and complexity. Our main focus is to re-envision the future of how we design technology and infrastructure in a manner that is more just, equitable, diverse, and sustainable.

New approaches that address the planetary scale and complexity of the Anthropocene demand integrating humanistic inquiry with scientific experimentation. What differentiates our center from other media and engineering labs is the Germanic idea of "wissenschaft"; mainly the desire to produce new models and new forms of knowledge. It is the systematic pursuit of knowledge beyond immediate functionality with a dedication to refusing the split between the sciences and the humanities. Wissenschaft is also a temporal term, evoking a dedication to that which is not yet known or imagined. We stress this focus because it is unique in the world of design and engineering laboratories, and it demonstrates our dedication to speculative design practices that insist on merging imagination with practice. We also insist on the place of model building, simulation, and rethinking how we represent (or visualize?) and therefore understand the world as central acts in reimagining the future of technology. We link to the natural sciences and humanities in the interest of creating new models for design and engineering. In doing so, we affirm the activity and productivity of both ideas and materials.

BACKGROUND

We take from a history of labs such as the Media Lab at MIT that sought to innovate on the use of digital media and computing in human machine interactions. At the same time, we are dedicated to a unique engagement between the natural sciences, engineering, urban planning, and the humanities that allows a focus not on the development of technology, but the development of the society. Our interest is in experimentation serving human interests, and in producing new models of both technology and society at multiple scales. Above all, our focus is not on technology but on infrastructure. On engaging with infrastructures that can be both material (roads, buildings, electrical grids) and epistemological (ideas, pedagogies, and models).

We are also unique in working to rethink the design of technology by recognizing the ubiquity of technology in our environments and bodies, and rethinking technology not outside of but co-constitutive of society and human subjectivity and politics.

Finally, we are unique in our interest on scale. We seek to recognize the synchronicities and differences in scales from the nano-technical to those of planetary scale technical infrastructures such as logistical supply chains, smart cities, and financial markets.