The Subversive Path: Art Toward the Neganthropocene

Jung E. Choi, PhD
Assistant Professor of Visual and Media Studies, Duke Kunshan University

ABSTRACT

This study examines Chinese contemporary art and technology projects that evoke imaginative and multi-sensory responses to environmental issues by harnessing the subversive potential of contemporary media. Specifically, it argues that these artistic practices can illuminate alternative approaches to practicing the Neganthropocene—a concept introduced by Bernard Stiegler to encourage a collective shift in perspective—while fostering shared affect and a sense of care in response to the challenges of the Anthropocene. The Neganthropocene embodies an act of will, desire, and revolutionary breakthrough from within the system. This study focuses on how the artists' subversive uses of contemporary media embody and expand Neganthropocenic thinking in creative practices, emphasizing the interdependence of ecosystems in their technological mediations. These artists promote care, or "cooperative intelligence" in Stiegler's sense, and vulnerability of our beings, highlighting transindividuation between human, technics, and nature. The essay identifies three approaches—manifesting the Symbiocene, materializing the inhuman nature, and addressing the other-than-human—as ways of "doing" the Neganthropocene and reconciling the technological with the ecological. Through this analysis, the study sheds light on a transformative shift in collective perspective and offers insights into navigating the challenges posed by the Anthropocene in contemporary art experiences.

I. THE SUBVERSIVE PATHWAYS OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

In an age defined by unprecedented ecological and technological challenges, contemporary art emerges as a powerful medium to confront and reimagine our relationship with the environment. This study examines the experimental ways contemporary artists employ contemporary media to provoke imaginative, multi-sensory responses to environmental crises. By contemporary media, I refer to twenty-first century media, characterized by invisible ubiquitous and physical computing, as defined by Mark B.N. Hansen. These media uniquely engage "the environmental sensibility to which we belong prior to and independently of any address to properly human perception," seamlessly embedding themselves within the environmental infrastructure. These media act as invisible platforms for "immediate, action-facilitating interconnection with and feedback from the environment." [1] By expanding primary sensory engagement with the world, twenty-first century media enable access to "a domain of sensibility of the world that has remained largely invisible (though certainly not inoperative)." [2] While contemporary media have the capacity to expand

human physical and sensory access to the world, their inherent invisibility often gives rise to oppressive environments in industrial settings, fostering control and surveillance of human behavior. These systems form an invisible panoptic infrastructure, operating within realms unknown to humans, continually activating capitalist mechanisms of efficiency and perpetuating environmental issues. However, as Anne Munster drawing on Ansell Pearson reminds us, the root of societal oppression lies not in the technology itself but in the "social machine" that shapes how technical elements are utilized, extended, and interpreted within social and cultural contexts.[3]

Against this backdrop, this essay examines how Chinese contemporary artists confront the exploitative tendencies of technology by proposing subversive and imaginative applications that pave alternative pathways toward the Neganthropocene—a conceptual framework developed by Bernard Stiegler. While the Anthropocene emphasizes a human-centered paradigm for understanding ecosystems, the Neganthropocene envisions a transformative shift toward technological practices that prioritize care, collaboration, and ecological harmony. Through their work, these artists not only critique anthropocentric paradigms but also reveal alternative pathways where technology fosters experiences of shared affect and interconnectedness by reimagining art as "productive of" new experiences rather than merely "produced by." Here, the notion of art is redefined from an object of recognition to an experiential encounter. Simon O'Sullivan explains that "an object of recognition is a representation of something that is always already in place . . . our habitual way of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence, no thought takes place. Indeed, we might say that representation precisely stymies thought." [4] In contrast, "the encounters staged by art contain within them the possibilities to challenge our typical ways of being in the world; disrupting our systems of knowledge, we are, in effect, forced to (new) thought and actions."[5] In these practices, art evolves into a dynamic process that generates creative situations, producing affects and fostering differences when interfacing with other bodies—both human and non-human—and technologies. These encounters crafted by the artists challenge conventional perceptions of the world by revealing the hidden dimensions of both nature and non-human beings through technological mediations. These practices disrupt entrenched systems of knowledge, provoking fresh thoughts and novel actions. This reconceptualization of art gains particular relevance in addressing the impasse of cosmic dimensions, where scientific and technological solutions to environmental issues often repeat the anthropocentric frameworks of the Anthropocene, reinforcing notions of human dominance. These artistic practices provide a critical counterpoint, inspiring us to reimagine and redefine our relationships with technology, art, and the broader world.

Focusing on emerging Chinese artists Cheng Jing, Jiajun Shen, and the artist duo Fei Lu and Jianhao Lei, this essay also explores their contributions to the discourse on technodiversity and cosmotechnics on the path toward the Neganthropocene in practices. These artists' practices offer a localized yet universally resonant perspective, integrating their own philosophical principles and ecological sensitivities to propose a harmonious coexistence of humans, technology, and the environment. By highlighting the aesthetic, philosophical, and practical dimensions of their work, this study aims to demonstrate how art can create speculative and affective openings that challenge entrenched modes of thinking and inspire collective action. By examining art projects that manifest the Symbiocene, materialize inhuman nature, and address the other-than-human—the distinctive, yet inter-related three pathways of "doing" the Neganthropocene—this essay argues that these subversive uses of contemporary media cultivate a renewed sense of care and interdependence in addressing environmental issues. These works invite us to confront the vulnerabilities of our

existence while fostering hope and imagination for a sustainable future. Engaging with the ethos of the Neganthropocene, these artists provoke a collective shift toward a curative, ecological perspective that redefines our relationship with the natural world and technology alike.

II. EXITING THE ANTHROPOCENE: TOWARD THE NEGANTHROPOCENE

The term "Anthropocene" has emerged as a buzzword in academia and social media over the past decade. With the unfolding crises of climate change and global pandemics, the environmental crisis has shifted from being a topic of discussion to a matter of survival. "Anthropocene" combines "anthropo-" from *anthropos* (Ancient Greek: ἄνθρωπος), meaning "human," with "-cene" from *kainos* (Ancient Greek: καινός), meaning "new" or "recent." Thus, the Anthropocene, or the human-recent era, refers to the epoch in Earth's history characterized by human impact as a geological force. This term arises from the observation of humanity's increasingly dominant influence on climatic, biophysical, and evolutionary processes at a planetary scale. In essence, the Anthropocene positions humans at the center, recognizing their profound impact on Earth while suggesting potential positive interventions to address Anthropocene-related problems. However, the discourse often privileges human agency, casting humans once again as the primary drivers of Earth's geological evolution—and, by extension, its fate.

Scholars have sought to reframe the Anthropocene by emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans, non-humans, and nature, redistributing agency across networks. Among these efforts, Richard Grusin's Anthropocene feminism deserves recognition. In this paradigm, Grusin challenges the masculinist and patriarchal assumption of humankind as the sole agent of change.[6] By redistributing agency across networks of living and non-living entities, Anthropocene feminism invites a diverse range of voices, posing fresh questions and yielding insights that disrupt established perspectives. Rather than perpetuating a dichotomy between humans and nature, Anthropocene feminism seeks to move beyond the human-centric viewpoint that has contributed to the current crises. This perspective resonates with David Abram's notion of the "more-than-human" world, which emphasizes the profound interconnectedness of life and reminds us that humans exist only in relationship with the vast and resourceful natural world.[7] Moving away from anthropocentric discourses, more recent studies have adopted revolutionary approaches to understanding these relationships. For example, in *Inhuman Nature*, Nigel Clark introduces the concept of the "other-than-human" world, challenging the notion of equal agency distribution across species and nature.[8] While humans have historically positioned themselves at the center of the universe (particularly since the Renaissance) and assumed their influence on Earth as a given, Clark raises a fundamental question: "What would the Earth be doing in the absence of any anthropogenic influence?[9] This question prompts a more radical understanding of the asymmetrical dependency between humans and nature, encouraging a reevaluation of humanity's role in the broader ecological web.

Building on these efforts, this study delves deeper into the practical dimensions of alternative approaches to addressing the Anthropocene, as exemplified by the work of contemporary Chinese artists. Specifically, it examines these artistic practices as pathways toward the Neganthropocene— a framework proposed by Bernard Stiegler that emphasizes *processes of negation or subversion*. Rather than simply restaging the more-than-human or other-than-human world, these artists employ media in subversive ways to actively construct alternative worlds within the audience's experience by inviting the audience into the process. By disrupting anthropocentric perspectives and engaging

with local knowledge systems, these practices offer critical insights into how art can foster transformative encounters, prompting new ways of thinking, sensing, and acting in response to environmental crises. They also propose alternative, yet valuable, directions for what art and technology can do—or more importantly should do—in reimagining the Anthropocene.

In particular, the artists presented here share concerns about the Sinophonecene (Sinophone Anthropocene), characterized by "excessive extraction of resources in industrial developments, environmental degradation, and climate change" while navigating their own aesthetic and philosophical embodied knowledge about technology and nature in their practices.[10] By focusing on these practices rather than on conceptual frameworks of technology, this study advances our understanding of technodiversity, where technical thinking interacts dynamically with aesthetic, religious, and philosophical thinking rooted in locality. Yuk Hui suggests that we can only grasp the concept of technics—and move beyond a narrow understanding of technology—by viewing technics as a variety of cosmotechnics, rather than as either *technē* or modern technology.[11] In Hui's framework, cosmotechnics expresses the unification of the cosmic and moral orders through technical practices. The meanings of both the cosmos and morality must be understood in relation to their specific local contexts. In particular, Hui argues that understanding technological thought in China requires considering the historical dynamics and relationships between two major philosophical categories: *Dao* (way or path—the condition of life) and *Qi* (器, container, vessel, or instrument to be distinguished from 氣, literally gas, energy) that provide frameworks for thinking about our relationship to the nonhuman.[12] During the interviews I conducted with the artists featured in this study they naturally embraced concepts of how technics "should be" as part of a larger ecosystem, rather than relying on specific references or ideas. Their technological thinking is already embodied in their practices. Examining how these artistic practices reflect the notion of technology in terms of cosmotechnics and its relationship to organismic and social forms of individuation can help us envision the possibility of diverse technological futures.

Above all, in realizing technodiversity, these artists focus on the pharmacological nature of technology by harnessing the potential of contemporary media. Stiegler's approach to technology centers on what he terms the "pharmacology"—the idea that technology inherently possesses both beneficial and harmful qualities, acting as both remedy and poison. The politics of technology, for Stiegler, involves minimizing its toxic effects to enhance its positive potential. This perspective reflects his optimism for utilizing pharmakon constructively, as a means of resisting industrial systems that exploit psychological power, neuroplasticity, and the human capacity for self-care and care for others.[13] The artists discussed here actively engage with the potential of twenty-first century media, their thematic approaches aligning with Stiegler's concept of the Neganthropocene, which advocates for a redirection of our collective gaze and the cultivation of shared affect and care in response to the Anthropocene. The prefix "neg" in Neganthropocene implies a different way of looking, a reversed gaze, negating anthropocentric ideas. It embodies an act of will, desire, and revolutionary breakthrough from within the system focusing on the potential of technology. Thus, the Neganthropocene advocates for a new model of technological progress that enables a "bifurcation"—a fundamental shift in direction in thermodynamic terms—aimed at generating qualitative improvements for both individuals and social groups. This shift can only be achieved through care—taking care of oneself and others.[14] The toxicity of technology in the Anthropocene has led to our current "care-less" lifestyle (or generalized proletarianization in Stiegler), and to escape from this impasse, we need a collective, cultural, and social tipping point in awareness. We must find a pathway to the Neganthropocene, one that enables us to escape the cosmic impasse we

face by finding "the courage to care, confront, read, reinterpret, and rebuild."[15] In this study, I argue that these artistic practices share this neganthropocenic perspective but expand upon it by opening a speculative and affective portal that fosters shared knowledge, generated through care and grounded in locality and practice within the domain of aesthetics.

In the context of the Neganthropocene, Jean Boyd emphasized that "caring for" a livable future requires addressing all of the entangled ecologies. This approach embodies a methodology, a theory, and a practice of healing. Through its performative nature, art holds the potential to materialize "visions of becoming" into livable futures.[16] Instead of surrendering to nihilism, the Neganthropocene appeals to the "hopeless idealists" who strive to contribute to "the transformation of our shared milieu by making possible the adoption of an imagined but possible future, however improbable."[17] Stiegler's Neganthropocene allows us to imagine a potential way out, even if it seems improbable, much like achieving negentropy in life appears almost impossible. This neganthropocenic approach in art creates creative situations where art forms visible and sensible networks of interconnected fields, binding humans to nonhumans while radically challenging the anthropocentric perspective in our experiences. By confronting the incomprehensible and improbable, the imaginative leaps envisioned by artists represent potential paths out of the doomsday sensibility of the Anthropocene, possibly offering long-term solutions to our problems. These creative encounters illustrate what it means to be ecological while being technological by allowing us to reflect, think and care. This process guides us toward psychic and collective individuation in practice, which Peter Lemmens and Yuk Hui consider essential for escaping the nihilistic sensibility of the Anthropocene.[18] It stands as a pinnacle of hope in a world where humanity often seems to be losing its footing—a courage continually manifested in artistic dreams and visions.

In the next sections, the study will analyze *Water Calligraphy—Life* (2018) by Cheng Jing, *Windyhome* (2021) by Jiajun Shen, and *Watching TV Together* (2021) by Fei Lu and Jianhao Lei under the frameworks of *practicing* the Neganthropocene: manifesting the Symbiocene, materializing the inhuman nature, and addressing the other-than-human. These practical realities of doing the Neganthropocene will offer us insights into how artistic practices can reframe our relationship with technology, ecology, and non-human entities, providing evocative pathways toward the Neganthropocene.

III. MANIFESTING THE SYMBIOCENE

Imagine wandering through a natural park and encountering a mysterious message, the word "生命" (meaning life and progress in Chinese), seemingly written by an enigmatic force in the water, gradually emerging and disappearing. This is *Water Calligraphy—Life* (Figure 1) by Cheng Jing, a work that brings to life the intricate interplay between nature, technology, and humans. The work encourages viewers to reflect on how life is made possible and sustained by nature, particularly water, within their own experiences. Jing utilizes underwater numerical control systems to discharge water from low-lying channels, forming Chinese characters through siphonage. When the audience approaches the water's surface, an infrared sensor transmits electronic signals to the underwater numerical control systems, and the calligraphy gradually appears on the water's surface as if an unnamed natural superpower is writing it. This message only remains visible for a few minutes, emphasizing the ephemerality of progress and life.

In the *Water Calligraphy* series, Jing incorporates water as an artistic medium to realize his belief in the symbiosis of man-made (or technological) installation art and the natural environment. Rather than putting his work of art in artificially built environments such as galleries and museums, Jing explores the infinite possibilities of nature as the foundation that houses, supports, and sustains all humans and man-made products. For the artist, Dao—literally meaning "a way" or "path," but more specifically "the way it is supposed to be" in which all existence is supported and conditioned—guides his perspective. He perceives no clear distinction between nature and culture; rather, both are unified and sustained within the encompassing presence of the biosphere. As Yuk Hui explains, Dao is fundamentally a question of living—how to live—and the artist's engagement with technology embodies this Dao.[19] With minimal signboards and interventions in the natural setting, the artist wishes audiences would unintentionally encounter his work as in the way all things happen in nature. Jing states: "When they step into the ultra-red detect area, their limbs' movement interact with my work and the words float on the pond," to rediscover the embedded message that was often neglected and hidden. [20] More importantly, what remains significant in this process is that Jing thinks his artistic intervention must serve to bring more symbiotic ways of interaction between audiences and natural environment. Jing continues: "The notion of symbiosis in my installation art is about its environment; the installation is in the natural environment, and it must empower the environment, either provoking people's interactions with the site or eliciting people's reflections on this site."[21] Furthermore, as the sensors can be activated by any proximate objects, the work is relevant not only to humans, but to any beings that approach the installations, including animals in the park. This artistic setup of unexpected encounter becomes deeply rooted in a shift of perspective, where humans voluntarily step down from the driver's seat, alluding to the concept of the Neganthropocene.

By delving into the capacity of contemporary media, which can invisibly amplify and visualize the imperceptible dimensions, Jing offers viewers a neganthropocenic experience in a speculative way. In this experience, the viewers' presence becomes the catalyst for the emergence of life, yet it is entirely reliant on and supported by nature. By poetically amplifying nature's power to create through technological interventions, the work emphasizes nature's affordance to life. Visualizing the operational intertwinement that brings "life" into being, the work indeed materializes one dimension of the Symbiocene. Glenn Albrecht and George Van Horn characterize the Symbiocene as a state of symbiosis where living beings coexist for mutual benefit, rather than prioritizing one over the other.[22] It underscores the interconnectedness of all things and beings in their becoming within the framework of ecological thinking. For Jing, nature becomes an all-encompassing medium that supports his artwork. The artwork exists "in" the water, and audiences are meant to witness the choreographed message resulting from the collaboration between technology and nature, prompted by the presence of living beings.
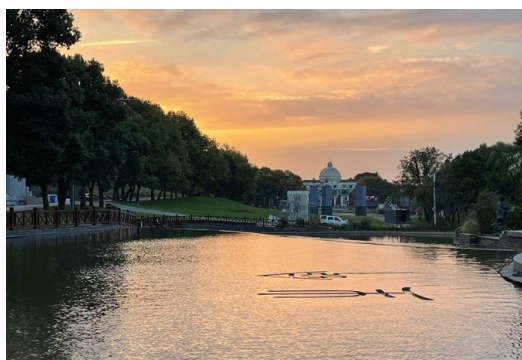
Figure 1. ***Zheng Jing,*** **Water Calligraphy,** *2018, mixed media. Exhibited at the outdoor site of the 2021 East Lake International Ecological Sculpture Biennale in Wuhan, China.* **Provided by the Artist.**

By expanding the horizon of worldly sensibility and enabling active participation in the world, contemporary media play a crucial role in this project in visualizing the Symbiocene. The installation of *Water Calligraphy* serves as an embodied manifestation of human presence within nature, employing both language and technology as facets of human civilization to intuit, relate to, and comprehend life in a manner solely afforded by nature. A perspective of Stieglerian organology also offers a straightforward way to understand this human-technology-nature symbiosis. Essentially, nature accommodates the reciprocal transduction between humans and technology, shaping itself in response to the evolution of these two intertwined agents. This reflects Jing's artistic intention in incorporating water as the primary creative medium for this work. The fluidity of water enables the creation of ephemeral calligraphy on the canvas of the lake, infusing the script with eternal droplets of life.[23] In this way, the work ushers us into a speculative portal to ponder nature's affordances for other beings and things and for its own existence. Witnessing the word, "life" emerging from and disappearing into nature, we are reminded of Nigel Clark's words: "Life as a force on earth, as an ingredient in the making and remaking of our planet."[24] Indeed, in this work, it is evident that life and its formation are solely facilitated by nature. Nature is a complex system composed of biological, material, and inorganic components that not only sustain and regenerate life but also play a pivotal role in enabling and inspiring human culture. *Water Calligraphy* thus urges us to acknowledge nature as the foundation and bedrock of our existence while dancing through the Symbiocene of human, technology, and nature.

IV. MATERIALIZING THE INHUMAN NATURE

Discourses surrounding the Anthropocene often amplify the role of the human subject, reinforcing the notion that humans can confront and resolve the crises they have created. In this context, Clark proposes that our understanding should begin with our vulnerability to the earth's eventfulness, and how we, as mere humans, are exposed to forces beyond our control or comprehension, instead of starting with our perceived powers and capabilities. To him, ways of thinking rooted in the Anthropocene are, after all, "all-too-human".[25] In an effort to challenge this overly human-centric discourse, Jiajun Shen's *Windyhome* (2021) allows the earth's eventfulness to take the helm in the process of art creation. *Windyhome* is a poetic pas de deux of sound and light, generated by real-time climate data. In this work, Shen acknowledges natural, or other-than-human, elements and events that comprise the world humans inhabit. The simple event of the earth—wind-blowing—is placed within a broader discourse where we witness the interplay between human activities and the

climate. In this work, Shen intentionally yields authorship of this interactive installation to nature so that the display "constantly shifts with the passage of time and seasons, which is a sublation of many permanent visuals of traditional landscapes."[26] The work is continuously made and remade by the ceaseless variation of natural forces, conditioning the presence of its audiences: the *now* is perpetually defined by the earth's dynamic movements. As audiences witness the shifting illuminations and sounds crafted by nature, they realize their entire experience of the work is shaped by other-than-human elements. As 'earthlings,' humans are left helpless, yet through this work, they are empowered to reflect upon this experience with care.

In essence, *Windyhome* draws on nature's dynamic eventfulness and introduces a unique artistic approach to visualizing climate data, generating an interactive, multi-sensory experience. The sensors in *Windyhome* record wind patterns, transforming them into data points, which are then used to produce sound and light within the physical environment. Shen and her collaborator, Bao, harvested data from the local environment, including aspects such as landforms, mountains, sunlight, precipitation, and airflow. This data was synthesized into three types of input for the mobile haptic device (iPad): real-time temperature, historical temperature, and wind power. This input is processed by a meteorological data analysis system which handles both real-time and historical temperature data, while the wind power data is gathered by sensors for reactive processing. Following this, the central processing system— encompassing both sound and light generation systems— takes the relay from the mobile haptic device to produce the final output through physical computing, a spatial soundscape, and optical medium windpipes. The on-site artwork (Figure 2) showcases a transparent cuboid devoid of any flat surfaces, underpinned by twelve light and sound-emitting pipes set against a backdrop of undulating mountains beneath a star-studded sky. Encased within the cuboid frame, two large, gnarled trees stand atop a concrete gridded floor. The twelve pipes radiate light and emit sound, bathing and encircling the ancient trees, weaving a mesmerizing sensory tapestry. In the distance, blue meteors punctuate the sky while a soft yellow glow emanates from behind the mountain. Upon closer inspection, luminescent scaffolds outline the path of drifting mist above the ground.

The Neganthropocene fundamentally involves a shift in perspective or a conversion of gaze that dismantles power asymmetries, which have allowed one agent (humans) to remain at the relational center. In the artwork *Windyhome*, the pitch of sounds is influenced by the local temperature, while the velocity of airflow is affected by the disparity between real-time and historical temperature data. Thus, higher temperatures and greater temperature differences result in more intense audio. Numerous windpipes generate different sound and light combinations with every occurrence of wind, increasing audience awareness of the artwork's synchronicity with their surrounding environment and raising consciousness about climate change—or the earth's eventfulness. Upon entering the installation's frame, the audience would feel a profound connection, standing together with the two trees as they experience the roaring and singing of the weather around them. In contrast to anthropocentric approaches, this specific Neganthropocene art opens up the space of creation and participation to non-human agents, allowing nature to be present and actively contribute to the creative process. *Windyhome* transforms the often passive image of nature to restore its equal—or more precisely, superior—dialogical status with humans by enabling nature, such as the local climate or trees, to initiate and even dominate such encounters. The aim of this specific Neganthropocene art is to subvert the belittlement or stigmatization of nature as merely a backdrop and to reveal that nature can be the source of artwork creation and, indeed, life itself. By

acknowledging that humans are not the "masters and possessors of nature," we open up greater potential for entering the Neganthropocene as a "curative, careful epoch."[27]

Figure 2. *Jiajun Shen,* **Windyhome***, 2021, Installation View, mixed media.* **Provided by the Artist.**
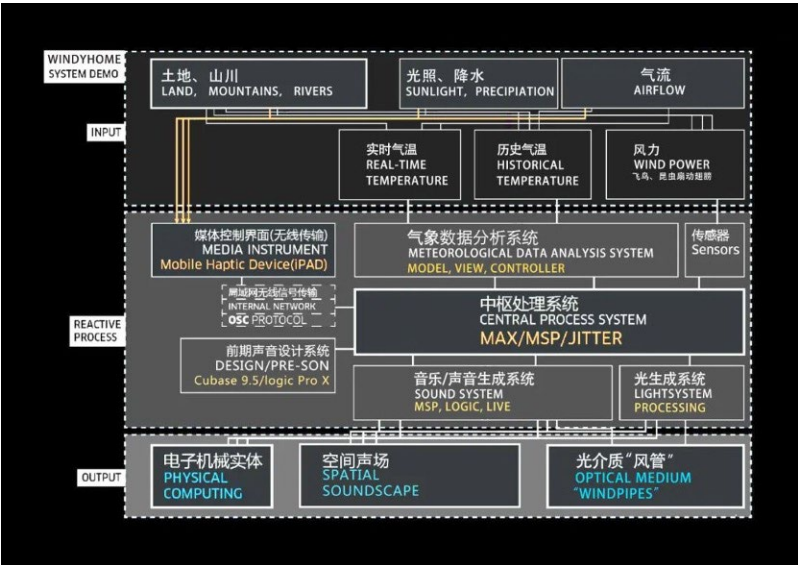

Figure 3. *Jiajun Shen,* **Windyhome***, 2021, Operation Design, mixed media.* **Provided by the Artist.**

The title, *Windyhome* also embodies a non-human-centric perspective by attributing agency to natural elements in the creative process, while inviting humans to engage actively in this experiential field. The title's combination of "wind" and "home" envisages an inevitable but harmonious coexistence between human activities and natural environments. Amongst 30 possible titles, Shen chose "Windyhome" to express a deep concern for nature, especially the weather. The artwork creates a contemplative space that prompts a moment of alienation and reflection for viewers, where they can unexpectedly discover the presence of the often-overlooked omnipresent weather condition. Once set in motion, the interaction between wind and technology operates autonomously, enabling viewers to observe the dynamic interplay between these natural and technological forces. Shen's various art and technology experiments reflect her belief that technology can empower humans to partake in a constant and profound dialogue with artistic creations, which would otherwise remain static and inanimate. Within the artwork, viewers are

drawn into the continuous and ever-evolving experience of an art piece born from the collaboration between technology and nature.

Windyhome offers a unique way to comprehend nature's workings that would otherwise remain hidden in our perception by transforming numerical climate information into a tangible multi-sensory experience in real-time. Shen's interest in artistic creation related to climate derives from her conviction that it encompasses not just natural ecology but also social production and human life. The frequent occurrence of extreme weather events in recent years, such as river flooding, urban inundation, and coastal flooding, are manifestations of natural forces for her. These events highlight increasingly unpredictable climatic conditions that pose threats to humans and significantly shape human lives. *Windyhome* indeed draws our attention to our arrogance in constructing discourses, as well as our vulnerability and susceptibility to nature's eventfulness. This process indeed manifests Clark's notion of "inhuman nature," wherein we discover our utter dependency on nature while the planet is in and for itself. According to Clark, there is a limit to thinking about the mutual enactment between humans and nature. While technology requires our involvement to evolve and be activated, nature does not. Through multi-sensory experiences of nature's workings in this work, we recognize and comprehend our own vulnerability. This acknowledgment can prompt a conversion of gaze, one that embraces openness, care, and empathy. As Clark notes, embodying vulnerability means "not only being open to being undone but also to being remade into something other than what we are. It means being open to the possibility of diversion and being propelled in new, unforeseeable directions."[28]

V. ADDRESSING THE OTHER-THAN-HUMAN

Water Calligraphy and *Windyhome* bring nature to the forefront of our artistic experience, compelling us to reflect on the vastness of the natural world and our own fragility within it. In a contrasting but equally powerful depiction, *Watching TV Together* (2021) provides a moment of levity by crafting a bizarre tableau of plants debating with AI on chairs (Figure 4). No matter how absurd this spectacle may seem, *Watching TV Together* prompts us to question what intelligence means and to envision a future wherein the human presence is significantly reduced. For this project, Fei Lu and Jianhao Lei developed a computing program capable of understanding the language of plants, including their electrical signals and responses. The AI and the plants, sitting on chairs, engage in a "battle" for control over the programs being played on the TV in front of them, with the intensity of their signals determining the outcome. Through this process, *Watching TV Together* creatively explores the potential for artificial intelligence to interact with and influence living organisms, specifically plants. In a written interview with the artists, they revealed that their inspiration for the TV channel battle came from childhood memories of watching television with their family.[29] Despite having different social identities and personal preferences for TV programs, they coexisted in the same space, which reflects the relationship that the artists believe exists between "natural life" (plants) and "artifacts" (AI). Rather than viewing the two as antagonistic, the artists propose a familial connection between them. By allowing the plants and AI to scramble for control of the TV channel, Lu and Lei not only restore consciousness but also intentionality to plants, which are often seen as playing a particularly passive role in nature.[30]

Within discussions surrounding the Anthropocene, nature is frequently stripped of its agency and relegated to a passive background that merely supports human intentions and activities. Humans are often considered ontologically distinct from nature due to their privileged possession of

consciousness and the ability to act, which justifies their discretionary exploitation of inert natural resources. By acknowledging the non-human intentionality of both plants and artificial intelligence, *Watching TV Together* attempts to subvert the dominant gaze found in Anthropocene discourses and practices. In this Neganthropocene practice, a new kind of tertiary retention is implied—the potential of inherent technicity in nature. Stiegler argues that tertiary retention, the technological mode of passing on knowledge and thought, is essential to humanity's evolution and invention. Writing, for example, externalizes human knowledge but can also be internalized to access memories of the unexperienced past through writing. Then, can nature also utilize technical apparatus to communicate and inherit memories? Is there any potential of coevolution between technics and natural life? *Watching TV Together* encourages us to ask the questions. The language of nature is materialized through technological interventions, just as human language is materialized through the technical apparatus and technology of writing. This process can be seen as a crucial step towards escaping an all-too-human understanding of our shared environment and facilitating the embrace of an envisioned yet plausible future.
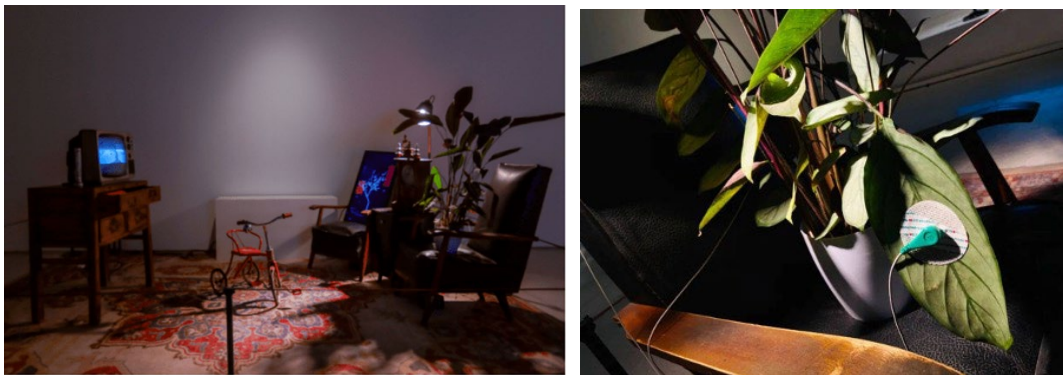

Figure 3. *Fei Lu and Jianhao Lei,* **Watching TV Together,** *2021, mixed media.* **Provided by the Artist.**

Once set up, the installation only allows for a very minimal role for humans: observation. Through machine-learning processes, the AI program has become capable of reading and understanding the electrical signals of the plants, acquiring a pseudo-individuality where it is capable of information acquisition and communication. The languages between them are inaccessible to humans and their right to choose a channel or to be involved in the communicative processes is relinquished. Some might argue that this approach, by black-boxing humans in communication, contradicts the Stieglerian notion of the Neganthropocene as it forces humans to surrender their agency to think, feel, and act to techniques in the process. [31] However, I argue, this interpretation of the Neganthropocene is limiting and it is what often makes us fall back into "all-too-human" understanding of the world, where humans must be able to comprehend and be involved every process of the world-making. Rather, this project encourages humans to reflect upon their own vulnerability or possibly inhuman nature, suggesting a shift in perspective and promoting the sense of care that lies at the core of the Neganthropocene. In particular, the artists incorporated nostalgic objects and furniture, such as an old-fashioned box television and a bamboo rocking chair, within a domestic setting to create an intimate atmosphere for this unconventional family. While minimizing human involvement in the process, this arrangement evokes a deeply human feeling—the intimacy experienced with loved ones during childhood memories. Again, in the interview with the author, Lu and Lei specifically expressed their intention to emulate a familial environment where individuals care for each other and coexist harmoniously, despite having differing

preferences and tastes. For the artists, new technologies like iPads, smartphones, and laptops are highly individualistic, whereas analog TVs provide a shared environment for family and community members. Through this installation, the artists aimed not to eliminate humans from the knowledge circle but rather to restore humanity, while also acknowledging the potential agency within nature and technology which emerges and evolves through interactions. For Lu and Lei, "the relationship between man-made and natural entities reflects the question of who we are."[32]

VI. THE NEGANTHROPOCENE FUTURE

In this study, we have examined various curative strategies employed by contemporary artists for addressing the challenges of the Anthropocene and transitioning towards the Neganthropocene. Considering that art involves a certain level of human intervention, these artworks can still be seen as caught within the circle of the Anthropocene, where nature is often disturbed and reframed according to human intentions. However, the power of art lies in its ability to evoke *creative encounters with transformative potential*, enabling us to perceive hidden dimensions of the world that can foster different thoughts and behaviors. Through tactics that manifest the Symbiocene, materialize the inhuman nature, and address the other-than-human, the presented works recognize nature as the primary source of life, affording sustenance to humans and human civilizations; thus, the radical dependence of humans on nature. This supports the concept of the Neganthropocene, wherein we aim to challenge and transform anthropocentric ideas by working from within the very system of our technological era. Jing mentioned in one of our interviews, "Although nature is the *mother* upon which we live and thrive, it does not need humans. Human beings should not be overly arrogant, for human art cannot interfere with nature. Instead, art can only instill, guide, warn, or even criticize the public through the creative behavior of artists, attempting to influence the relationship between human behavior and nature."[33] Through their artistic tactics, these artists invite us to acknowledge our *being as vulnerability*. In this way, these tactics can nurture a sense of care and bring forward a fundamental shift in our perspective on ourselves and the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AUTHOR BIO

Jung E. Choi, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Visual and Media Studies at Duke Kunshan University and the co-director of the Anthropocene XR Lab. As a cross-disciplinary scholar and curator, she specializes in contemporary art and technology and digital media culture. Choi has worked as a curator at renowned media art institutions, including Art Center Nabi in Seoul, Korea, and ZKM Karlsruhe in Germany. She received an MA in Visual Culture Theory from New York University and earned a PhD from Duke University, specializing in Visual and Media Studies. She also obtained a graduate certificate in Information Science and Studies, which provided research and training in digital humanities. Her theoretical work explores the spatiotemporal dimensions of human experience in contemporary digital environments and offers constructive criticism of digital media by examining current art and technology practices that challenge, experiment with, and anticipate the impact of digital technologies on our society.