

## **The Weight of Systems**

### **Notes on Planetary Dignity and the Power of Encounters**

Text by Fernanda Brenner

Imagine lifting every living thing off Earth's surface: each blade of grass, every swimming fish, crawling insect, soaring bird, towering tree, and human being – the entire biosphere hovering in space. Now picture alongside it another mass: our concrete cities, endless networks of cables, mountains of plastic, billions of machines, satellites, and the invisible but ever-present digital infrastructure. In a moment that marks a profound shift in planetary history, this human-made mass now exceeds all life combined. The technosphere, at 1.1 teratons, has outweighed the biosphere's 1 teraton.

This vertigo-inducing image emerged during a recent Zoom conversation where artists Christoph Weber and Luiza Crosman appeared in their respective digital windows from Vienna and São Paulo. As we discussed their exhibition *TECHNOFLOWS*, the unstable connection between us – packets of data crossing oceans via submarine cables – seemed to materialize this massive technological weight that now blankets our planet.

Weber's practice revolves around concrete, the second most widely used substance on Earth after water. Crosman, meanwhile, weaves scientific research and speculative fiction to probe planetary systems. Both approach this overwhelming reality from opposite ends—the tangible and the virtual, the heavy and the weightless—yet both equally real in their impact on Earth's systems.

Weber's work manifests as a direct confrontation with extracted matter. His pieces don't merely represent extraction – they embody it. In "Touch Fragments, Contact Print" (2022), the life-sized reproduction of a limestone quarry wall bears the literal scars of industrial drilling, transformed through translucent materials and analog photographic processes. The bore holes become both physical markers and metaphysical wounds – sites where the act of extraction reveals itself as simultaneously material and epistemological. For Weber, concrete becomes a medium through which to examine the contradictions of our time: a material that once symbolized modernist utopian ideals now stands as evidence of our most pressing ecological crises.

His newest work, "BIND" (2023), pushes this material investigation further by incorporating concrete from a landfill with organic substances like wood tar and beeswax. Through these methodological inquiries into materiality, Weber creates what he calls "settings for situated perception," where the politics of human and non-human interactions become tangible through sculptural transformation.

Crosman's "Átropos Sky" (2022) approaches extraction from a different angle, constructing what she terms "actionable and imaginative frameworks" to investigate how digital systems transform the atmosphere itself into a reservoir of data. Her work with forecasting systems and climate models merges scientific research with fictional narratives, revealing how contemporary power operates through the ability to capture, measure, and predict environmental phenomena. By focusing on women as figures of foresight and future-telling, she challenges the masculine logic that has dominated both industrial and digital spheres, creating performative narratives that traverse scales from human subjectivity to planetary futures.

The dialogue between these approaches reveals something essential about our current moment, what Achille Mbembe, the Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist, calls our era of "digital reason" – where both physical materials and data become reservoirs to be drilled, tapped, and processed. Weber materializes this philosophical tension by working with chases – the metal frames used to hold moveable type in printing presses – from a Heidelberg press. In "Chase #1" (2023), he fills the industrial frame with a beeswax cast of a Vienna highway support. For "Chase #2" (2023), he combines traditional Antiqua 16-point lead type bearing Kant's words about "pure schema" with Mbembe's text from "Brutalism" printed digitally on polystyrene. By repurposing these printing press components with such contrasting materials and ideas – from ancient beeswax to contemporary polystyrene, from Enlightenment philosophy to postcolonial theory – Weber creates a material meditation on how different systems of knowledge and production frame our understanding of the world.

This material engagement with philosophical ideas characterizes both artists' approaches to the exhibition's theme of climate dignity. Rather than theorizing from a distance, they get their hands dirty with the very systems they examine – Weber through his concrete works and material transformations, Crosman through her deep dive into digital systems and data flows. Together, they probe how extraction operates simultaneously across physical, digital, and epistemological realms.

Their works, viewed together in the ACFNY's modern space, create unexpected resonances. Weber's concrete pieces anchor the space with their material presence, while Crosman's video work and drawings seem to activate the air between them. The way her flowing diagrams and digital projections interact with the harsh shadows cast by his sculptural forms creates a kind of atmospheric tension – as if the space itself were manifesting the weight comparison that opened our conversation. Here, the technosphere becomes tangible not just through individual works, but through their choreographed interaction: Weber's concrete and beeswax pieces seem to ground Crosman's floating data streams, while her projections transform his solid forms into screens for possible futures.

Watching these works unfold in dialogue, my mind keeps drifting to Arturo Escobar, the Colombian-American anthropologist whose ideas about ecology and design have radically transformed how we think about development. His insights feel particularly resonant when looking at Crosman's "Drawing logistics series" (2018), where something as simple as lines traced on postal packaging becomes an arresting meditation on how abstract systems shape our material world. Framed in industrial chrome aluminum and stainless steel, these drawings capture the tension between mental schemas and global commodity flows – between how we imagine the world works and how it actually moves and transforms around us.

The drawings operate like a visual manifestation of Escobar's pluriversal concept – the rich possibility of multiple ways of understanding and being in the world coexisting at once. As you look closer, Crosman's lines perform a fascinating double movement: they restrict and define, creating boundaries and borders, but they also explore and connect, mapping out dependencies and possibilities. Even as they diagram existing systems, they suggest how these systems might be modified, transformed, reimagined. This interplay between documentation and reimagining echoes through both artists' work: Weber's alchemical experiments with industrial materials and

Crosman's broader investigations into how different forms of knowledge – from weather forecasting to data flows – might coexist without one dominating the other.

In this light, *TECHNOFLOWS* becomes more than an exhibition about climate and technology – it becomes a proposition for reimagining our relationship with the world beyond the development paradigm that has dominated global thinking since the mid-twentieth century. The artists' approaches suggest that true climate dignity might require abandoning the very categories through which neoliberalism has taught us to understand our relationship with the Earth and its systems. Through their material and conceptual investigations, they invite us to imagine forms of knowledge and practice that don't reduce the world to a resource to be managed or a disaster to be mitigated, but rather as a complex web of relationships to be cultivated and sustained.