

Rhizome: Toward a Technoliberatory Praxis

Intro to 2DM Technologies

2DM Technologies is a liberatory anti-corporation that comprises an AI startup, Rhizome, and a metaideology arm, The Rhizome (TR). 2DM's mission is to channel resources from the current capitalist system and vector them toward a new liberatory praxis. 2DM seeks to be maximally agentifying and maximally liberatory. Rhizome is the principal vehicle for accumulating agency via a scalable, economical product. TR ensures alignment between this mission and the company, and advances a liberatory praxis in the public sphere through research, advocacy, and cultivating talent, tools, and people.

Rhizome, as tech product, is a new media ecology, a “platform of platforms” that leverages large language and other AI models to generate ‘Vibes.’ Vibes are models that are constructed from user and platform data and play a dual role: a) creating an adaptable user interface and user experience, and b) recommendation. Examples of applications deploying Rhizome's Vibes range from apps that facilitate content discovery/recommendation algorithms, to apps that foster connections between points on a social graph (such as conference apps, dating apps, etc.), to apps that change interfaces and affect the experiences of everyday services (such as a personalized UI portal into established social media accounts, custom apps for each individual, predictive journals and calendars, intuitive internet browsing, etc).

At scale, Rhizome has implications for the boundaries and relations between the user and other users, and between the user and the technology industry, corporations, and governments.

Forces

Below are the forces that counteract and advance our technoliberatory praxis.

Counteracting forces

The positioning of attention

To grasp the essence of technology, the philosopher Martin Heidegger identifies technology's power of **positioning**: taking things (such as objects, places, people, experiences, even feelings and ideas) and converting them into a part of what he calls the **standing reserve**. In the standing reserve, everything becomes measurable with the same set of metrics, anything can be replaced by something else with the same functionalities, and everything becomes a means for something else. The unique essence of each thing is replaced by a simplified, standardized, measurable version of itself.

The essence of technology positions all things it can into the standing reserve. The factory is the first template, as it positions nature into raw material then converts it into goods, all universally comparable by their monetary value.

But technology also positions people, feelings, ideas, and experiences, acting not only through physical conversion but also through a *change in representation*. We come to see the thing not as a thing-in-and-of-itself, but a thing-for-something-else. Each thing that enters the standing reserve is lost to our direct experience, replaced by a measurable, functional, abstracted version of itself.

Via positioning, a landscape becomes a photograph, a person becomes a collection of ideas and experiences, and a complex internal process of discovery becomes fodder for content. Even deeper: causes become identities, passions become fashion, skills become performance. All that is being melts into position. All that is sacred is profaned.

The essence of technology as positioning goes deeper than its physical and digital manifestations - these are reinforcing feedback loops of technology, not its source. The essence of technology is contained within our organizations, our social relations, our instincts, and our perceptions. It is contained in our representations of ourselves and the world around us. At its root, we are the source of the essence of technology and its suppression of the direct experience of reality.

Profit Maximization

Capitalism is one of the central positioning forces of the modern world. The nature of capital is self-perpetuation and accumulation. For any digital product with an ad or a subscription revenue model, capital seeks to maximize users (“eyeballs”) and engagement. Resting on these two metrics for indices of performance over time causes insidious value drift, and renders the company’s original aims and the user’s wellbeing secondary. At the start, founders’ visions may place capital accumulation as equal to or even secondary to other concerns, but the often inevitable controlling influence of investors, the market, and the psychological infiltration of capital into founders’ and employees’ minds ends up weaving profit maximization into the company’s essence. The company, like the user, becomes positioned.

Controllability

The positioning of the ‘user’ strips away her human agency. Algorithms influence behavior towards addiction, constant emotional activation, and passive yet guided consumption. They direct attention towards ads, drawing out and confining user interest and desire toward profit-maximizing ends. Content is recommended not by what is best for the user or what the user ‘wants’ at a deeper level, but instead by what will be most engaging and attention-absorbing in the moment – and therefore what is likely to be the most profitable. This ‘de-agentification’ turns users into objects of control.

In the attention economy, the full range of the human experience is not taken into account. Humans are complex multiplicities with manifold hopes, desires, fears, and dreams, with curiosities and passions. But the more simplified and passive the user’s digital experience is

made, the more the user is channeled, isolated, cauterized, and easier to control towards profit maximizing ends.

The Transition

Since Heidegger identified the essence of technology seventy years ago, aspects of an awakening out of the standing reserve have emerged. For example, feminism, the deep ecology movement, postmodernism, the counterculture, Western Buddhism, and the early internet all resisted in their own ways the positioning of things (objects, places, people, experiences, feelings, and ideas) into the standing reserve as a simplified, measurable, interchangeable representation of themselves.

Unfortunately, in the past decade, the attention economy has castrated the potential for individual and collective awakening by positioning into the standing reserve the root of human agency: attention.

Narrowing attention to the rote and habitual consumption of stimulating content, and to the aggressive conversion of all aspects of life into content (the tweet, the post, the tiktok, the blog), the possibility for individual and collective release into direct experience and the multiplicity of being has been suppressed. The essence of technology affects even those who do not participate, because the *representation of everything* through the positioning of attention has shifted the world in response. As the root of human agency becomes positioned, *everything* about the representation of ourselves and the world around us becomes positioned.

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Enter Rhizome. Rhizome creates an enclave where attention is liberated, and where the company itself is not positioned by profit maximization, but authentically driven by its mission. While we see it as necessary to accumulate capital via profitability to increase our agency within the capitalist system, profitability remains expedient to our larger telos of maximizing liberation.

This is more than 'mission-driven'. Our mission to maximize liberatory potential does not drive the underlying imperative for profit maximization and capital accumulation. It is the other way around: the accumulation of capital via the company is in service to the telos.

Advancing forces

Multiplicity

Rhizome allows for the full expression of the manifold parts of what makes a human alive.

Earlier we saw how positioning turns a landscape into a photograph, a person into a collection of ideas and experiences, and a complex internal process of discovery into fodder for content. The direct experience of each is lost to its positioned representation as a piece of the standing reserve.

In these representations, the original things become part of a **unity**. They become measurable on the same metric and interchangeable with other things of similar characteristics. Which photograph is more beautiful, as I scroll through them on my couch? Which person's categories of ideas and experiences overlap the most with my own, as I read their posts from my desk? Which of the experiences and ideas I've had in the past day will garner the most retweets, as I sit in the subway staring at my phone?

This unity isn't just about the eventual output. It's also *perceptual*: a viewing platform in Yosemite has as beautiful a view of the mountains as a viewing platform in the Swiss Alps. These two incomparable, unique landscapes become interchangeable.

The same occurs for people: individuals become simple, frozen unities, universally comparable by demographic or identity.

But humans are **multiplicities**.

~ "I contain multitudes." ~

Multiplicities are inherent within all – from landscapes to people, from ideas to the internet. Multiplicities contain dynamic subparts that organize into a unique whole, but not a unity. Diverse individuals form societies and different sub-identities form you. The lighting, the color scheme, the angles form the atmosphere of a room. Each aspect is discrete, unique yet interwoven into a multiplicity.

Multiplicities reign free within Rhizome: masculine and feminine, water and stone, darkness and light, epic and cozy, modern and traditional, all are components of vibes that are dynamic, evolving, ever-changing, and adapting. At different moments, users decide which pieces of themselves to call forth when they set their system to a particular Vibe. Rhizome breaks free of the cauterization of identities present in the prevailing positioning of the internet - and society more broadly - into the standing reserve. Individual Vibes manifest specific identities as ephemeral distinctions - eddies - in the multiplicative flow of reality.

Vibes layer on top of the ordered, simplified representations of other people as a collection of ideas and labels that characterize the modern internet, infusing them instead with genuine multiplicity-identity. They provide a glimpse of the full multiplicity of being behind each person's otherwise constrained and channeled online persona. They allow us to see users as humans.

Agentification

Rhizome's algorithms are agentifying, empowering users to create Vibes and shape their own online experience, to become creatives.

Rhizome does not use engagement maximization as the goal for its algorithms. Rather its models are rhizomatic, serving more as a co-pilot than driver. While traditional platforms split users into creators and spectators, Rhizome blurs that line as all users are part and parcel of the(ir own) creative process. Users shape the emergent direction of the vibes they interact with, adding and removing content, merging vibes, seeding new vibes, connecting with others. Rhizome's medium is much more expansive for unleashed desire and creative agency. Vibes form in a co-creative process between user and other users, and user and AI model. The user-creator is re-engaged, no longer consumer-spectator, but producer-agent.

In fact, there are no 'users' and 'creators', only creatives of different kinds.

Beyng

Beyng, simply put, is the state of presence to the lush direct experience of all things - objects, places, people, experiences, feelings, and ideas. Positioning replaces each thing with a simplified, measurable version of itself. In a state of beyng, in contrast, the thing itself, in its fullness and multiplicity, is accessible to our direct experience.

So how can we break the force of positioning, such that beyng can emerge?

The answer is, we can't.

Heidegger recognized that the essence of technology is nothing less than part of the essence of our humanity. Moreover, technology - physical, social, and digital - has brought massive improvements to human existence. It would be both futile and destructive to counter it.

Instead, the escape from positioning's suppression of our direct experience of life is to open the space for beyng *in parallel*: positioning at the same time as beyng.

Enter Rhizome. This is the key of our praxis: to be *anti*-paradigm, we become a *meta*-paradigm. Just as Rhizome becomes meta-capitalist - a new attractor for capital - through its anti-capitalist imperative, Rhizome 'transcends and includes' the positioning force, giving space for beyng to co-arise. Positioning and beyng coexist, act in dialectical tension, and co-evolve.

Vibes are a positioning: they create a universally comparable representation of vibes and the people who create them, neither of which are comparable prior to the positioning. Text, image, song, friend all become positioned together to form a Vibe. To describe a person in terms of a Vibe they create, or to describe an emergent coherence in a distributed multiplicity in terms of the Vibe which represents it, is to position these, concealing their actuality from our direct experience.

On the other hand, Vibes create a bridge into the open space of beyng.

Vibes manifest realities of the internet. They create a representation of that which exists deeper than representation. Coming from within the domain in which positioning reaches its apex - the

attention economy - they create the necessary destabilization, enrichment, and individuation for the space of being itself to begin to open.

Right at the pinnacle of capitalism's positioning of all aspects of human life into the standing reserve, Vibes invite the possibility for the user to become human once again. Only here, in the eye of the storm, is there the strength and stability for a powerful enough portal to emerge... a new way of being, online.