



**James Bridle, "Seeing Like A Planet" (Exc.), *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines*, 2022.**

"We live mostly at the speed of our media and our machines. Our days are governed by the twenty-four-hour clock and the news cycle; by status updates and emails. But the idea of global time - a single, universal standard, divided into hours and minutes, and shifting across time zones - is a recent one. An invention of the late nineteenth century, it was driven by the development of technology. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the world got by perfectly well with many and various measurements of time: the farmer and the farrier worked to their own rhythms, and clocks were set to different times even in neighboring towns. Cultural conceptions of time also differed widely: Western, Judaeo-Christian time was conceived of as linear, with a definite start and end, while Incan and Hindu cosmologies conceived of time as cyclical and infinite. These models of time deeply influenced the awareness of those who lived within them, producing entirely different ways of being and living..." (pg 100).

"In *The Soul of a New Machine*, Tracy Kidder's account of the development of the Data General Eclipse MV/8000, an early microcomputer, in the late 1970s, the author records the experience of one engineer whose work involved testing the new computer for bugs. To do this, he used a device called a logic analyser, which took snapshots of the machine's internal state every nanosecond - every billionth of a second, an almost unimaginable fraction of time. For the engineer, though, such time frames were familiar: 'I feel very comfortable talking in nanoseconds. I sit at one of these analyzers and nanoseconds are wide. I mean, you can see them go by. "Jesus," I say, "that signal takes twelve nanoseconds to get from there to there.'" Those are real big things to me when I'm building a computer. Yet when I think about it, how much longer



it takes to snap your fingers, I've lost track of what a nanosecond really means" (pg 105).

"Later in the process, another of the engineers on the Eclipse project burns out, and leaves the company. He too was working with the logic analyser, peering into the infinitesimal gaps of time within the machine, day after day, week after week. But the effort of doing so had become too much. Before departing, he leaves a note to his colleagues on top of his terminal: 'I'm going to a commune in Vermont and will deal with no unit of time shorter than a season.' He wasn't just going to Vermont; he was going to a place where time was different, where it more closely matched the rhythms of the body and the rhythms of the world...

"It matters what time we live in. Not which age, but which present time, the time of our awareness. When it is governed by machines, our attention is forcibly attuned to the scale of the nanosecond and the breadth of a beam of light, and this makes it harder for us to think of and with other beings and processes which exist at different scales of time and geography: the turning of the seasons, the continental migration of birds, the lifespan of trees and plants. But attention is also something which can be turned and trained, which can be brought back, consciously, towards a more-than-human mean time. While we mostly construct and think our technologies in ways inimical to this, it does not have to be this way. Our tools of data gathering, measurement, recording and viewing can also be used to increase our awareness and broaden our capacity for attention and care, if we make conscious choices about the time we want to live in" (pg 106).