

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONCEPT OF THE TECHNO- ANTHROPOCENE

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1 THE TECHNO-ANTHROPOCENE

Contemporary conceptualizations on what it means to be human in a world focus on the Anthropocene, and I want to open for how this is yet another sign of human hubris, where we as humanity consider ourselves as masters of both nature and technology. I am calling for a serious and hybrid approach where technology finds its natural place as co-determinant and co-constituent for how this world is construed and (re)acts – namely the Techno-Anthropocene. Inspired by Martin Heidegger (Gestell and planetary technicity), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (the chiasm), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (becoming) and Peter-Paul Verbeek (techno-terrestrial condition) I shall try through a multifaceted lens to envelop the concept of the Techno-Anthropocene.

Martin Heidegger touched upon how we are doomed if we do not realize how technology is determinant for our being-in-the-world. In an interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966 (1976/2020) “Only a God Can Save Us”. Heidegger talks of ‘planetary technicity’ as a condition and as conditioning. The specific conceptualization of ‘planetary technicity’ has implications in relation to how we approach our being-with-technology. We can only think our planet from the outside and in relation to other planets in our solar system. Planetary is hence cosmic and external distance, which technology has mediated for centuries and intensified through space programs in the past 60 years. Peter-Paul Verbeek identified four levels (Earth, World, Globe, Planet), in his keynote at the PHTR 2022 conference: *‘The techno-terrestrial condition: human-technology relations and the anthropocene’*, and the following is building upon Verbeek’s distinctions and elucidations.

Technology alters the surface of the Earth and transforms habitats of substances. Technology changes our world, which is exactly ours, in opposition to the Earth, which is not ours. Technology creates the globe through infrastructures that make us perceive our world as global. Finally, technology mediates our planet to us through images and measurements. The power and impact of technology is at its highest in relation to world and globe, because capable of destroying possibilities of life-(world) and disrupting connections and communications on a global scale. The Earth and the planet will persist independently of our being with technology. It will still orbit around the sun for billions of years, and substances (Earth) will persist.

The Earth and the planet are not *conditioned* by the Techno-Anthropocene. They are moved and touched, but essentially not determined by neither technology nor humans. The world, as we know it, as habitat for different human and non-human life-worlds is highly conditioned and determined by technology, and the globe as what binds us together is as well under the siege of human-technology relations.

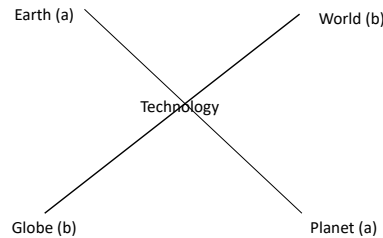
How are we in our relations to the Earth, World, Globe, and Planet? I am on the Earth. I am in the World. We are on the Globe. We are on the Planet. The distinction between I and we are highly relevant when it comes to the Techno-Anthropocene because it means that we are capable of moving on both an individual and collective level. If I am supposed to still *be* on the earth and we *be present* on the planet, then we must act on a global level and perform in our individual life-worlds. The possibilities and potentials for change and transformation are present in relation to world and globe, still given the fact that technology enacts the Earth and facilitates/mediates our contact with our and other planets. This also means that our *being* must be framed in a more transformative way through the verb of *becoming*. Deleuze and Guattari have on various occasions (1987, 1994) touched the paradoxes of *becoming* as an ontological instance: constant *becoming* is how we are in the world. They frame *becoming* through the concept of involution: “Becoming is involutory, involution is creative” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 263). According to the Oxford Dictionary the concept of involution has different meanings dependent on frameworks and the most meaningful in this context reads: “An involved or entangled condition; entanglement, complication; intricacy of construction or

style”. The movement in involution is in-warded, and leads back to itself, so becoming constitutes itself constantly in complicated and entangled processes. World and life-world constantly constitutes in the in-between, or as Deleuze and Guattari states in the middle: “The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary it is where things pick up speed” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 28).

Science is our access to being (earth and planet), whereas art and philosophy paves the way to becoming (world and globe). The Techno-Anthropocene is a construct which performs and envelop in the local and the global and reaches/bridges earth and planet. The Techno-Anthropocene is a bridging between science, art, and philosophy directed towards World and Globe, and reaching towards Earth and Planet.

Figure 1

The chiasm of the Techno-Anthropocene



Note. There is an asymmetry in the figure where World and Globe is moved and touched by and with technology to a higher degree than Earth and Planet.

There is a bridging in the concept itself, which is the hyphen between technology and humans. This bridging is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, instability, and danger, which makes it a ‘strange’ bridge. We do not move from A to B on that bridge but are caught in a whirl. The hyphen is a whirl, where things intensify and gain speed towards the middle and exponentially expand towards infinite limits. We are constantly forced and determined by technology to face and engage with the ‘walls’ of the whirl. How do we involve and engage? I have on prior occasions (Botin, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021) introduced to the concept of scaffolding, inspired by Heidegger. We need to scaffold in the whirl to manage speed, complexity, and chaos. Scaffolding is an attitude, or pos-ure as Heidegger would have it. The *Heideggerian* concept of *Gestell* has been translated and interpreted in myriads of ways since it was introduced in essays from the 1950’ies. William J Richardson S. J. who translated the interview in *Der Spiegel* (1966) suggests pos-ure with different prefixes in front, which could embrace the enigmatic character of the term: com-posed, pro-posed, contra-posed etc. (Heidegger, 1966/1981, p. 15).

In Heidegger’s own words it reads:

The essence of technicity I see in what I call ‘pos-ure (*Ge-stell*)’, an often ridiculed and perhaps awkward expression. To say that pos-ure holds sway means that man is posed,

enjoined and challenged by a power that becomes manifest in the essence of technicity – a power that man himself does not control. Thought asks no more than this: that it helps us achieve this insight. (Heidegger, 1976/1981, p. 9).

Technology works in these different ways as it poses itself in between us and the world. Therefore, the postphenomenological equation of I-Technology-World and the concept of multistability is sensemaking. I and World are touched, moved, transformed by and with technology, as I and the World are posed in myriads of ways, hence multistable.

2 THE CHIASM

Earlier I made the distinction between I and We, but the distinction is blurred to an extent that it is difficult to make clear definitions. We cannot think the I without the collective and collaborate We, and the We cannot be thought without the Other. Technology is at play in the intersection, and once again it works in myriads of ways: combining, disrupting, connecting, destroying etc. We are still in whirl and trying to get a grip. One way of trying to get a grip or scaffold in the whirl of the Techno-Anthropocene is to address the concept of the chiasm (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968; Botin, 2021; de Boer and Verbeek, 2022).

Maurice -Merleau Ponty introduced to the concept in the essay “The Intertwining-The Chiasm” and stresses the fact that we are in the world through our relational bodies: “The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh” (Merleau Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 135). In our meeting with the world *things are made flesh*. This is what de Boer and Verbeek calls *techno-flesh* where technology is not considered as an add on to the body (flesh) but rather as something that deeply and radically shapes our relations to the world: “The flesh, so we have suggested can be understood as a ‘technoflesh, where ‘techno’- refers to the flesh being malleable by technological developments that mediate chiasmic relations” (de Boer and Verbeek, 2022, p. 205). In the quote the hyphen has disappeared in the concept of ‘technoflesh’ whereas earlier in the article it appears consistently with the hyphen. In my view the hyphen in techno-flesh should be kept, because exactly pointing at the relations in between technologies and bodies. This relation is according to Merleau-Ponty chiasmic in the following way: “My body model of the things and things model of my body: the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it (arrow) all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as locus for the inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 131). I have addressed this in the following way: “Our way to the world and the things is bodily, and thinking/thoughts are mediated by this body-thing-world relation” (Botin, 2021, p. 234). My body becomes *more* body as it gets technified or reified through being with things. Techno-flesh is the sublime being of the body, where technologies literally open our bodies to the conditions of the world. These conditions are critical and should be handled with care and cure. We must curate our techno-flesh and de Boer and Verbeek point at a possible way of curating: “The notions of ‘chiasm’ and ‘techno-flesh’ might help address how technologies shape the flesh of the earth, thereby shaping its very materiality and the conditions in which entities can mutually sense one another” (de Boer and Verbeek, 2022, p. 206). De Boer and Verbeek bridges toward the Earth in the chiasm of Earth (a), World (b)/Globe (b), Planet (a), which is certainly needed the moment we think our organic and non-organic companions in a common future.

As I stated the whirl is condition and conditioning our being and becoming through and with technology on all levels. We are *posed* in various and multistable ways, and critical thinking is needed if we are to have some sort of grip in the whirl of the Techno-Anthropocene.

In this short essay I have tried to frame the complexity of the concept of the Techno-Anthropocene through readings of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari, and the

most rewarding contribution to understanding the complexity of the concept has been de Boer and Verbeek's distinctions and integrations in the chiasm and how the *techno-terrestrial condition* is a result of how we as humans are together with technologies.

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