

Introduction

For the first time in the 20-year history of the Society for Phenomenology and Media's annual international conferences, last year's conference featured a theme that was not directly related to media. The conference organizers of our lively and very successful 2017 meeting in Brussels, Belgium, selected the theme of the Anthropocene, a current and widely discussed topic in the social sciences as well as in philosophy. Although many of the papers presented at the conference did not take up this theme, a significant number of them did so, and examples of both are represented in the current (2018) volumes of *Glimpse* and *Proceedings*. SPM has always encouraged philosophical diversity and a wide variety of perspectives; our conferences are open to all papers insofar as they discuss media.

Back to Brussels: as our main keynote speaker, SPM was lucky enough to enlist one of the leading thinkers today working in the area of intersection between politics and technology, Langdon Winner, a perfect fit for a conference themed around the notion of the Anthropocene. His keynote paper fronts the selection of papers in this volume of *Glimpse* that comprise the first grouping of essays dealing directly and primarily with the theme of the Anthropocene. While Winner

takes an analytical approach to the philosophy of technology that appeals to the political, sociological, and ethical dimensions of technics that is grounded in the natural sciences, several other authors in this first section of essays adopt a Heideggerian metaphysical stance that employs a vernacular of neologisms in a critical understanding of the philosophy of technology, calling on the theoretical work of Bernard Stiegler as well as Peter Sloterdijk. Although these approaches are different in their analyses of causes and possible cures, they concur with the idea that however we describe or narrowly define it, the Anthropocene represents an impending environmental calamity not only for humanity, but also for all other living things on the planet.

In his timely and engaging article, "Biosphere Meets Public Sphere in the Post-Truth Era," Winner begins his exposé of the topic of the Anthropocene with a look at the current situation in politics and popular forms of media, which have contributed to the spreading of doubt not just about some particular news item or scientific claim, but about what should count as a fact and what should be recognized as truth. Enveloped within this umbrella of doubt is the reality of climate change, which has been

spreading into public discourse for almost as long as it has been recognized as an issue of concern. This atmosphere of doubting the claims of science has fostered postponement of and even hostility toward any widespread initiatives aimed at reducing activities that contribute to the resulting problems, some of which are, or may soon be, reaching catastrophic proportions.

Winner develops this critique in his examination of the terminology of the Anthropocene, which he regards as inadequate and misleading in guiding our thinking about the Anthropocene. Sometimes with tongue-in-cheek and sometimes with alarmed seriousness, he punctures the balloon of self-inflated “science(s) of technology” that situate the discussion of the global situation within the regime of what he sees as a biased terminology. Winner opposes the use of the term, “Anthropocene,” tying it to the Trumpian “post-truth” era of “fake news,” propaganda-laden social media platforms, and other forms of Orwellian rhetoric that confront us at this juncture in our history, non-stop and seemingly from all corners. Winner wonders whether, rather than being helpful in understanding and addressing the problems we face, the linguistic creativity we intellectuals, scientists, scholars, political activists, and other concerned commentators employ in posing problems for academic analysis is nothing more than a production of beguiling fictions. He argues that although there may be plausible reasons for humans naming an entire geological epoch after themselves, to Winner, “it smacks of an

obvious, species-centered narcissism.”

Next up is Mark Coeckelbergh’s “Scientific Subjects, Romantic Witnesses? Magic Technologies, Alienation, and Self-Destruction in the Anthropocene,” which is more in line with the Heideggerian approach mentioned above. Adopting what in the end turns out to be a somewhat hopeful outlook, Coeckelbergh alerts us to a paradox of agency faced by humans in the age of the Anthropocene. We are the cause of the negative consequences of climate change, yet we seem to be at a loss in coming up with solutions. We have become impotent, alienated bystanders in the face of the threat of human self-destruction. He takes an imaginative leap into the suggestion that in addition to the contemporary cultures of science and technology that have played a significant role in the emergence of the problem, we must now also recognize the potential of the cultural movement of romanticism whose aesthetics generate their own technological manifestations. This would be a kind of “romantic science.” The element of romance enables new imaginaries and makes space for our creation of “enchanted and artificial spaces for living elsewhere.” With this romantic and, as Coeckelbergh suggests, magical idea of technology, we can re-enchant the ordinary, problem-laden world, or even create a new world that will satisfy our desire for romance and magic.

However, Coeckelbergh concludes that our “Earth alienation” and magical escape into new (romantic) worlds would be nothing more than an artistic solution, a way of conceiving of the world, or of

nature, and our connection to it. He ends by saying that we need to “create technologies that give us more agency and a different, less alienated epistemic relation to our environment. We can avoid a romantic escape into magical thinking and a fascination with the spectacle of the Anthropocene and its attendant problems by engaging directly with nature, not through theory, but through hands-on contact with natural things and also by reinterpreting science and technology as thoroughly bound up with culture and political reality.

In “The Anthropocene as Event,” Jan Jasper Mathé continues the discussion of anthropogenic events with his claim that we make the mistake of overlooking the fact that the Anthropocene is itself a kind of event. Just as Coeckelbergh notes that we feel powerless to solve the very problems we create, Mathé, calling on the work of Slavoj Žižek and Bernard Stiegler, argues that our attempts to deal with the disruption and destruction that have surfaced in the age of the Anthropocene are only obscured by framing them within the boundaries of science and technology. Mathé sees techno-scientific culture as a source for the belief that human history is conjoined with the history of the planet itself. As an event, the Anthropocene is an object that transforms reality by shattering the notion that the Anthropocene is just another fantasy. Mathé sees a way forward by conceiving the very interplay of appearances, which may be taken as perspectival distortions of reality, as genuine aspects of reality in itself. Tapping into the

Stieglerian idea of technicity – that humans are in themselves incomplete and contingently determined beings in need of supplementation through various forms of technology – Mathé urges that we need to see technology as “a constructive medium for human experience and practice.... [and] to integrate technological development into who and what we are as human beings.” This will ideally lead us to create new perspectives from which to generate actions that make sense of and deal with the urgency of the Anthropocene. We really have no alternative but to obey the imperative of acting in response to it as a real event in both geological and human history.

In the elaborately detailed essay, “Re-Orienting the Noösphere: Imagining a New Role for Digital Media in the Era of the Anthropocene,” Pieter Lemmens re-introduces the concept of the *noösphere*, first introduced by Jesuit philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as a framework for conceiving of human evolution. Lemmens continues the exposition of Stieglerian thinking and also calls on the work of Peter Sloterdijk, whose ideas he uses to frame his essay; however, Lemmens’ main argument is clearly based on Stiegler’s philosophy and cultural politics. He avoids wading into the more controversial issues of genetic engineering or technological tampering with human reproduction in order to produce “better” (culturally tamed, “de-bestialized”) humans that Sloterdijk provocatively promotes, which led the renowned German philosopher and public intellectual,

Jürgen Habermas, to charge Sloterdijk with more than a glancing flirtation with fascism. This is not the place to air this debate but only to note that the “homeo-technological turn” brought about by the “Neganthropocene” envisioned by Stiegler and championed by Lemmens as a “synergetic co-operation, co-production, co-construction” that results in a conjugated *biotechnosphere* through which “the digital noösphere would be intelligently transformed from a *destructive* into a *constructive* force” is not in itself a fascist ambition. However, there is a need to be wary of such connections. Lemmens references Sloterdijk to call for a “co-natural, non-despotic and Earth-caring technological paradigm.”

In “A New Telluric Force: Humans in the Age of the Anthropocene,” Melinda Campbell and Patricia King Dávalos develop an approach that acknowledges both the empirical observations of the natural sciences and the phenomenological data of lived experience as integral to understanding, addressing, and solving the problems that attend the issues raised by the Anthropocene. They see the situation that confronts the planet and the life it supports in the crisis of the Anthropocene as signaling a need to move from subjective phenomenological investigations into human-environment relations to a re-conceptualized and naturalized phenomenology, which merges the ability of the natural sciences to produce objective accounts of the natural world with the methods of phenomenology that give proper recognition to the lived experience of the creatures who

inhabit, enjoy, and exploit that world. The “telluric force” in question is that of humans themselves, who, in the age of the Anthropocene, figure not simply as both perpetrators and victims of the new geological and climatological conditions, but who themselves are a geologic entity or force. All of which leads, the authors claim, to new political, social, and ethical confrontations and opportunities for cooperation and conflict resolution.

We now move into a second grouping of the essays in this volume that focus on specific effects of technological innovations and advanced technics on the quality and indeed the very form of human life. We start with Richard S. Lewis’s “Hello Anthropocene, Goodbye Humanity: Reframing Transhumanism through Postphenomenology.” Lewis weighs in on the “human enhancement” debate generated by the development of new technologies that exploit untested possibilities in genetic engineering and technological bodily alterations and augmentations that promise (or threaten) to dramatically change our conception of what it is to be human. This harks back to the controversial “eugenics question” that Sloterdijk has injected into philosophical public discourse mentioned above. Lewis, however, does not call on Sloterdijk, but instead considers two opposing sides on the issue, the transhumanists (e.g., Nick Bostrom and Ray Kurzweil) and the bioconservatives (e.g., Francis Fukuyama, Jürgen Habermas, and Michael Sandel). He sees the field of postphenomenology, developed by Don Ihde, as an effective way to

engage the human-enhancement debate through identifying flaws in transhumanist thinking and introducing an empirically grounded, realistic approach to the notion of human enhancement.

In an outstanding summary and penetrating analysis of the new media collectively known as the “social network,” Valeria Ferraretto, Silvia Ferrari, and Verbena Giambastiani situate their discussion of personal identity as it relates to the transformational power of social media. Invoking Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif* (cf., “apparatus”), the authors explain that the experience of living one’s life online, cultivating a “digital life,” puts the apparatus of the social medium into operation, and with this form of experience comes both the maintenance and enhancement of various forms of social, institutional, and personal power. The authors address three important issues: how social media are changing us; the extent to which social media have changed society; and the question of whether social media improve and enhance human life. They countenance the interesting possibility that our digital life may in fact be the start of a new “historical orientation” in which the virtual world is simply an extension of the real world, with no ontological line of separation.

To address this set of questions, Ferraretto, Ferrari, and Giambastiani enlist, among others, Walter Benjamin and Michaela Ott (influenced by Gilles Deleuze) to think through the complex and multi-faceted relationship between the self as ordinarily conceived (as an inhabitant of the actual world) and the online self. The

answer lies, according to the authors, in acknowledging a new kind of community that distinguishes individuals from *dividuals*. The idea here is that we must no longer think of “human beings undivided as individual entities. Individuals have become dividual,” which is a state of being that is “affected by and interrelated with countless others, of sharing multiple bio- and socio-technological structures.” Again, following Benjamin, the authors conclude that new forms of perception are in fact enabled by the new forms of reproduction (as in social media) because these media multiply our “being-as-self,” and as a consequence, all social relationships are thereby transformed. In the end, Ferraretto, Ferrari, and Giambastiani consider a new mode of life in which the “divided individual” is the real and true subject in the postmodern era.

Nicola Liberati continues the investigation of our digitally and technologically enhanced future in “Facing the Digital Partner: A Phenomenological Analysis of Digital Otherness.” Liberati is inspired by authentic, Husserlian descriptive phenomenology in his discussion of the possibility of meaningful, even intimate, relationships with digital entities. He explores first how digital entities are perceived as merely fictional because they do not function as part of the everyday world in the same way as, for example, actual human or living beings. However, with the emergence of new iterations of digital technologies (Liberati references the Gatebox virtual-assistant “girl” that takes on human-like characteristics),

the digital other breaks through the boundaries of the virtual world to meet the user where he lives, so to speak. Invoking the ideas of Alfred Schütz, Liberati asserts that the quality of otherness is grounded in both intertwined, interconnected activities as well as in resistance. Up until now, digital entities have not been able to meet both of these criteria; however, the newest forms of digital technologies can achieve resistance because they can be programmed to be operational even when switched off. This adds an element of autonomy that approaches the resistance of other human beings. Liberati maintains that, so equipped, these digital programs “can be perceived as ‘digital others’ with which, or with whom, it is possible to develop intimate relationships.”

Continuing the theme of the technologically augmented or disrupted human body as well as introducing the importance of art in thinking through the Anthropocene, Marta G. Trógolo, Alejandra de las Mercedes Fernández, and Rosario Zapponi present an account of subjectivity as a zero-point of orientation in “Living the Body as a New Anthropocene Experience?” In this original and thoughtful essay, they inquire into possibilities for new ways of conceiving the body’s role within nature. The authors explore issues related to human self-reference in situations of human invention (such as making art) as well as situations of corporeal interventions like cosmetic surgery or even technological bodily enhancements, claiming that such activities result in a kind of

repulsion, or even expulsion (as in bodily dehiscence), thereby negating human morphogenetic nature. They argue that conceiving of the “‘body object’ as a knotting of meanings given the impossibility of reticulate substance, humanity, and subject” can allow for an opportunity to witness an “immanent Anthropocene experience” rather than a transcendent one. Such a witnessing would mark a “historical passage to technoscience as well as an interpretation of an Anthropocene conversion as power-totalizing.”

The role of art as revelatory of human nature continues to be addressed in the next group of articles. In “Anthropocene and Art,” Alberto Carillo and May Zindel make an important claim about the value of art in dealing with the issues of the Anthropocene. Pointing to the “three great ecological problems” of pollution, desertification, and the destruction of biodiversity, they claim there is no such thing as a dynamically independent, autonomous nature or planetary environment that is separate from culture and human activity, which itself should be seen as geologic in nature. (This recalls a main theme developed earlier in this volume by Campbell and King Dávalos in “A New Telluric Force.”) Carillo and Zindel argue that artists play a special role in making us aware of this aspect of human existence – that we are a geologic force – because the magnitude of our impact on the planet goes beyond what can be seen or known directly in human experience, and the particular kind of conceptual representation achieved in works of art is an important way of “perceiving” and understanding

this geological impact.

The next essay in this section develops the theme of art as both a continuation and a disruption of human life as well as providing a “looking glass” (both in the sense of a mirror *and* a window) into reality. Lisa Daus Neville’s “Memory of the Future: Cecilia Vicuña’s Participatory Poetics and Murray Bookchin’s Unfolding Dialectical Freedom” brings together a number of themes and ideas that suggest art’s integral role in expressing and creating a communal understanding of life. In this beautifully written essay, Neville introduces us to Chilean poet, artist, and filmmaker, Cecilia Vicuña, whose highly original work weaves together themes at the heart of art-making, metaphysical questioning, spiritual realization, environmental awareness, and social reform (healing). Neville’s move here from an exposition and insightful interpretation of Vicuña’s work to what she sees as the complementary thought of social ecologist Murray Bookchin is not merely instructional, but also broadens the discussion in helpful ways. She characterizes Bookchin’s view as an “ecology of freedom in which human being becomes aware of itself as nature’s own self-expression,” a stance that lines up with underlying concepts as well as the surface expressions of Vicuña’s work. She advances the idea, already introduced in Carillo and Zindel’s “Anthropocene and Art,” as well as in Trógolo, Fernández, and Zapponi’s “Living the Body as a New Anthropocene Experience?” that we must turn to art or other activities that integrally involve human intentionality and

expressive production in order to “heal our calcified discrete identities and return us to our evolutionary origins in an ecology of interdependence.”

David Romero Martín, in “Art and Experiences of Embodied, Disruptive Reality,” also underlines the position taken by Carillo and Zindel: art, in its various expressions, is empowered to disrupt and enhance ordinary experiences of reality. Moreover, its analysis indicates a parallelism of the aesthetic experience and psychological disruptions and disorders. Martín probes the effects of immersive technologies (e.g., those which create virtual- or augmented-reality scenarios or situations) that create shifts in the subjective experiential perspectives of user-experimenters to show that the effects of such technologies on the sense of embodiment and of reality itself mimics a level of the sort of detachment and sense of loss of familiarity with self and world that characterize dissociative orders such as depersonalization and derealization. The phenomenological implications are taken to indicate that there is a meaningful interrelation between art, technology, and dissociative disorders.

In “Mediating Knowledges: How Theater Transmits Partial Perspectives,” Bjorn Beijnon also sees art, this time considering the medium of theater, as a powerful medium that both disrupts and heals through the formation of community in the transcendence of individual perspectives. Beijnon develops the idea that “the empirical world is a shared space for multiple bodies that agree

on the causality of certain events and objects in that space.” This results from the fact that humans make sense of the world from their own individual, embodied perspectives, which leads to the creation of multiple individual body-worlds, each of which has its own partial perspective on the empirical world. And theater, as an art form, has a powerful capacity to transmit different partial perspectives to the audience through the techniques of re-enactment and disruption, thereby connecting differently situated knowledges and producing what he calls “ecological knowledge”: a kind of transcendent perspective that comes from an awareness of the connected network of situated knowledges and partial perspectives.

The volume closes with two articles that take radically different approaches to the study of media. In “Tools for New Lifestyles: Indigenous Stone Crushing and Public Perception of Television Entertainment Reporting in Jos City,” Sarah Lwahas brings us a concrete analysis of television news reporting on the environment, showing how the descriptive medium of TV news falls short in providing adequate or incisive reporting on environmental issues. The example she surveys is the practice of indigenous stone crushing, which, while beneficial to a class of workers, mostly women, who rely for their livelihood on this arduous work, it is at the same time quite destructive of the local environment. Lwahas points out that in addition to an increasing depletion of the impressive rock formations characteristic of the Plateau state of Nigeria, this practice represents an

endangering of both indigenous culture and the aesthetics of the surrounding environment of Jos City. She concludes that this environmentally risky practice needs to be thoroughly studied, publicly discussed, and much more frequently reported on by the television stations that themselves make use of the high-altitude rocky outcroppings for their broadcast masts and satellite-signal receivers.

Paul Majkut provides the coda for this year’s volume of *Glimpse* with a continuation of his discussion of media in “Time Machines and the Appropriation of Time: Mediated, Unmediated, Immediated” in a discussion of clocks, calendars, and the appropriation of time. In this he considers clocks and calendars as media, tracing their development and use in everyday life as well as in the domains of class struggle and power relationships. His extensive exposition and fascinating digressions take us through historical time to reveal the advent and demise of various forms of temporal media (as media of communication) and the shifting dynamics associated with the “ownership of time,” showing how “technological mediation forms and defaces experience, representationally removing it from the direct experience of *immediated* reality.” Majkut’s stated purpose, however, is to *return* to us to immediated reality, conceived as “inherent, simultaneous, and spontaneous knowledge of the world.”

—Melinda Campbell
Editor