

Technology, Alterity and Agency: following dance metaphors to where they lead

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While the question of technological agency is inescapable for posthumanist theories on technology, current conceptualizations of such agency (e.g., Latour, 2004; Verbeek, 2011) fail to do justice to the experience of technologies as *active* (quasi-)others in alterity relations with them. Specifically, the oft-used metaphor of hybridity (where the distinction between subject and technological object is experientially at its lowest) is not up to the task of adequately describing such relations. In this paper, I explore an alternative that focuses more on the performativity of human-technology interactions than on metaphysical or ontological ascriptions of agency: Pickering's 'dance of agency' (Pickering, 1995). The metaphor of dancing not only does justice to our experience of artifacts' alterity and agency, but provides much-needed conceptual resources for describing them (a/e)ffectively. With concepts like 'interactive stabilization', passivity and activity, resistance and accommodation, Pickering already thought of human-technology interactions as a dynamic and dialectical partnership. Moreover, he kept the dance of agencies asymmetrical, reserving most of it for the human 'dancer'. Based on this, I push his metaphor by focusing on the dynamic of *leading* and *following* common in partner dancing, describing an asymmetrical but interactive relationship between human and technological 'dance partners' that retains the alterity of technological quasi-others. Doing so, I show that there is more to be gained from thinking of human-technology interaction in terms of a 'dance of agency' than was previously assumed, and explore the metaphor of leading and following for describing the dance of agency between humans a number of concrete artifacts.

Keywords: technological agency, dance of agency, alterity

References

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