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Life grasps life – Mind the gap

There is a certain tendency in today's philosophy of technology to use and hide metaphorical speech concerning the "agency" of technology. Moral agency of things, technological intentionality, technology acts/interprets/chooses/decides, etc. – those are all common figures of speech. Many contributions are well aware of that metaphorical use while – to some point strategically? – underemphasizing it (e.g. Verbeek's "Moralizing Technology"). Some contributions even ask whether the metaphors could be transformed into literal speech, and things or artifacts could actually care for or understand someone or something (e.g. Michelfelder's "Caring for Alexa caring for us"). Yet, technology does not understand, nor care, nor act.

There are several philosophical tools to "mind the gap" that metaphors semantically bridge. This talk will present some of them to reemphasize some human-technology differences that stay significant even when (otherwise highly productively) considering sociotechnical assemblages, technology as "autonomous" or as mediation, etc.: One tool is a clear distinction between processes, behavior, and action and accordingly between (causal) explanation and two forms of understanding. Another helpful tool is Hegel's objective spirit and (with Kapp and Cassirer) the notion of technology as objectification of life – sedimented in text, code, design, standards, etc. Combining Hegel, Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricœur: "Life interprets itself" or "Life grasps life." Yes, this grasping is a technologically mediated understanding by the detour of technology as exteriorizations of life, but never does the exteriorization itself interpret or care for its source. Until technology becomes part of life other than being part of everyday-life – to some this means: never.