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Anthropogenesis as a technical process

In this paper, I aim to give an account of the pivotal role technics plays within anthropogenesis, i.e., the evolutionary emergence of the human lifeform. The contemporary philosophers Stiegler (2018) and Sloterdijk (2009) advocate for human originary technicity, claiming that our condition could emerge only thanks to the feedback effects of technical practises, i.e., systems of instruments and their rules of usage working as the exteriorization of life conditions onto accordingly reorganized, non-living matter. This perspective is also defended by palaeoanthropologists such as Malafouris (2013) and Wrangham (2009).

Adopting an anthropotechnological, transdisciplinary approach, I aim to understand anthropogenesis as a special instance of niche construction (Odling-Smee, Laland & Feldman 2003) occurring through technics. Hominins adopt, develop and transmit complexes of techniques and technologies, which increasingly contribute to the construction of their environments, to the point where technics becomes systemic (Sterelny 2012) and cumulative (Tomasello 2014).

This is where artificial selection (G. Moore 2017; not to be confused with Darwin's term for breeding) sets in. Its peculiarity in relation to niche construction is that technics becomes the agent of both selection (those traits which better fit in the system of socially coded instruments will be favoured) and mutation (techniques and technologies evolve according to non-genetic, non-environmental factors). Moreover, technics becomes both the object of selection (only those technologies which suit the extant artificial environment will be adopted and transmitted) and the subject of selection (hominins' life conditions are increasingly bestowed to technical media). Thereby it takes over the process of anthropogenesis.