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"Technology as a Strategy of the Human? A Comparison Between the Extension Concept and the Fetish Concept of Technology"

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Discussions on the Anthropocene as the geology of mankind imply the question whether globalized technology such as energy technologies or A.I. ought to be first and foremost conceptualized as a strategy of the human in relation to nature or as a strategy of some humans over others. I argue that both positions are mirrored in the philosophy and sociology of technology through the concepts of technology as an extension and as a fetish. The extension concept understands technology as an extension of the human body and its capabilities, resulting in a local 'inward' perspective. The fetish concept offers a contrary 'outward' perspective by drawing attention to the global socio-material context of modern technology. Despite their differences, I argue that both concepts share an underlying operation principle of technology as functional simplification. Technology always involves a functional simplification of physical as well as social causality. Sociologists and philosophers of technology would do well not to give primacy to the former as it leads to the belief in technology as a universal tool that neglects how technology is not embedded in but consists of (unequal) social arrangements. (Abstract)

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