

# Technogenesis

by **Jamie Allen**

At the heart of the everyday way in which we think and speak about what it is to be human is a false dichotomy. It is customary to hear people speak of the difference, or even antagonism, between “technology” and “the human”, as if the former were a sentient force, on its way to encroaching upon more and more aspects and characteristics of the latter. Some of the more sensitive and reasoned strands of post-humanism, from Gilbert Simondon to Michel Serres to Donna Haraway to Sadie Plant and beyond, have pointed out and attempted to revise this false dichotomy. In its place, we might orient activities and energies toward more auspiciously open relationships to those modes of existence we call

materiality, machines, electronics, and computation. These form part of our extended cognition, our birthright as homo sapiens, and are part of what co-constitutes reality *as we know it*. “It is completely artificial to ask, what is the relationship of the human to technics? Because the human is technics,” just as it is “impossible to understand the ant without the anthill,” writes Bernhard Stiegler.

In this frame, we see how there are many intuitive ways in which we already know intelligence to have in part *always already been* artificial. The material extensions of our genetic and neural processing, from eyeglasses to supercomputers, pay witness to the complexifying, support, and rerouting of human thinking, memory, communication, emotion, and attention — an extended physiology of human understanding. Technogenesis refers to the ways in which human intelligence, as a species, is and has forever been co-constituted by its co-evolution with tools and technologies, the neocortex extended by our bodies in constant contact with a material and technological milieu, subjectivity contaminated from the outset by the outside.

The question of computational artificial intelligence can, as such, be recast as a transhistorical problem, asking, perhaps, why we should be so particularly concerned with or by the Von Neumann architectures and algorithmic instantiations characterized by contemporary discussions

of “AI”. What might we be missing here; what ecologies of thought are being rendered extinct? What other intelligences are discounted by the silicon-mind? The provocation of AI, in its mainstream guises, could rather be a provocation that provokes a sensitivity to alternative intelligences, humbling programmes of progressivist technical arrogance, modulating extractive and xenophobic AIs that extend only anthropocentric, white, male rationalist enlightenment. Might we then arrive at a more measured, inclusive, and productively promiscuous characterization of intelligence? As Serres has written, “If winds, currents, glaciers, volcanoes, etc., carry subtle messages that are so difficult to read that it takes us absolutely ages trying to decipher them, wouldn’t it be more appropriate to call them intelligent? How would it be if it turned out that we were only the slowest and least intelligent beings in the world?”