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LIVING IN THE FLESH: TECHNOLOGICALLY MEDIATED CHIASMIC RELATIONSHIPS IN TIMES OF A PANDEMIC

During the current pandemic, it became clear that people are vulnerable to potentially harmful nonhuman agents, as well as that our own existence potentially poses a threat to others, and vice versa. This suggests a certain reciprocity in our relations with both humans and nonhumans. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty introduces the notion of the flesh to capture this reciprocity. Building on this idea, he proposes to understand our relationships with other humans, as well as those with nonhuman beings as having a chiasmic structure: to sense, or perceive another entity in a particular way simultaneously implies to be sensed or perceived in a particular way by this other entities.

In *Technology and the Lifeworld*, Ihde briefly introduces the notion of chiasm to point to the fact that our perception is constituted by how we are immersed in the world, and that we never have complete control of the nature of this immersion. In this paper, we substantiate this idea by arguing that Merleau-Ponty's notions of "flesh" and "chiasmic relation" must be integrated into postphenomenology to clarify the reciprocal nature of human-technology relations. Furthermore, we show how a postphenomenological perspective expands on Merleau-Ponty: first, it more radically interprets the notion of flesh as pointing to a general structure in which entities interact with one another, also beyond the human sphere. Second, it augments Merleau-Ponty by drawing attention to how technologies mediate chiasmic relations. This is clarified through the example of the facemask, which (1) reveals the chiasmic structure of our relation with nonhuman entities, and (2) shows that technologies co-constitute particular interpersonal relationships by making humans present to one another in a particular way. We suggest that these aspects are not unique to the facemask, but point to a general technologically mediated chiasmic structure of human-world relations.