

# Short-term policy dominates more than ever before

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

**L**ast week I argued that the human-technology symbiosis "fuels" our innate illusion of control (attribution error). Since our origins some 200 thousand years ago, homo sapiens has always been a technical species. From the start we had tools (levers), energy (fire) and language at our disposal. Levers (including arms, pulleys and wheels) were combined with fire and newer energy sources (electricity, electromagnetism, hydropower, hydraulics, etc.) into engines. Language (including logic / mathematics) played both a descriptive and a guiding role (code, AI). But it was precisely because of the unprecedented possibilities for adaptation that the symbiosis of human-technology brought about that the need for evolutionary adaptation was mostly discarded. For example, evolving a warmer fur is not necessary if you can light a fire and poach a fur from an animal.

Where language was initially used primarily to defuse forces that we did not understand, and to pursue common goals, in the age of artificial intelligence, language has become the cardinal technique. However survival has always been a short-term issue. Genes that lead to a more diverse, more varied existence in about, say, 5 generations, could only arise by chance. Therefore selection is also a short-term issue. In principle, planning over the long term is possible through technology. But .... we don't do it! As short-term planners, we continue to develop technologies that are disruptive to our continued existence and our politicians, including education ministers, are ... proud!

## Exploring or exploiting

Every human-technology cooperation - think of a pianist - is characterized by precisely exploring (finding new musical expressions) or exploiting the possibilities of this cooperation (re-producing existing compositions with their own feelings). With two hands harmonies are brought to sound, which is impossible without technology (piano). But the piano also limits the possibilities, and that is where the power lies. However, in new human-technology cooperation, there are so many possibilities connections that people have started to capture, limit and express themselves on a global scale, without taking care of the carrying capacity of the local "biotopes". Short-term benefits have become dominant but what's good for the individual isn't necessarily good for the species. Biologically, short term determines through reproduction; technologically, short term now dominates more than ever before.

We all know that if we all sit in the stadium, everyone has the best view of the match. But if one individual stands up, he / she has the best view. Smart Technology helps all of us stand up, with the result that almost no one sees anything of the competition anymore. Sustainability can't be achieved on an individual level but on a collective level, not in the short term but in the long term. However, sustainability has disappeared more than ever, precisely because of the scaling-up that technology has brought about. To stay with the stadium metaphor: we all stand and scream for new technology to regain both vision and visibility.

For example, we all individually claim the right to fly. Regarding collective sustainability, aviation should be abolished, replaced or at least greatly improved. And that doesn't work, because then we have to exchange the individual level for the collective, and the short term for the long term. We are not genetically structured like that, and democracy is only helping us in the wrong direction with populism. Technological iatrogenesis (study and policy based on the harmful effects of technological development) must be taken seriously, it's time to follow Greta and listen to the new generation!

