

Roundtable:

The future of culture in more-than-human worlds of being

More-than-human in the garden: Living with Homo hortensis

ASTRID SCHWARZ

Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany; schwarz@b-tu.de,  ORCID 0000-0002-2511-1538

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Abstract: In contrast to Homo faber, Homo hortensis does not side with technical production. He is dependent on dealing with inhomogeneous, 'impure' ensembles and can thus offer an interesting approach of acting in the age of the Anthropocene. Dealing with the interweaving of the natural and the artificial, craftsmanship and mechanization, local traditional and scientific knowledge is inherent in gardening practice and has been this way for centuries. Homo hortensis is a genuinely technoscientific person for whom the garden is an ecotechnical product of co-produced knowledge and material. The garden is a counterpart and demands attentive perception, and in this sense offers a model for a convivial mode to live with many others. The garden demands a sense of situatedness and requires the gardener to constantly position himself in his gardening work. This is where Homo hortensis differs dramatically from other forms of horticultural management, for example in geoengineering, industrial agriculture and many sustainability industries.

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Introduction

In the age of the Anthropocene, the search for adequate portraits of humanity is booming. A seemingly new man is spreading who relies on technologically optimized sustainability and networking, on incredible efficiency thanks to the circular economy and self-optimization. This human is also often placed in a competitive situation with AI technologies or, in a more technophile turn, portrayed as the cyborg of the future, surrounded by cryogenic culture and terraforming options. In contrast to this is *Homo hortensis*, the person in the garden, or more precisely, the person who belongs to the garden, somewhat staid and down-to-earth appearing. But that is deceptive, because the symbolic worlds and material garden heritage are a central part not only of many cultures all over the world, instead, they are creative works of historically current cutting-edge technology and their socio-cultural environments. In particular, the garden goes back a long way in the history of mankind and in the everyday world it was and is broadly based, with the spectrum of horticultural practices ranging from ornamental courtyard design, balcony gardening and community gardens to landscape architecture.

It is natural for *Homo hortensis* to deal with and produce the hybrid; its objects, products and works are usually equally artificial and natural, made and become, technical and aesthetic. This applies to the excess of rose and pumpkin varieties in ornamental gardens and the arbor colony as well as to the historical genesis of the orangeries (Orangery culture in Saxony 2015) and orchards (Brunner 2021), the contemporary 'xeriscapes' (Campbell 2019: 135) and 'waterwise gardening' (Cooke 2008). Gardens are manifestations of a technological adaptation to specific localities, to unfavourable climatic conditions, and also to social milieus using the means of artistic experimentation and always with creative intent. The garden could prove to be a resource for creating a more balanced relationship between people and the environment and 'finding ways to redirect people's attempts to garden the world into more sustainable expressions of creativity.' (Strang 2013: 298) The garden, in other words, seems to be a widespread, historically extensively tested and very diverse 'incubator' in which various technology-nature-society relationships can be tested.

Now one could thematize the garden as a technical object, a kind of machine, in the sense of a mediation between humans and nature. Since around the 1990s, however, this figure of thought has come under increasing criticism, pointing out that the machine is 'intertwined not only with the garden, but with entire social and natural ecologies, and it is not always clear where the machine ends and nature begins.' (Gorman and Mendelsohn 2010: 277) As early as the 1950s, the French philosopher of technology Gilbert Simondon characterized the technical object as a 'stable hybrid being' that 'consists of the human and the natural; it contains the human and natural, it gives its human content a structure similar to that of natural objects and allows the insertion of this human reality into the world of natural causes and effects.' (Simondon 2012: 226f) That the garden is composed of living and non-living entities, whose assignment to one or the other is by no means self-explanatory (the topsoil, the water basin), makes it once again interesting as an ensemble from this perspective. Also, the cultural reworking of plants and animals, mushrooms and bacteria in the garden are to be understood as a continuum, with some being worked on more or longer than others: the musk rose, for example, in ancient times, the nasturtium only since the Renaissance. There are around 90 species of the nasturtium. and even 200 species of the meadow rue, but only a few of them were cultivated in the garden (Krausch 2003: 403, 406, 463). Accordingly, the meadow rue has remained more independent of human intervention in its development dynamics, while the musk rose is today largely a product of human breeding practice.

Accordingly, the garden is a technological product of knowledge co-produced (Jasanoff 2004) by crafts and science (The idiom of co-production suggests an entanglement of ideas and concrete things, both of which are relevant for the analysis of technology in society, its form of organization and normative questions). The history and theory of the garden make a variety of gardening techniques and concepts available, which virtually call for an investigation into the interconnection of craft and scientific knowledge, of object and symbolic knowledge, and of forms of organization and evaluation. Through this quasi-retinal network of references, the perspective of *Homo hortensis* is also sharpened, especially with regard to its technoscientific identity.

The Garden as an ensemble of conviviality

It has already been established that with the garden as an object of study, the hybrid necessarily comes into view. *Homo hortensis* cannot possibly take the side of technical production alone, as *Homo faber* does, but is dependent on dealing with its inhomogeneous, 'impure' structures and assemblages. He would also do well to rely on cooperative relationships rather than trying to assert his scientific and technological potential as knowledge of power, which, in the worst case, could lead to the disappearance of the ensemble 'garden'. The fact that the garden can also be thought of as a transgressive figure in the sense of colonial and capitalist principles is currently particularly evident in the debate about the sense and nonsense of the use of geoengineering to adapt the planet to a place with a climate regime that is livable for humans also in the future.

In this context, too, there is talk of 'gardening management' and 'garden tools'; some authors even consider this fundamental tendency towards growth and expansion, i.e. 'gardening the world', to be a deeply human aspiration. In any case, this form of gardening implies that resources are used hegemonic, and their use is extended into the past (fossil fuels) and into the future (socio-ecological costs).

Homo hortensis is hostile to this expansive and exploitative program; as a species belonging to the garden, this thoroughly reflective technoscientific person pursues a different strategy. S/he is interested in exploring the question of the extent to which the garden as a technical object forces its own actions to be situated and thereby constantly demands a positioning through their gardening actions. This action is also necessarily dependent on simultaneously developing an awareness of the many others in the garden and learning to sometimes even surrender oneself to them. The garden is one of these places where humans experience themselves radically through their practices as being dependent on more-than-human assemblages, be it a technical artefact like a greenhouse or a particularly capricious artichoke plant. Gardening would then - in a slight modification of Sylvia Wynter's (Wynter 2015) perspective of resetting the history of humanity - fundamentally mean 'being human' and can only be determined through practice and in relation to one another, i.e. to the various others in the garden. Of course, this could also be said for any other human activity that forms spatio-temporal and conceptually specifically coherent assemblages, such as waste (Bürgin 2025) or food (Tsing 2015). What could be interesting about this approach of 'gardening as being human' in a more-than-human world is that its application may not only allow us to better understand the very different practical models of life through the garden, but could also provide impetus for transformative processes through the garden. Xeroscape gardening or kitchen gardens as resilient garden forms in the Anthropocene are then mundane Anthropocene practices and document mutual learning processes fitting humans and more-than-humans to one another.

Conviviality, as numerous authors have emphasized, is another concept that creates a positive interdependence and commitment to one another. In 'tools for conviviality' Ivan Illich places an

emphasis on learning processes in crisis situations and how basic structural criteria need to be changed to retool society to the changed conditions. In an age of scientific technology, he writes, 'the convivial structure of tools is a necessity for survival in full justice which is both distributive and participatory' (Illich 2021: 27). He suggests a transition towards a convivial mode of production, characterized by 'a pluralism of limited tools and of convivial commonweals' (Illich 2021: 30) that would encourage a diversity of lifestyles. The objective of a convivial society is then to balance those tools 'which create the specific demands they are specialized to satisfy and those complementary, enabling tools which foster self-realization.' (Illich: 40) In this convivial society self-realization is embedded in a game of balanced tools, and it puts forward a joyful self-recognition as well as self-limitation. This definitely can also be read through the lens of gardening practices, adding a broader sense of the politics of nature to the convivial mode of production. Focusing on a concept of ecotechnological conviviality and bringing it into the context of gardening could help create a promising tool for moving productively and confidently in more-than-human assemblages.

The garden as an experience at the border

In the technoscientific modified garden, man does not appear as, in the diction of Heidegger's technique of challenge, a self-forgotten machine-driven being. Instead, he preserves the possibility of one to meet the other as a counterpart. If this mode of action is missed, the garden escapes the gardener's design intention and control; in the worst case, the failure can manifest itself in the transformation of the garden into a completely different piece of nature; it becomes an agricultural area, a neglected corner with ruderal plants, a woodland fringe. For technical action in the garden, this means that *Homo hortensis* is necessarily related to its local and historical situation, s/he cultivates a caring attention to maintaining a spatio-temporal dynamic, and s/he learns to trust in the stubbornness of resilient structures, *Homo hortensis* is constantly involved in a game about the limits of his intervention.

What is not exceeded is the more or less explicit boundary of the garden as a delimited and protected place, a piece of nature that was chosen to give it human dimensions in a world that otherwise appears unlimited, at least on the meso level, be it an impenetrable urban jungle or sky-wide prairie. The limitation of the garden creates other relationships between things and also the gardener's (or garden visitor's) perception is influenced accordingly. The garden is a place where attention and encounters are directed and sometimes even made possible at all. At the same time, the garden promotes an attitude of care, respect, contemplation and aesthetic enjoyment.

For the gardener, the garden also represents an order in that plants and animals structure the life of the gardener, who can only successfully cultivate them or even encounter them at the right time and in the right place. The garden sets the temporal and spatial scale for the sensual and aesthetic experiences as well as the creative scope. In this sense, it is not primarily the gardener who gives the garden its order, but rather it is the garden itself that shows the boundaries and the possibilities of challenging them (Borchardt 1951: 38).

Worry, stubbornness and feeling for boundaries

What it means to get involved in testing limits in a gardening context, and above all to develop trust in the resilience of plants and the cooperative potential of gardening practice, is well captured by the following quote. It is from the 'Garden Manifesto' by Henk Gerritsen, garden architect:

'Lyrical descriptions of the tallgrass prairie inspired me to eventually plant a prairie garden on my property. [...] There are only a few true prairie plants among them that thrive among the

plants, most of which come from the forest areas of eastern North America. This shows the difficulty of framing a garden under a theme that has no logical connection to the garden's environmental conditions. It is difficult to maintain: I pull European weeds that do not fit into this theme ("All American" garden). [...] So I had to find out the truth through trial and error. Fortunately, fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) spread quickly and since it also occurs in North America, it was allowed to stay.' (Gerritsen 2014: 121)

The garden presents the gardener with a positioning and creates constant pressure to make decisions, which imposes an unavoidable constraint on *Homo hortensis* to constantly adapt to new arrangements of situatedness. The fact that in this constellation cooperative action in the garden ultimately proves to be more productive for the gardener can be read in many gardening books. The experiences described above are genre-typical of what it means to work cooperatively to achieve a certain garden condition through gardening practice. The soil, plants and animals in the garden have their own willfulness (or stubbornness) that needs to be reacted to - this is also what is meant by developing a caring attention to the spatio-temporal dynamics of the garden as a 'stable hybrid being'. In the permanence of their location, gardens are constantly changing; they demand adaptation to this changeability.

'The garden is not only permitted (to man); it is also set for him. To him it is not just arbitrary; it is also a rule for him. For the garden is, to summarize all of this, an elementary and constant human institution that forces its existence against all circumstances with triumphant tenacity (victorious toughness – siegender Zähigkeit).' (Borchardt 1951: 35)

In a certain way, the garden imposes itself as a counterpart, thanks to the inherent logic of plant development and its demands, but also the meteorological coincidences, the sluggish physical nature of the garden soil and, last but not least, the encounters with other animals. The philosopher Robert Pogue Harrison also emphasizes the aspect of stubbornness and the challenging character of the garden in his garden philosophy when he aptly remarks: 'For like a story, the garden also has its own developing plot, as it were, whose intrigues keep the caretaker under more or less constant pressure. The true gardener is always 'the constant gardener'' (Harrison 2009: 7).

Elevator of Scales in the Anthropocene

Gardeners are concerned about the impact of climate change on the garden and how, conversely, the local climate could be influenced by gardening measures (Vogt 2017, GDPPGF 2014). The British Royal Horticultural Society published a five-year plan in 2015 'to meet the challenge of climate change and help gardeners to be more environmentally friendly' (Royal Horticulture Society 2015), the current RHS website offers concrete instructions for 'planet- friendly gardening' (RHS 2015).

For around twenty years now, the collective term 'Anthropocene' has been used to identify this concern about the planet's climatic changes. The debate has arrived in an inter- and transdisciplinary context, and media attention is high (Smith and Zeder 2013: 8-13, Oxman 2016).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the discourse was still dominated by the political contextualization of the epistemic status of complex climate models on the one hand, and by the search for large-scale technoscientific solutions on the other (Hulme 2009). Accordingly, the concept of the Anthropocene as an epoch is from the beginning a hybrid term, a 'range of technical and political demands wrapped in geological language' (Stilgoe 2015: 78). The more recent debates about the question of planetary boundaries (Rockström et al 2009: 32) are a further discursive

intensification with which the global political urgency of technoscientific management comes into play and is pushed to the foreground (Schwarz 2022: 25). The language game of gardening and garden management is quite present in the discourse about climate-sensitive management of planet Earth, and forestry and agricultural practices are also considered in the sense of a gardening climate care, be it the construction of the so-called great green wall South of the Sahel zone (UNDP 2023) or reforestation projects in the Amazon (ASA 2021).

The reference to gardening practices in the context of geoengineering visions seems almost disturbing. In the spirit of a large-scale experiment on a planetary scale, geoengineers suggested, for example, releasing nanoparticles into the stratosphere to reduce solar radiation (Keith 2009) or fertilizing the oceans to increase the carbon turnover of algae, with the deep sea becoming a resource as a carbon sink (Semctacek et al 2012: 313-319). In these measures, which are referred to as gardening management, responsibility and concern, across scales, are also used as a normative basis and also as a justification. It is not clear how a garden can assert itself as a counterpart in these practices, or how exactly the boundaries of the technical object could be identified as a garden.

The gardening language is used here to advance projects that lie far beyond the horizon of a gardening experience, and also beyond the possibility of having experiences in the sense of experimental constellations. Because there is neither a second reference object from Earth nor is the position of an outside observer possible (or sensible). The image of the blue planet, which has become iconic through the environmental movement, ironically plays a persuasive-manipulative role here, which is further increased by the ubiquity of satellite images. The suggestion of technical options for action that accompany these images lends false evidence to the promise of the ability to control such experiments. In addition, while the environmental icon 'Blue Planet' was originally an analog photo, the satellite images are compositions from many data sets that have a wide variety of provenances, not just visual ones. They appear 'hyper-readable, but in reality they are anything but transparent or direct' (Demos 2017: 17).

Under these conditions, gardening management can only be understood as transgressive and thus follows a principle, particularly in industrialized countries, of material transformation in favour of production and consumption, also the promotion of large-scale technical solutions, and to the detriment of ecological resources and local socio-economic solutions. Gardening understood in this way does not rely on a commitment to social and ecological sustainability or even limitation, but rather on growth and expansion. In this vulgar materialistic variant, the Garden of Eden is not to be found in the afterlife, but 'must be done here and now'.

So, there are obviously diametrically opposed motivations for using gardening semantics. *Homo hortensis* is one of the representatives of a gardening language with which socio-technical modes of description and action are developed in order to counteract capitalist logic and phenomena of alienation by allowing itself to be permanently involved in a game about the limits of its intervention. Above all, this means being aware of a local and historical situation, developing a caring attention to maintaining the spatio-temporal dynamics in the garden, respecting to be part of more-than-human assemblages and, perhaps most demanding of all, having confidence in the stubbornness of resilient structures.

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Author information

Astrid Schwarz is Full Professor of Technoscience Studies at the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany. With her research and teaching, she contributes to the philosophy of technology and environmental anthropology. In her philosophical fieldwork, she focuses on assemblages of technology and environment. Currently, her research revolves around the role of *Homo hortensis*, theories of garden design and practices. Her published books include *Experiments in Practice* and, as co-editor, *Research Objects in their Technological Setting*. More recently, she has written on Ecotechnology. Another research topic is the onto-epistemological distinction between the constructive principles of composing and combining in technology and the arts.