

# The Noosphere: encountering the Human and the Geosphere in the Anthropocene

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## Abstract

Science and technology paradigms are not value free. In turn, values are rooted in different beliefs and ideologies that interact with historic, territorial identities as Human-Geosphere constructs and are manifested through cultural and technological expressions. The Noosphere is presented as a metaphysical concept bridging the philosophy of science and philosophy of nature, a hermeneutic concept that allows us to explore the relation between technocratic artifacts and the underpinning of spiritual values, thus the relation between humans and the Geosphere. Four photographs captured by the Russian photographer Antonina Baygusheva help to reflect on the Human-Geosphere relationship from the spiritual point of view.

**Key words:** Geosphere, Noosphere, Anthropocene

## 1. Confronting the Anthropocene

Climate change is the latest of a series of manifestations of the Anthropocene era, which has an exponential trend, meaning that during a certain time, at the early stages, it seems controllable, but it reaches a tipping point when the course becomes irreversible with uncertain outcomes.

The Anthropocene disrupts biogeochemical cycles altering geodynamic processes and will surely bring human mutations as a biological evolutionary adaptation to the new climate conditions. Thus, the profound on-going changes on Earth are a co-evolutionary process. Being part of the Biosphere, human beings are interlinked and co-evolve with the Geosphere in a way that our encounters with the Creation discover the darkest but true side of a revealed Nature<sup>1</sup>.

If science and technology are not going to reverse the Anthropocene, then our rationales and old philosophic, ontologic and epistemologic frameworks need to be rethought. It is not sufficient to deconstruct the reality because the reality, as it is known now, becomes unknown. The knowledge about reality and the way in how we think about it is to be put into question.

This short essay is both a retrospective and prospective interpretation to explore the last remaining pieces of an era that is disappearing. It confronts the ongoing Human-Geosphere changes and the last places of spiritual resistance of a World that agonizes.

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<sup>1</sup>Human beings are a constitutive part of Nature (or Biosphere). Geosphere refers to the manifestations resulting of the interaction of water, soils and rocks, and air cycles (hydrosphere, lithosphere, and atmosphere cycles) in the form of mountains, rivers, lakes...

## 2. Visual imaginaries

Taking photography as an icon, a representation that gives meaning to a reality, it does not have to be even a truth, but rather a narrative of the observed reality. Indeed, photography captures an instant, a moment that lasts in time, but only from that photograph prescriptive. The image acts as a timeless memory and develops a mystical dimension, as Tarkovsky would say. This timeless dimension allows us to travel within the photography and explore that meaning of reality. The “mystical” game of photography is twofold: on the one hand towards transcendence, but also through immanence. Photography appears as an element to explore the spiritual relation of the human being with the Geosphere in the times of the Anthropocene. Can photography constitute a way that enlivens our relation of contemplation of the Geosphere as the way to the transcendent, as St. Gregory the Theologian suggests?

The silence of photography conforms to a mystical space, in union with the human and Geosphere; it is not reproduced in the piece of art, but in the sensations it provokes. Art, as an experience of the sacred, cannot be reproduced because silence is unique in each of the spectators; art is, therefore, an exclusive and universal experience, partial and totalizing, immanent and transcendent.

This “artificial” contemplative mysticism represents a time and a space, in an almost geological historical evolution, according to Heidegger's idea of “presencing”. The spirituality revealed in cultural identities shows the power of space and the space of power of a land as a hyrophantic, geospheric place, which is expressed in the form of technocratic artifacts in the human relation with the Geosphere. The concept of the Noosphere, coined by V.I. Vernadsky (1945) and P. Teilhard de Chardin (1956), encapsulates this idea (Bellaubi, 2021).

But in the end that doesn't matter much because what the photographer projects is only a part of reality. The photographer becomes an intermediary who, through performing a photographic liturgy, exposes the union between the human and Geosphere, and the photography as an icon becomes a silence, an inner journey that transcends and becomes an ecological mysticism.

Photographic imaginaries reflect on the new global biogeochemical conditions by exposing us to the co-evolution of living matter where humans and the Geosphere mutate to adapt; molecules look for a new crystallization matrix (Photo 1) and the human body is drastically transformed in a symbiotic process (Photo 2).

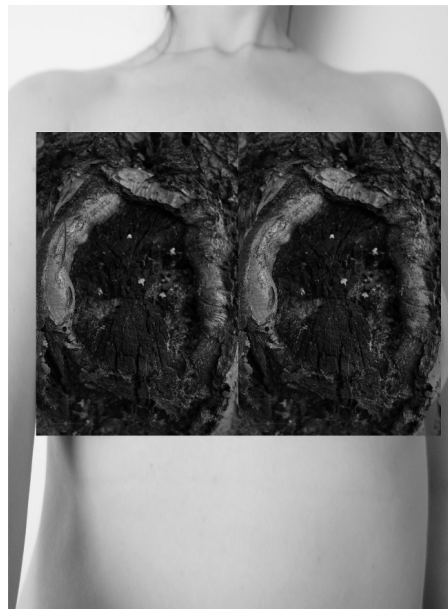


Photo 1. Crystallographic modifications

Photo 2. Body showing human mutations

### 3. Lost lands of resistance

The current co-evolving reality of the symbiosis between the human and Geosphere confronts the materialistic fetishism of the mutant global World with a local spiritual ecological mysticism; two different ways to understand an uncomfortable era that has just begun. This ecological mysticism unfolds in attitudes of spiritual resistance expressed as identities of belonging to a place. Identities transmit values that transformed in ideologies are transfigured in technological artifacts and their technocracies.

A beautiful example is the irrigated valley of the Ebro River surrounded by the olive trees at the foothills of the Tortosa-Beceit mountain range, shaping the distinct landscape of the lowlands in the Ebro River Basin. The Ebro River (“Lo Riu”) acts as a symbolic element of identity. Ditches and irrigation channels (“sequias”), diversion dams (“azuds”) and water lifts (“senias”) scattered all around the territory constitute a meshing of hydro-social relations impregnated by the spirituality feeling of identity. The land stages the union between the human and Geosphere, the essence of the human itself. This is a powerful land that holds the memory of identity values and transmits the remembering of ancestors to future generations through rich spiritual folklore and imaginary narratives. Whilst the global World mutates, this pocket of resistance becomes a reliquary of the past that fights tirelessly, almost in vain, keeping the hope. A strong sense of identity fills the souls of the local dwellers that feel the river and the mountains as a part of themselves, as belonging to each other, in a kind of mystical ecologic relationship (Photo 3).

#### *Ecological mysticism and transfiguration of values*

An expression of spiritual resistance is a standing monument at the highest point of the Tortosa mountain range (Caro Peak, 1447m o.s.l.) - an imperceptible expression of human consciousness. The monument is a small statue of Mare de Deu de la Cinta (Our Lady of the Girdle, patron of Tortosa) erected in 1955 by Unio Excursionista de Catalunya (Trekking Club of Catalonia) in a setting that dominates the large Ebro River Valley up to the sea.

In Tortosa and the lowlands of the Ebro River, the expression of identity values is embedded in religious beliefs. The devotion to the Mare de Deu de la Cinta is largely grounded in the people’s hearts, minds and the culture along the “Les Terres de l’Ebre” (the Lower Lands of the Ebro River), thus protecting and blessing believers and the inhabited land (e.g. a pregnant woman used to wear a blessed girdle around her belly). Devotees to the Mare de Deu de la Cinta automatically become “Tortosins” and socially acquire the local dweller’s identity status.

Indeed, “Tortosins” profess strong spiritual feelings that tie them with a geospheric place in a kind of ecological mysticism. These are identity feelings of belonging to a place, open to the Whole through religious rituals and liturgies. Thus, religion is no longer an intangible, but a historical reality manifested through the land.



Photo 3. View of the Lower Lands of the Ebro Valley from Caro Peak

#### **4. From the Anthropocene to the Anthropophany**

An interesting concept that puts together both material and spiritual co-evolution dimensions of the Anthropocene is the concept of the Noosphere. The concept of the Noosphere was framed by V.I. Vernadsky (1945) and P. Teilhard de Chardin (1956) in the mid XXth century and although they had divergent in views, both interpretations are complementary. Whilst Vernadsky saw the Noosphere relating to how human mind evolution disrupts the biogeochemical cycles of the Geosphere that allow the sustainability of the Biosphere, Teilhard de Chardin had a more spiritual interpretation. Vernadsky acknowledged that the sphere of the human mind develops with the emergence of human self-awareness or the human consciousness is rooted in a collective unconsciousness of belonging to the whole Earth, according to C.G. Jung (1967). This non-material dimension was taken forward by Teilhard de Chardin (1956) who saw the justification towards the eschatological evolution of the Human in the Noosphere.

Thus, the human relationship with the Geosphere through technocratic artifacts and technocracies (human physical objects and processes) is underpinned by beliefs and values, and the concept of the Noosphere embodies a spiritual dimension that may explain how and why values evolve. In this sense, the Noosphere could unfold in new global, ecological and spiritual ethics, to transform the Old Human that becomes the New Human, the Anthropophany (Cortazar 1963).

Marked by the predominant Anthropocene, and its climate change symptoms, the question is if the Geosphere orientates our actions, with humans managing, controlling and dominating the Geosphere, or perhaps there is coexistence of both situations, bringing reflection to what is real. The concept of the Noosphere represents this coexistence; from one side the instrumental materialistic values and from the other the meaning of a constitutive dimension, in the relation between Human and Geosphere.

At the end, and in the face of a reality marked by the prevailing Anthropocene, the iconic representations of reality through photography serves us as a way to interpret realities from lived experiences, exposing ourselves to the radical otherness of the World.



Photo 4. A new Human in the Geosphere, the Anthropophany

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