

Technosomata. Transhistorical and Intersectional Perspectives

Abstracts

Panel 1: Life and Techne

Sofia Varino

Can *Zōe* Speak? Viral Biopolitics in the Anthropocene

My presentation engages with the concept of *zōe* and the classical Greek distinction between *zōe* (natural life) and *bios* (political life) as a gendered binary brought into crisis in over-developed industrialized societies by issues ranging from climate change to artificial life and the current coronavirus pandemic. Mobilizing contemporary critiques by authors like Alexander Weheliye, Rosi Braidotti, Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben, I examine how *zōe* has radically transformed (un)natural and (bio)political life in the so-called Anthropocene. I focus on zoonotic disease transmission as a model for considering how *zōe* might be capable of both linguistic and pathogenic communicability, contaminating what might have once appeared to be the purity of the “human” realm and contesting foundational distinctions between body and mind, nature and politics, matter and language.

Maria Gerolemou

Women in Tech: Pandora, Pasiphae, and other women

The paper will discuss three different cases where women are depicted as recipients of technologies. The paper will first explore the story of Hesiod's Pandora where technology appears to form a key theme both in the initial production of Pandora as well as in her anticipated reproductive role (see the jar as a *reproduction* of the womb); technology, here, classifies women's labour as worthless.

The paper will then turn to cases of women as attested in the Hippocratic treatise 'Diseases of women', where pessaries, suppositories and other *prostheta* instruments are used by physicians for redirecting a displaced uterus to its proper position and promoting menstruation (133 L). In this case, women's lack of power to determine how technology is designed and applied is being highlighted.

The paper will also discuss the case of Pasiphae (in Euripides' *Cretans* and Apollodorus) who via a device (an artificial cow) transforms her appearance and 'improves' her sex-life (or better said, expands her opportunities for mate choice; she mates with a bull). Pasiphae's use of technology, although a man, Daedalus, is the master of technology, presents new possibilities for women. While generally in antiquity women are depicted as being excluded completely from science and

technology, the story of Pasiphae indicates how certain groups of women turn technology to their advantage.

Finally, the paper will explore why and how the case of techno-women in classical antiquity could be a valuable contribution to a modern debate on the impact of technology to women's lives.

Panel 2: Language About and in Technology

Giulia Maria Chesi

Helen's drugs, *techne* and language in *Odyssey 4*

In this talk, I would like to discuss the extent to which supposed technological innovations in the fields of prosthetics and pharmaceuticals have in fact been conceived of as cognitive extensions since classical antiquity. The Homeric narrative of Helen's drugs addresses the question of the entanglement of *techne* and human cognition; specifically, it points to the possibility that ancient myths are able to frame human and nonhuman encounters as a technical discourse engaged by a technical mind in a technical exchange with the world.

Hannah Fitsch

Principles and effects of a 'mathematization of perception' in neuroscience.

Based on the project *How bodies turn into numbers and numbers into images. On algorithms in brain research and the logic of standardization*, this presentation wants to raise the question how formalized and mathematized logic in the neuroscience methods are affective on the data we can even get with this method and how it is effective, on the language neuroscience uses to describe the brain. Although the conditions for neuroscientific methods have been significantly expanded in recent years by computationally powerful computer and machine learning, their traces and borrowings lead far back into the history of mathematics and statistics, and can be found today in connectionist notions of artificial intelligence and artificial neural networks.

Today, artificial intelligence research and deep learning calculations produce technologies that decide: in this sense, definition of an algorithm is 'math that computers use to decide stuff'. The algorithmization of bodily processes in digital imaging serves to prepare and generate specific concepts of 'normal materiality' in such a way that the individual body is standardized through algorithms that provide specific body standards and average values. In this respect, mathematical models of the human body are normalizing in two ways. First, models can describe only a

certain range of a paradigm that represents the object under investigation. The parameter set to designate an object is always already the average of a large group. Second, this average, which initially framed a phenomenon technically in the laboratory, is epistemologically and materially translated back onto the body. The talk follows the successful traces of mathematical logic, as well as the proof and truthproofing anchored in the mathematical discipline, which have become fundamental for specific areas of today's knowledge production.

Sigrid Schmitz

Techno-brainbodies: transgressive potential and normative enhancement

Feminist Science Technology Studies, since more than 40 years, engage with the cyborgian intra-actions of bodies, brains, and technologies to assess their inherent transgressions of boundaries between nature and culture, human and non-human. The potential of such transgressions for breaking up gendered and racialized binaries and their hierarchical order, however, is questioned against the enactment of technosomatic developments within cultural meanings and social power relations.

In my talk I explore this tension for developments of techno-brainbodies within modes of governance of enhancement. I take the politically framed perspective of feminist materialisms (Coole 2013) and the transdisciplinary approach of feminist posthumanities (Åsberg/Braidotti 2018) to contrast the dynamics and agentiality of technosomatic becomings with the normative trajectories of optimization as ability, efficiency, whiteness, and masculinity for a posthuman future.

Panel 3: Boundaries, Plasticities & Futures

João Florencio

Antiretroviral Time

The introduction of combination antiretroviral therapies in 1996 brought about a radical change in the temporality of HIV infection, moving us away from the event-time of the AIDS crisis to the expanded/expansive temporality of chronic “undetectability.” That, and the later extension of antiretrovirals as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, has dramatically shifted the lived temporalities of both sex and subjectivity among gay men who were able to access the new medical protocols for testing, managing, and preventing HIV. In this talk, I draw from fieldwork carried out in Berlin, Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as gay pornography, to map the new temporalities of sex and subjectivity that have been catalysed by the introduction of antiretroviral drugs, speculating on their limits and queer political

potential, situated as they are at the intersection of neoliberal regimes of biomedical self-administration and sex understood as both an aesthetics and poetics of existence. If modernity developed through an incessant rationalisation of time, including of lived, embodied time, I argue that antiretroviral time has triggered the emergence of sexual behaviours and subjectivities that open up new avenues for thinking 21st-century triangulations of sex, subjectivity and resistance being experimented with in bedrooms, sex clubs and bathhouses across the developed world.

Ute Kalender

Digital Feminisms and the Body: Problems and Potentials

Xenofeminism, Glitch Feminism, Crip Techoscience Manifesto: Over the last years, exciting new digital feminisms have emerged. All of them depart from the body. And all of them strive for feminist emancipation through digital technologies. Especially xenofeminism and glitch feminism caused a lot of public attention. Xenofeminism filled large event halls at the intersection of art, theory and politics and is very popular among students of various fields. Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* was sold out within a few days in September 2020. The New York Times put the book on its list of Best Art Books in 2020. At the same time, these digital feminisms also encountered tough headwinds. Xenofeminism was criticized for too much embracing technologies, computers and algorithmic rationalities. The authors were accused of following a masculinistic colonial logic (De Sena 2018) and lacking historical feminist sensitivity towards the body. Legacy Russell's idea of the fluid body was read as a neoliberal approach: a notion of the body that would be hostile towards more vulnerable, weak, or elderly bodies incapable of constant transformation, shape shifting and activity (Bodies that Glitch 2020).

My contribution takes up these fusses about the body and examines further the strong conceptual relation between xeno and glitch technologies and the body – its potentials as much as its problems. On the one hand, glitch and xenofeminisms offer a seductive approach to radically depathologize bodies in a digital world by connecting the body to a profound critique of heteronormativity, digital capitalism and surveillance. On the other hand, both manifests understand the body as a code that is an entity which can easily be managed, manipulated and formed. They suggest a too strong constructivist approach to the body which might again silence negative digital experiences and lead into a 'destructive deconstruction' (Boger 2015). Finally, by borrowing from Disability Studies, I will supplement the discussed feminisms with a notion of complex embodiment (Siebers 2015). The model of complex embodiment offers a fine-grained, multilayered model of bodily experiences in a digital world and the possibility to also engage with the alienating, destabilizing and existentially troubling effects of digital immersion (Ng 2017).

Literature

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