

# Alcune riflessioni sul 10° anniversario di *Tecnoscienza*

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**Abstract:** How can STS move towards a greater pluriversity? How can we question the taken for granted of STS scholarship and geopolitics, so as to engage across radically different worlds? Thinking through a decade of *Tecnoscienza* and bridging the articles published in the 2010 and the 2019 volumes, the contribution reflects upon possible lines of future STS inquiry.

**Keywords:** STS; pluriversity; feminism; more than human relations; *Tecnoscienza*.

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## I. Introduction

How can STS (an STS multiple) be part of wider transitions from universal knowledge projects to projects in articulating pluriversity?<sup>1</sup> The answer to this question cannot, obviously, be a prescription for what ‘we’ all should be doing. Rather, answering needs to be part of an ongoing, collective conversation in which we locate ourselves as speakers/writers, not once and for all but always in relation to the discussion at hand. Our discussion here engages with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal *Tecnoscienza*, established initially as a forum that invites contributions from STS scholars for whom Italian (once the imperial voice of Renaissance Europe) is their native tongue, or those who have undertaken the work of gaining fluency in that beautiful language. This itself is a step towards greater pluriversity, asking different readers to make the effort of becoming multilingual or risk missing out.

While the dominance of English as the lingua franca of academic publishing continues, there are at the same time shifts in centres of gravity

within STS that challenge monolingual futures for the field. The flourishing of *Tecnoscienza* is indicative of an expanding range of STS scholarship and associated journals, which support regional networks of research and publishing in (*inter alia*) Latin America (*Tapuya*, published in English but inviting supplemental translations in Spanish and Portuguese) and East Asia (*EASTS*), as well as across Europe (*Science and Technology Studies*) and Scandinavia (*STS Encounters*, published in Danish and other Nordic languages as well as English). In a less hegemonic future, these networks could open new possibilities for researchers not only to think and work but also to write in first languages, leaving those of us who are monolingual English speakers feeling (at last!) increasingly on the outside. At the same time, this transition is not an easy one, as is evident in the fact that, while the majority of the journal's contributing authors continue to be located in Italy, *Tecnoscienza* shifted to English only submissions in 2016. The politics of language are integral, in sum, to thinking about our field's pasts and transforming its futures.

Where else might we begin in taking *Tecnoscienza's* 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an occasion to think about STS? How about the cover of Vol. 1, No. 1, a human/machine designed by Zaven Paré? The human, as is so often the case, is figured as/by a face (in this case without a mouth), suspended on what is evidently the machinic body that supports and animates it. The editors' description of the art installation of which this device is part is eloquent, conveying the poignant effect of multiple of these identical phantasmatic subject/objects, inchoately murmuring, generating sounds that, while originating from human bodies, diffract through these machines and the gallery space to engender an affective return to the bodies that the installation incorporates as its audience.

Ten years later, the cover of Vol, 10, No. 2 presents a self-driving car, bedeviled by a salt circle; "By reproducing a "No Entry" road marking, the circle confuses the car's vision system into believing it is surrounded by no entry points, and entraps it" (Redazione *Tecnoscienza* 2019). A work of installation artist James Bridle, "Autonomous Trap 001 (2017)" joins the human/machine as another fetish object of automated autonomy, this time centering automobility. Bridle himself embodies a transdisciplinarity indicative of the future of STS, as an artist/scholar capable of configuring the hardware and software of this "research vehicle." The research being conducted by Bridle is a simple suggestion for a non-violent act of sabotage, a countertechnology to the investments of Google, Tesla and other contenders for the displacement of driving labours, and a move towards demystification that demonstrates the fragility of the car's sensory coupling with its surrounding environment.

As a device for navigating the rich range of topics evident in work published over *Tecnoscienza's* first decade, I'll stay with the somewhat arbitrary strategy of thinking through Volumes 1 (2010) and 10 (2019), about generative lines of future STS inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. STS of Translations

Following translation – as the work of making commensurable, with its inescapable losses and frequent betrayals – is a founding/ongoing STS project. Within the material-semiotic framing of STS research, translation refers to processes by which entities, beings, knowledges and practices from one location are re-rendered in order to be intelligible and practicable within another. The inaugural issues includes stories of raw milk dispensers (Piccioni 2010), the stabilisation of furniture (Parolin 2010), the “retranslation” of images in experimental psychology (Gianelli and Montanari 2010), and the “recombinant typicalities” of breadmaking with “reconfigured ‘natural’ yeast” (Mongili 2010). In Volume 10, the case of the “translational imperative” to move findings from animal models to humans (Lowe et al. 2019, 6) considers the question of who suffers, or is sacrificed, on behalf of whom as an integral moral/ethical thread, for both biomedical practitioners and STS scholars. Reminding us that care is a longstanding topic for STS (cf. Lynch 1988), the current moment brings new questions and normative prescriptions regarding multispecies translation, and adds further layers of nuance to critical STS accounts regarding “material flows and conceptual transformations” from bench work to clinical treatment, laboratory to market (Lowe et al. 2019, 11). Recognising that the traffic of natureculture flows in multiple directions, extending and deepening our field’s tracings of the politics of translation begins to open up possibilities for “doing difference” differently (Verran 2013), in support of more radical transformations in the geopolitics of knowledge making.

## 3. STS of Ordering

Perhaps more than any other field of social research, STS has attended to the material practices through which social ordering is enacted. In Vol 1, Coletta (2010) directs us to the performative agencies of street names, taking the mundane artefact of city signage as a guide to recovering the administrative lifeworlds that assign material-semiotic orderings to the urban landscape. Ventura (2010) examines relations of urban lighting and road surfaces through the case of Palermo’s Piazza Politeama, showing daily cycles of transition in the piazza’s symbolic and practical character affected by naturalcultural changes in illumination. Ten years later, as I write these reflections in the moment of the pandemic of Covid 19, we find ourselves subject to extraordinary reconfigurations of social space aimed at managing and disciplining mobility/contact. These new orders of mobility governance intersect with ongoing, and intensifying, technological regimes of population management through border control. Animated by discourses of in/security, b(ordering) at once promotes fear

from invading ‘aliens’ (as human and viral actors/actants are deliberately conflated), and promises to conquer the threat through fortification and containment (Andersson 2020). Technopolitical regimes at the border engaged in what Pelizza (2019) has characterised as “processing alterity” are enabled through the expansion of computational infrastructures; these systems reanimate longstanding imaginaries of omniscient/omnipotent control based on translational technologies of sensing and datafication.

#### 4. Sensing STS

From Volume 1, STS is a resource for critical data analytics as both method and object of research, troubling dominant tropes of research into computationally-enabled sociality, e.g. “online community” (Pelizza 2010), in favour of attention to the noncoherence and ephemera that escape the computational system’s normalising designs. By Volume 10, relations of datafication and knowledge-making take STS into multiple domains. Zampino (2019) follows the case of self-tracking as a mode of ontological choreography, not only in the clinic but in everyday life cycles. Bodily agencies are complicated in a matrix of expert knowledge and behavioural management on one hand, incorporation of new possibilities for self-knowledge of the body on the other. The politics of knowledge making are critical here, specifically questions of who configures relevant measurement devices in the service of whom, further complicated by the ways in which a device’s design is at once normatively prescribed and never determining of its use and significance (see also Roberts et al 2019). Measuring devices do not render their signs independent of the body that “learns ‘to be affected’”, to be moved by those signals (Zampino 2019, 33, citing Latour 2004). The direction of movement, as Yli-Kauhaluoma (2019) reports, may be less about changes aimed at health and well being than about new routines developed in the service of the smooth operation of sensing devices themselves.

#### 5. Feminist STS

In Volume 1 Castiello’s (2010) review of *Meeting the Universe Half-way* (Barad 2007) anticipates my own reflections on relations between Barad’s writings and ANT (Suchman 2011 which, my apologies, should have cited Castiello!). Castiello observes:

Questi due movimenti – verso il reale e verso una nozione di realtà non rappresentativa bensì performativa e in divenire – costituiscono, probabilmente, la cifra di una convergenza di interessi, seppur con le debite differenze, tra il dibattito inerente ai STS e le teorie femministe (2010, 115).

[These two movements – towards the real and towards a notion of reality which is not representative but rather performative and in a process of becoming – constitute, probably, the sign of a convergence of interests, albeit with due difference, in the debate between STS and feminist theories].

Delineating lines around and between things is, as we know, a practice of making difference. It follows that responsible knowing requires attentiveness to the reiterative, material-discursive practices through which object boundaries are drawn, and to the constitutive relations – and exclusions – that boundary making enacts. This includes, of course, the figures of STS and feminist theories themselves, each becoming, however contentiously, in relation to the other.

A decade later Sciannamblo (2019, 80) returns to the question of what we might mean by STS as an “ethico-onto-epistemic practice,” adopting an admittedly unwieldy conjunction introduced by Barad to signal the inseparability of ethics, knowing and becoming. Sciannamblo prefaces her empirical discussion of instances of writing research with a thoughtful and extensively referenced précis of debate regarding how STS is implicated in its own theoretical/empirical arguments regarding the performativity of knowledge claims. This is a discussion that has at its best combined clarifying critique (rather than critique in the service of territorial claims or one-upmanship) with transformative reconceptualisations of relations between research methods and their objects, the material and the discursive, knowledge and world making.

## 6. More than human STS

By Volume 10 the multiple realities of climate change compel attention from STS researchers, not only to associated technosciences but increasingly also to wider publics and multispecies relations. Inspired by Callon (1998), DelSesto (2019) takes people-plant interactions as a site from which to examine what he identifies as the logic of constraints that frame the socio-spatial architectures of the Anthropocene, and the overflows that open that logic to alternative paths towards transitions to sustainability. As he traces the disconnection of social life from nature, DelSesto centers “the ongoing design of people-plant interactions as a practice that can work from the inside-out to unfold new political capacities” (2019, 101). The prison garden, for example, enacts a kind of counter socio-spatial logic, wherein “a certain kind of energy ... exists – of uncertainty, openness, and possibility” (ivi, 108). Without over-representing the agency of such spaces within wider political economies of mass incarceration, DelSesto argues that their local effects are powerful, and are echoed in diverse configurations from urban gardens in reclaimed ‘vacant’ lots, to therapeutic gardens inside institutions like hospitals or long-

term care facilities.

Giardullo et al. (2019) take the movement for a global energy transition from finite fossil-based to renewable zero-carbon systems as critical for sustainable human/more than human relations. Read in a moment of pandemic, the toxicity of globalisation as a political economic project, involving the opening of commercially-based flows accompanied by renewed commitment to the containment of (mostly forced human migration), is as an index of the wider transition of which remaking energy sources is a key element. Crossing boundaries in order to connect the dots leads this discussion into a plethora of multi-scalar (both temporally and spatially) and interrelated themes.

## 7. Coda

A crucial question for us as STS-informed scholars/activists is just what worlds are presupposed, assumed, reiterated in our reading, writing, and practice? Who do our words reference, when, where, and under what circumstances? Too often the worlds of reference remain implicit, comprising the taken for granted settings and networks in which we ourselves are located. For many of us writing from Anglo/Euro/US worlds, unmarked figures (of the human, the consumer, the actor, the citizen) stand in for the specificity of those we actually have in mind. We need to expand our capacity to acknowledge radical difference, including the specificities of our own locations and associated onto-epistemological conditions, and the histories, politics, economies and discourses that hold those differences in place. At its best, careful scholarship in STS helps with that work, as it draws from and builds upon the accumulating archive of writings/insights that comprise the field, elaborating or reconsidering our collective ideas as they are reiterated and mobilised anew in a next story, analysis, and argument.

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<sup>1</sup> Mignolo (2018, x) characterises the pluriversal as working counter to the power differentials introduced by colonialism and its companion modernity, with their associated investments in the unity of Western technoscientific knowledge systems.

<sup>2</sup> My apologies to all of the bountiful scholarship left out of this brief survey, for which I refer readers to the archives of *Tecnoscienza*!