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What is posthumanism, and how can we as scholars best meet “the posthumanist challenge”? In the anthology Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter, Swedish for Post-humanist key texts, seven texts from the fields of feminist theory and STS are translated into Swedish. Oriented towards “all those interested in a wider ethic discussion, increased democratization and more valid approaches in research and society” (p. 26), the editors and translators Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman and Francis Lee want to present a “smorgasbord” (the Swedish word for buffet) of texts (p. 7) in an attempt to answer the questions above.

The first three chapters in Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter are introductory texts where the editors explain their take on posthumanism as well as introducing some central topics and discussions. The first chapter, “Reading Skills Beyond the Comfort Zones of the Humanities” is written by Cecilia Åsberg, while “Material-semiotics, Translations and Other Connections” and “Meet the Posthumanist Challenge” are written by the three editors together. Each of the next seven chapters consist of an introduction to an author and guide to further reading, followed by a translated text. The last part of the book is a “Posthumanist dictionary”, explaining about 40 key terms, starting with “affect” and ending with “sociology of translation” (in Swedish: översettningssociologi). All the translations and introductions are done by Åsberg, Hultman or Lee, who thus become not only editors, but also translators and authors. However, to avoid confusing them with the translated authors, I will refer to them as “editors” throughout this review.

Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter could be termed as “posthumanism for beginners”, a guidebook for those curious about entering this emerging theoretical and analytical field. However, it is not just a collection of texts, but offers concrete guidelines for posthumanist analyses. Focusing on the performative function of the analysis and “onto-epistemological ethics”, the editors stress that posthumanist analysis should write the changes one wants to see in the world instead of repeating problems we are already aware of (p. 15). Thus, the posthumanism in this textbook is not just a tool to think with. But what is posthumanism? It is a concept with many different, and also opposing, connotations, ranging from utopian visions of technologically and genetically enhanced transhumans to dystopian and misanthropic views of humanity. The posthumanism presented in this book positions itself within the material, or ontological, turn in the
Humanities and social sciences. Challenging humanist anthropocentrism as well as the views and analytical range of the humanities, Åsberg, Hultman and Lee wants to take the (Scandinavian) reader “directly into a dynamic and unfinished phase of theory building and development of concepts which open up for fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology; ethics, technology and (environmental) politics; affect and pedagogics” (p. 26).

Åsberg, Hultman and Lee have chosen authors who have illustrated how posthumanist approaches relates to the prediscursive agency of the non-human, or who have formulated posthumanist insights formative for the field (p. 24).

The first text is, not surprisingly, by Donna Haraway. In the text “Companion Species”, an excerpt from When Species Meet, Haraway uses her dog Cayenne, Derrida’s cat and the baboons of Ebburu, to demonstrate how actors are the products and effects of relations. This text sets the tone for the entire collection of texts. Still, in her own text, Haraway refuses to be called a posthumanist, hence the title of the introduction: “The reluctant posthumanist”, which again underlines the many inconsistencies in this field. The next chapter, “Karen Barad: a Posthumanist Quantum Physicist” introduces Barad’s agental realism, followed by excerpts from Karen Barad’s “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”, which focuses on how the phenomena which constitutes the world are the effects of intra-action. Then follows Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s introduction to "A Thousand Plateaux", introducing the concept of rhizome to challenge the traditional notion of binary structures so central to many forms of analyses. The following translation of Rosi Braidotti’s "Becoming Woman, or Sexual Difference Revisited", is the first time Braidotti is translated into Swedish. Åsberg writes in her introduction that this reluctance may have to do with Braidottis’s sexual difference-approach, an approach that doesn’t necessarily blend well with the Swedish focus on equality. Following Braidotti, Michel Serres and his text of quasi-objects from The Parasite, demonstrating how objects and subjects cannot be separated, brings us over to the more ANT-oriented part of the collection. Being one of the inspirators for actor-network theory, it seems only reasonable that the next author is Michael Callon, represented by excerpts from “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation”. The last key text is an excerpt from “Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions” by Anne Marie Mol, where she argues that different medical practices not only deal with different aspects of reality, but actually enact different versions of it.

The seven texts and excerpts are translated into Swedish for the first time. Translation is also a key term for this particular take on post-
humanism - the translation of knowledge changes the actors involved as well as the knowledge itself, and in translating these texts, the editors have also changed them. In her introductory chapter, Åsberg describes how they have adapted the original texts in an effort to create a common posthumanist ground, “transposing” the texts into a posthumanist language to enable communication between different disciplines and fields (p. 16-17). Through the introductions and the translations, they put these texts into dialogue with each other as well as with the posthumanist field. Still, in selecting, introducing and translating these texts, they have also been excluding. And although the editors assure us that they do not want to create any form for canon, the texts they have chosen inform us that the effects may be something quite different from the intention. The definitions in the dictionary at the back also remind us as readers that this is a specific version of posthumanism. Translated from other languages into Swedish, it creates something new, something that might be termed Swedish, or Scandinavian posthumanism. Histories, actors, agents, objects, relations, effects, materiality and meaning is what this posthumanism is all about. The posthumanist challenge posed in this book might be summed up like this: How to make sense of the complex realities of humans and non-humans in ways that includes the material, challenges anthropocentrism and are ethically valid? Posthumanistiska nickeltexter offers numerous points of departure for anyone eager to venture into this landscape as well as a range of interesting, and creative answers to this challenge.

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Dawn Goodwin

Acting in Anaesthesia. Ethnographic Encounters with Patients, Practitioners and Medical Technologies


Ericka Johnson
(University of Linköping)

This book is about how anaesthesiology practices are formed, maintained, challenged and extended, and how these anaesthesiology practices are learned through doing, in an apprenticeship relationship. It is based on ethnographic research, both detailed, real-time observations and in-depth interviews, but it also benefits from Goodwin’s past experiences as an anaesthetic and recovery nurse. It is obvious that she knows her ethnographic field very well, a knowledge which allows her to provide the reader with very detailed and helpful descriptions of otherwise confusing medical proce-
dures. But she has also succeeded in distancing herself from the field to analyse actions and taken-for-granted practices with an astute eye to the learning and identity construction occurring.

The book consists of six chapters, and throughout, Goodwin illustrates her discussions with rich, descriptive scenarios, transporting the reader between the hospital and her theoretical analysis.

In the first chapter, the author introduces the fields, both the fieldwork environment of the anaesthesia practices; the operating and recovery rooms, and the academic field of learning in doing, within which this book’s theoretical arguments are placed. In chapter 2, Goodwin discusses the concept of agency, demonstrating the relational aspects of the concept in the context of ‘silent’ bodies and anaesthesiology technology. Using the term cyborg, she shows that the anaesthetised body is not so much silenced and disabled as merely transformed. It can communicate, but in different ways and through augmenting technology. This communication changes the trajectories a patient can take through anaesthesiology, interesting in itself, but it also allows for Goodwin to demonstrate one way agency without intentionality may look, indicating that "Agency is not contained within the body, or within the machines – it is enacted in relations" (p. 57).

How anaesthesiologists deliver care and achieve accountability, even when the bodies and technologies are sending incoherent messages, is discussed in chapter 3. Goodwin shows that sometimes the body-machine patient of anaesthesiology is not communicating clearly, yet actions must both be taken and later accounted for. Her examples and her discussions of other work in STS show how incoherencies and disunity are prevalent in medical practices, and that these elements also problematise the concept of accountability. In her words, while "certainty may be highly valued, it is also an ideal, and in some circumstances, practice, actions and interventions must go on in spite of intense uncertainty" (p. 103).

In the next chapter, Goodwin expands her ethnographic view to include the work of nurses and operating department practitioners, exploring the abilities and limits these participants have in shaping anaesthetic care. Doing so allows her to show how knowledge, practice and agency are distributed asymmetrically across an organisation, and what the consequences of enacting or transgressing different remits of participation are, at least in the UK context. Goodwin’s approach in this chapter allows her to expand on existing work in discussions about communities of practice because her material comes from a multidisciplinary community with very regulated hierarchies.

The final empirical chapter examines how space and material resources are involved in embodied anaesthetic knowledge. Discussing situations when routine work is interrupted
because of disturbances in the
regular arrangements of tools, pa-
ients or practitioners, Goodwin is
able to convincingly suggest that
such disturbances are actually a
contributing factor to the develop-
ment of expertise. "Learning to see
“normal appearances” from a differ-
ent perspective, and to accomplish
anaesthetic techniques from these
altered positions, furnishes a repé-
toire of techniques that can be used
when facing unanticipated difficul-
ties” (p. 165).

Some of the chapters in this book
have previously been published as
articles. Collecting them into one
volume is very useful for those of us
who have long been inspired by
Goodwin’s work, and it is a pleasure
to be able to read a substantial
quantity of this research at once. But
collecting the work this way has also
allowed Goodwin to draw larger
theoretical lessons from her research
and present more nuanced ideas
about learning and acting in
anaesthesia for the reader. Thus,
because of this book, she has been
able to develop her ideas about
health care as practice populated by
clinicians, patients, medical tech-
ologies, machines and devices, all
acting in concert, and all relationally
shaping action, which she discusses
further in the final chapter.

These ideas are useful to us working
in the field of science, technology
and medicine studies and to those
interested in the interplay between
learning-in-practice, cognition and
technology, so the work is well
placed in Cambridge’s ‘Learning in
Doing’ series. However, her work
also has much to contribute to the
debates about standardizing health
care work and accountability. Her
descriptions of how knowledge is
embodied and situated in practices,
her ability to make invisible
anaesthesiology work visible, and her
arguments about “the primacy of the
immediate context of action in
understanding how trajectories of
care are shaped” (p. 32) ought to be
incorporated into policies regarding
medical technologies and clinical
guidelines. Her book would force
policy makers to ask: if agency is
recognized as enacted in relations
between bodies and machines,
should this not also change our
understanding of who can be held
accountable for what within
medicine and health care?

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Scott Lash

_Intensive Culture. Social Theory, Religion and Contemporary Capitalism_


Letteria Fassari
(University of Roma La Sapienza)

As often happens in the lives of
scholars who have achieved a
deserved success, Lash allows himself
the luxury of an exploration,
philosophically founded, on contem-
porary culture, which he calls "intensive culture". Many of the arguments drawn by the author have been published in the well-known scientific journal "Theory, Culture and Society" (2001, 2003, 2007), but now Lash draws a line of continuity building a very ambitious theoretical platform. For this purpose, Lash re-reads key thinkers such as Leibniz, Nietzsche, Simmel, Deleuze and Guattari, Benjamin and many others in order to extract the "spirit" of the topics which are introduced in the text. To define contemporary culture, he uses a substantial number of dichotomies, the first and most important of which is the dichotomy "extensive/intensive". Contemporary culture, capitalism and global information are, nowadays, according to the author, widely extensive and tend to expand: we can find clear examples looking at the large corporations, the intergovernmental organizations, the growing extensiveness, the extensive contemporary social relations and the universalization of contemporary culture. This growing extensivity manifests itself in terms of geographical spread and process of homogenization that makes distant shares of the globe substantially identical. At the same time, but on another level, there is an opposite process that leads to experiencing a culture that is defined "intensive": experiences of drugs, sex, daily life in global cities but also convergence of media, social networks, processes, and downloading streaming. All these experiences are defined as intensive.

To explain what he means by "intensive culture", Lash uses again a series of dichotomies: homogeneity versus difference, actual versus virtual, things-for-us versus thing in itself, life versus mechanism, ontology versus religion. "Intensive culture" is a culture of difference, of inequivalence. For instance, intensive is the brand's virtuality where what is in potentia may grow, flourish, or come into being. The intensive is full of possibilities, is the extensive actualization of what was, at first, a potentiality. Things in themselves are intensive: to be treated in their singularity and not through general categories such as ethnicity, gender, race means to be treated as intensive. For Lash we live in a culture that is both extensive and intensive: the more globally stretched and extensive social relations become, the more they seem to take on this intensity.

Lash is necessarily redundant when he traces with great creativeness the shift from the intensive to the extensive in different key areas of social life and social thinking including: sociology, philosophy, language, capitalism, politic, religion and theology. With this book Lash also presents a case for the revaluation of vitalism in sociological theory. It argues for the relevance of such a Lebenssoziologie in the global information age. The core of this part is naturally centered on vitalistic sociology of Georg Simmel. In defining the modern vitalism, Lash refers, among others, to Nietzsche, Bergson, with regard to
the classical thinkers, and Deleuze, Foucault and Negri with regard to contemporaries. The currency of vitalism has re-emerged in the context of the changes in the sciences correspondently to the rise of ideas of uncertainty and complexity, and the rise of the global information society. This is because the notion of life has always favoured an idea of becoming over one of being, of movement over stasis, of action over structure, of flow and flux. The global information order seems to be characterized by “flow”. Lash’s central question is to put the issue of vitalism in the context of the “information age”. Central to this shift is the concept of mediatisation. Today media as technological forms are given meaning-making powers; but they are largely outside the control of the subject and of the social institution. Media nomination yields a shift from the externally causing power of mechanistic form to power that is wielded through, self causing and takes cybernetic forms. Externalized flows of the information society are in fact abstract information, communication, finance flows; flows of technology, media, immigrants even desire or libido. Simmel provides to Lash the bases for an intensive sociology, especially in Simmel latest works vitalist sociology assumes greater importance as it becomes ontological. Simmel, Lash says, was influenced by the study of Leibniz and especially from Leibniz’s monadology. The monad is simple substance as difference. It is self-organizing, conceived on the lines of not the extensivity of res extensa, but the intensivity of res cogitans; the monad is possessed with memory as trace; it is comprised of relations of perception; it is reflexive. In today’s global informational culture, intensity and extensity are increasingly fused together. The result is that substance increasingly becomes system. The fusion of substance and system, of the intensive and the materiality of social life is seen above all in information and communications. Information in its difference is necessarily intensive. System itself, Lash says, becomes substance. Substance leaves its place in the human subject and itself becomes system: system itself now becomes intensive. Media machines of information and communications (the semantic machines of Luhman and of Varela which produce meaning) have taken powers of predication. The substance of Aristotle and the Leibniz’s monad are key concepts for understanding contemporary capitalism. This, with its new media, its brands, the dominance of finance and biotechnology, logic design and constant innovation as a result of the investigation, metaphysical, and their shapes become substantial. What characterizes contemporary capitalism is that the thing, the object, the good, the service is in-itself. Goods and services become metaphysical capitalism. In classical capitalism, the exchange of equivalents leads to equilibrium (and reproduction), in the capitalism of today, the exchange of non-equivalent objects leads to
imbalance and "production". Here, Lash highlights the question of production and innovation without limits, where under the principle of naturalized difference, it is always possible to produce something new, perhaps very similar to its previous version, but with a renewed sense in the market. For Benjamin, Lash writes, capitalism worked through the extensity of the commodity but commodities are physical. Here the logic of the commodity, of the cause and effect of economic structure on superstructure, is modelled on and consistent with Newtonian physics. But the capitalism of today, on the contrary, is a capitalism of difference in which, like Aristotle’s substance and Leibniz’s monad, each thing is different from every other and self-sufficient. There is a shift from the abstract homogenous labour to the abstract heterogeneous life. Material cause changes from the commodity’s units of equivalence to consist of informational units of inequivalence. How does capitalism stand in relation to metaphysics? Lash refers to Antonio Gramsci for whom the superstructure is metaphysical. Gramsci stresses the contrasts between economic infrastructure, which works like a physical mechanism, like a mechanical body, and the mind, the spirit of the superstructures. Indeed ‘hegemony’, which is super-structural is essentially meta-physical. But today with the determination of the economy, and the subordination of superstructures to economic reproduction, the metaphysicality of the superstructures is relegated to a mere function.

Following Gramsci footpath, Lash poses the question of how to define the post-hegemonic power. In his answer Lash tries to show that the extensive power or the extensive politics are being progressively displaced by a politics of intensity. Correspondently a change has occurred from an extensive (and hegemonic) regime of representation to an intensive regime of communications.

The passage from hegemony or extensive politics to intensive politics shall be translated, in Lash’s terms, into the following shifts: a transition to an ontological regime of power, from a regime that in important respects is ‘epistemological’; a shift in power from the hegemonic mode of ‘power over’ to an intensive notion of power from within (including domination from within) and power as generative force; a shift from power and politics in terms of normativity to a regime of power much more based in what can be understood as a “facticity”. This points to a general transition from norm to fact in politics and from hegemonic norms to intensive facts. Lash merges the issue of power with the neo-vitalist look of social sciences. Is contemporary mediatised politics about transforming flow into flux? Lash’s answer lies in framing the today’s neo-vitalism as an attempt to put flux back into the flow. To put flux into flow is to put reflexivity (flux is always reflexive) into globalization.

Lash’s book is not an easy reading.
but it is constructed as a major challenge to the traditional socio–logical theory. It is permeated by an interpretive vitality that leaves the reader with the conviction that the path taken is going in the right direction. It requires, however, the effort and the modesty to abandon most of the conceptual equipment commonly used to interpret cultural and social changes.

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Martin G. Weiss
Bios und Zoë: Die menschliche Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit
(Bios and Zoe. Human nature in the age of mechanical reproduction)

Ingrid Metzler
(University of Vienna)

At first glance, Bios und Zoë: Die menschliche Nature im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbar-keit – which might be translated into English as “Bios and Zoe: Human nature in the age of technical” or perhaps, indeed, “in the age of mechanical reproduction” – seems to be a collection of philosophical works. It is edited by Martin Weiss, a German philosopher who has held academic positions in Austria, Germany, Italy, and the United States, and is now at the University of Klagenfurt in Austria. The title itself alludes to the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whose Homo Sacer (Agamben 1995) in particular helped to revitalize the two Greek terms “bios and “zőë”, as well as to Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Benjamin 1963). Moreover, Bios und Zoë is published by the prestigious publisher Suhrkamp, whose recognizable brown paperback books often indicate a zone of philosophical reasoning. Yet this first glance is misleading. This book is more than a purely philosophical collection. Assembling a plethora of authors with very different modes of reasoning and styles of writing, the book is just as heterogeneous and difficult to categorize as the beast it seeks to study: life in the bio-age. Containing chapters that discuss such different phenomena as synthetic biology, DNA codes, stem cells, egg cells, and post-genomic configurations, the collection provides not only a snapshot of the many frontiers and heterogeneous directions of contemporary bio-technology, but in fact a fairly suggestive picture of the different modes of reasoning and styles of writing that have emerged within those fields of inquiry that have sought to make sense of the ways in which the life sciences have unsettled our ways of thinking on life and our ways of acting on it, fields such as philosophy, history of
science, political science, anthropology and science and technology studies. As editor, Weiss has managed to gather many of the big names of those fields.

“Bios” and “zoe”, the two terms that constitute the main title of the book, mark the ambiguous zone on whose past, present, and possible futures the contributors seek to reflect upon. “[N]ew insights of the life sciences” and “biotechnology’s capability to manipulate”, Martin Weiss writes in his brief introduction to this volume, have moved “life in its double meaning as ‘mere biological life’ [zoë] and ‘qualified human life’ [bios] as well as the relationship between these two concepts at the center of interest of the social sciences and humanities” (p. 7; my translations throughout). This book, Weiss goes on, is meant to be a collection of “Werkstattberichte”, that is, reports from the workshops of these fields.

The contribution by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and Staffan Müller-Wille is the first of these reports. It reflects upon the “[t]echnical reproducibility of organic nature” from the perspective of a “history of molecular biology”, whose practices, “tool boxes”, and machineries the authors carefully unpack in their chapter, distilling some of those “epistemic changes” – such as the ability to read life and to rewrite life, or to blur boundaries between species – that provide the meat of some of the following chapters. In the next chapter, Martin Weiss seeks to think through the connections between what he depicts as “dissolution of human nature” in biological laboratories and the dissolution of the individual in the “communitarian turn of bio-ethics”. He argues that biotechnologies not only “reduce human beings to the materiality of their genes” but also increasingly “dissolve these [material] molecules in the immaterial probabilities of potential gene expressions” (p. 45) – which Weiss reads as an interesting symmetrical movement to the dissolution of human subjects in those kinds of political projects that call upon individuals to govern themselves in light of collective truths. In the following chapter, Karin Knorr Cetina seeks to think “[b]eyond the enlightenment”, reflecting on the emergence of a “culture of life”. “Citizens” and “biological citizens” more precisely are at the center of the contribution by Thomas Lemke and Peter Wehling, which is an excellent reconstruction and discussion of the proliferation of that concept, whose critical power they seek to revitalize. Michel Foucault’s work provides the bridge between this chapter and the next one, in which Rosi Braidotti first critically discusses Foucault’s work and subsequently introduces a post-human reading of “zoe” as starting point for an ethics of becoming. Such a post-human perspective is similarly developed by Stefan Helmreich in his contribution titled “Human nature on sea”, in which he reflects upon the efforts of “environmental marine metagenomics” to genetically profile
not individual organisms but “life in the sea”. At a distance from this, Nikolas Rose draws upon Erwin Schrödinger to reflect upon what life is, and seeks to revitalize this question to catch some answers in an age in which what life is and what it should be is no longer tamed by informational epistemologies. Rose’s chapter is followed by a block of philosophical contributions. These start with Gianni Vattimo’s more programmatic attempt to reflect upon the possibilities and directions of a post-metaphysical ethics. Similarly – yet, perhaps less programatically – in their chapters Kurt Bayertz and Dieter Birnbacher both reflect upon the limits and problems of ethical reasoning that are grounded in notions of “human nature”. Subsequently, Ulrich Körntner tackles not “human nature” but the concept of the “person”. After these philosophical contributions on ethics, Anna Durnová and Herbert Gottweis reflect upon “politics between death and life”, using examples from human embryonic stem cell research debates and end-of-life debates to distill some cardinal features of the politics of life today.

Striking more empirical paths, Charis Thompson discusses materials from ethnographic studies in clinics of reproductive medicine, and discusses the many ways in which “race” emerges and persists in egg donation practices in the United States. Paul Rabinow and Gaymon Bennett subsequently report from a workshop that is more experimental in kind, describing the past failure in setting up symmetrical collaborative projects with bio-scientists, and mapping some lines for such a collaboration in the future. In the final chapter, Bruno Latour contributes to this debate through a chapter that seeks to find some middle-ground between modern(ist) dichotomies.

The book as a while might be difficult to digest for those who are altogether new to the literature on the “bio-age”. Yet, it is helpful for all those who are not completely new to this body of literature and for those who have wrestled with making sense of the life sciences and its implications and wish to think outside their own box. Many of the chapters are worthy reading as such. For example, Rheinberger and Müller-Wille give a remarkably succinct but nevertheless deep and detailed report on the history of molecular biology, unpacking its toolboxes in detail whilst embedding them also in regulatory debates. Moreover, some themes cut across chapters: “post-genomic” research practices, which are introduced in Rheinberger and Müller-Wille’s contribution, are taken up in Weiss’s, Lemke and Wehling’s, and Rose’s chapters; “human nature”, and its biological and normative reconfiguration, features prominently across the chapters, in particular the more philosophical ones; and many contributions are conversations not with Giorgio Agamben, as the title somehow suggests, but with Michel Foucault’s work on biopolitics.
However, overall this book shows that even if the various fields of the social science and humanities are assembled in one volume, they do not necessarily speak to one another. The book does not give a coherent message and a tension between different modes of reasoning persists. For instance, whilst some chapters take pains to show that “biotechnology” is not a coherent actor, others tend to take biotechnology – and its power and agency – as a given. This tension is addressed in Latour’s contribution, which, however, remains at a distance from the volume’s topics. Yet, such a tension does not necessarily detract from the value of this volume. Rather, it is productive and thought-provoking, triggering reflections not only on what kind of phenomena we are witnessing, but also on how we might want to reflect on them and engage with them.

References


Federico Neresini and Paolo Magaudda

La scienza sullo schermo. La rappresentazione della tecnoscienza nella televisione italiana

(Science on the Screen. The Representation of Technoscience in the Italian Television)


Paola Pallavicini

(University of Torino)

The volume, edited by Federico Neresini and Paolo Magaudda, collects the main results of a research project on technoscience in Italian television programs. Started in 2007 at the Department of Sociology of Padova University, the project was led by the PaSTIS research unit (Padova Science, Technology and Innovation Studies) and, inside a strictly sociological frame, involved scholars from both the fields of Science and Technology Studies and Media and Communication Studies. The common reference to the sociological culture has oriented the intradisciplinary analytic work toward the long tradition issue of the agency of media contents in social context (i.e. the way in which media content acts socially), investigating how the television communication takes part in and, at the same time, gives form to the social sharing of technoscience knowledge.

Starting from the assumption that
television communication – seen as a particular and specific field in media communication, and identified with television programs broadcasted – is part of the process of social construction of technoscience knowledge (today a common understanding in STS studies), the authors suggest a step forward, that consists in considering media “as they actually are”: not a neutral arena for debates or information circulation, but an autonomous actor in the process, with its own logic and its own interests. A step that opens, in the authors’ explicit intentions, to a privileged dialogue with the studies on public communication of science and technology (PCST), more than to a critical revision of the basic assumptions of media sociology, today deeply challenged by the radical outcomes – technological as well as social – of digitalization.

Throughout the very large database produced (two full years of television programs recorded from the seven major free channels with national distribution in Italy), the research group selected those useful for the eight case studies presented in three distinct sections of the volume: technoscience and television genres, expert and disputes, bodies and machinery.

In the first chapter Federico Neresini illustrates the structure of the research project, providing a very clear and articulate description of the different frames of reference faced, and of the analytical relevance of the issues specific to each of them (as they have been developed in the single articles collected in the volume).

A first reference horizon is the interweaving of public policies that, since the eighties, have been designed to support a socialization of technoscientific knowledge as a structural element of economic and political development: starting from the Royal Society Report on “The public understanding of science” (1985) up to the assessment in communication strategy included in EU funding policy for R&D projects, the public communication of science and technology has become, internationally, a stable issue involving public and private subjects, media professionals and scientist, politicians and company executives. As Neresini points out, today scientific research lives in this frame.

A second frame of reference may be identified in the growing popular interest in science and technology issue – perhaps backed by the impetuous growth of the new media market. Although this is a long lasting tradition in Italy, the present widespread circulation of scientific metaphors in common language bears witness of a culturally open attitude towards technoscience, which finds confirmation in the media audience’s good welcome towards every new form of scientific popularization: news, publications, public events, as well as television programs.

The third frame of reference consists of the specific role that the television medium plays in the media system, or better, the role it was still playing in
2007-2010, before the web became a serious competitor either in the television audience choices, either in the contention (between media) for authoritativeness in scientific issue debates. At that time (recent but far, in Italian television history) was easier and possible considering television like an insulated medium – as the research group does, more for a methodological purpose, than for theoretical choice – because of the actual dominion that it had on other mass media (newspaper and radio in primis), not only by its economic supremacy, but even in defining agenda-setting and aesthetic rules.

Given this analytical background, Neresini highlights how the presence of technoscience in television programming largely outreaches the canonical boundaries of popular science television programs and creeps in non-specialized areas – such as news, advertising, fictions, talk shows – showing today a great capacity to inhabit the territories of the present social experience and imagination. This theme is studied in deep in the two following chapters of the volume – by Stefano Sbarchiero and Cosimo M. Scarcelli, and by Paolo Magaudda – focused respectively on television news programs and on television advertising.

The complexity of the mediation conducted by television in the social sharing of scientific knowledge is recognized by Neresini mainly on two levels, both textual: by intervening directly in the generation of multiple levels of significance of the single technoscientific knowledge data, from the information level up to the imagery level, seamlessly; and by creating a new scene, different from that in which scientific knowledge is originally formulated and validated, where the authority of scientific knowledge is negotiated anew, according to new and different principles proper to the medium. Television has an ambiguous and complex position in this negotiation. From one side, television confirms social utility and reliability of technoscientific data, using them as starting point for debates or as sources for news; on the other side, television continues to impose and reproduce the old model of scientific undisputed objectivity – as La Follette already remarked in 1982 – pretending the existence of homogeneous hierarchies and scale of values, without ever showing the process of scientific knowledge production, with its own conflicts. At the same time television tends to impose its own criteria (from audience approval up to political interests) in the selection of topics as well as of “telegenic” experts, superimposing them to the criteria of the professional scientific community. Likewise in the television context the role of scientist as expert is, by itself, ambivalent: from one side, her or his professional expertise actually represents the scientific world in the media world, becoming a sign for it; from the other side, aside of the actual complexity of scientific world, this same emphasis on professional expertise tends to
confirm the traditional “deficit model” of scientific knowledge transmission, so hardly criticized by scientists because of the simplification it produces in presenting technoscientific knowledge. This theme is common to all the contributions collected in the volume, but finds an articulated analysis in the three chapters of the second section, which consider the role of experts in talk-shows and infotainment programs (Renato Stella), the function of scientific evidence in television debates (Andrea Lorenzet), and the differing configuration of the representation of scientific controversies in two popular science television programs (Michela Drusian).

The third section of the volume is less consistent, perhaps because of a short circuit generated by the title – “Bodies and machinery” – that allows expectations outside the analytical apparatus that gives coherence to the volume. Coherently with the previous sections, both bodies and machinery are considered more a textual theme than an object (i.e. human or non-human beings in Latour’s hypothesis). The three articles deal with three case studies, respectively on how the body is presented in talk-shows on medical issue (Mauro Turrini), on the way television debates trivializes the eating disorders issue (Claudio Riva), and on the way the main infotainment Italian programs argued into the concept of “technological failure” in the Thyssen-Krupp case (Marco Rangone).

Looking at television from an historical point of view it seems to be impossible to ignore the technological changes that, during the last three decades, so deeply altered its traditional pattern of agency. The ancient analogue broadcasting model – which has been the matrix of the mass communication paradigm – lost its constituent elements when digitalization allowed the broadcasters to control the access to the signal. The authority that television communication gained during the Sixties, coming to be considered the most powerful medium in the mass media system (due to the possibility to reach “all” the people at the same time), has been rapidly eroded by the Internet growth; and it is not currently (and will not be) compensated by the broadcasters involvement in it. Television studies and media studies still tend to ignore how this technological process historically worked on the definition of the television social authority in the media system. Nevertheless it is still true that the current social discourse about the television social authority is today still strong enough to allow us – or better to allow those of us involved in public communication studies – to think that since “so many people” still watch television, the television may be still considered “by itself” a powerful and influential medium. But this is a way to look at the past before us. What we need to face the present change. The technological history of television tells us that the authority of television has changed,
rather than ended: this is why we need to find the way to consider together text and technology to understand how television socially worked and works.

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Gabriel Gatti, Iñaki Martínez de Albéniz and Benjamín Tejerina (eds) 

Tecnología, cultura experta e identidad en la sociedad del conocimiento 

(Technology, Expert Culture and Identity in the Knowledge Society) 


Barbara Pentimalli 

(University of Roma La Sapienza)

The book is a collection of contributions presented at the seminar “Knowledge Society, Identity and Social Change – The Material Supports of Identity”, organised in 2005 at the University of País Vasco, Bilbao, by the CEIC (Centro de Estudios sobre la Identidad Colectiva) and the Department of Sociology, and it is a material proof that Actor-Network Theory (henceforth ANT) is becoming a very dynamic field of investigation in Spain, thanks to an increasing number of conferences and publications promoted by universities and research centres.

As the three editors state in the introduction, the volume aims to fill two gaps in social sciences focusing on how society and identity are shaped in the knowledge society, which is characterised by the pervasiveness of technology. The first gap is the lack of attention given to the impact of social scientists’ representations on their analyses of society and identities (sociology is not purely descriptive but also performative). The second gap is related to the material dimension of the construction of identity, which is mediated by technologies, embedded in heterogeneous artefacts, rather than being the exclusive result of social construction, as a phenomenological perspective has claimed so far, privileging symbolic and intersubjective aspects. The book is organised into two sections, dedicated to these two points.

The first section, "Expert Knowledge and Identity”, adopts a sociology of science perspective to point out the influence of scientific representation in the construction of identity and society, which are not static or given once for all, but must be regarded as dynamic, heterogeneous, fluid, porous, hybrid and malleable.

The first chapter, "The Problem of Materiality in Science and Technology Studies", is written by Miquel Domènech and Francisco Javier Tirado, members of the GESCIT (Grup d’Estudis Sociales de la Ciència i la Tecnologia), at the Department of Social Psychology of the Autònoma University of Barcelona. The authors have actively
contributed to the translation, diffusion and development of ANT in Spain (in 1998 they edited Sociología simétrica, the first book dedicated to ANT, with translations of works by Callon, Law and Latour). This chapter also shows how in Spain ANT is mainly rooted in a sociology of knowledge framework and moves from the techno-science field to update the traditional concepts of sociology, social psychology and anthropology (Castillo Sepúlveda 2011). The chapter is the theoretical manifesto of the book, proposing a new approach able to question the modern dualism and “a priori” distinction between nature and society, humans and artefacts. By recognising the contribution of Science and Technology Studies, especially of the socio-technical (Hughes 1987), SCOT (Social Construction Of Technology - Pinch and Bijker 1987) and ANT approaches, the authors refer to the principle of symmetry (Latour 1992) and to the postulate of heterogeneity (Law and Bijker 1992) to embrace a “third” perspective, able to overcome the tension between the social and the technological determinism. Adopting a symmetric approach means blurring the boundaries between social, material and natural, highlighting the heterogeneous work of engineering by which social, technical and material aspects intertwine with each other. When we consider agency as only human and social, we neglect the materiality of the world: that is, all the missing masses which are also provided with agency and are actively implicated in social practices. After this chapter, which clarifies the theoretical approach of the volume, we get to the heart of the research projects, which show how expert and scientific knowledge contribute to the configuration and naturalisation of society and identities.

The chapter by Pablo Marinis, "Expert Knowledge and its Power to Make and Unmake ‘Society’", focuses on the role of a new professional agent, a new personification of expert knowledge, a ‘new servant of the prince’: that is, the symbolic analyst, whose identity is fluctuant, adaptable, and neither corresponds to the old ideal-typical figure of the intellectual nor to the social engineer of the Keynesian rational model. The symbolic analyst is a pragmatic expert, a counsellor with mobile and flexible institutional affiliations. He participates in government policies, is involved in think tank activities, or works for NGOs as a consultant, dealing with the development and management of contingent projects. He maps the territory of social action; creates new communities and identities (with the cold know-how of the expert who believes in the malleability of the world) as a “beneficiary of program”, “neighbour”, “consumer”, who ideally participate in cosmopolitan governmental policies through committees and assemblies.

The chapter by Benjamín Tejerina, "Knowledge Society, Social Mobil-
sation and Collective Identity”, focuses on how scientific knowledge turns into common sense when social movements acquire it and adapt it to their life-world. By giving voice to environmentalists, feminists and peace campaigners, Tejerina shows that social movements are a symbolic and material support for the construction and maintenance of identity. Their organizations and interaction systems work as spheres of socialisation and knowledge transmission. The techno-scientific debates sparked by their action challenge the dominant scientific knowledge and point out the necessity for activists to adopt a more professional profile. They should be able to transform their alternative practices into expert knowledge, and learn, enhance and use this expert knowledge (and convey it to the militants) to support their claims and their battles for social change, but they should also acquire the pragmatic knowledge to orient public policies.

The second section of the book, "Material Supports of Identity", collects a series of empirical studies carried out in a wide range of contexts and focused on a variety of topics (cultural heritage, social meaning of trash, gastronomy, mobile phones). These studies show the relevance of the technological mediation in the construction of identity, analysing the material supports where identities are embedded. Here, materiality is not regarded as a latent, inert and intrinsic quality of the object, or as an element that only emerges when the object ‘resists’ some specific use or social representation, or as a mere social construction.

The chapter by Antonio Ariño, “The Construction of Cultural Heritage” and its Paradoxes, presents two conflicting approaches to materiality – the immanent and the constructivist one – analysing how societies and communities attribute a patrimonial and aesthetic value to specific objects. Cultural heritage is generally associated with an intrinsic quality of the objects, which only experts can identify, or with a network activated by specific social groups and involving conflicts for the attribution of the status of “cultural heritage”. Today, cultural heritage is related to the identity policies of an increasing number of communities. The society produces cultural and identity value, but it is the material construction of cultural heritage that makes identity more solid, stable and visible, and therefore socially representable. Cultural heritage creates four paradoxes: ontological (the rapid obsolescence of techno-scientific objects requires the conservation of a growing number of ordinary items, which are consequently devaluated), methodological (the meaning of the objects changes and turns them into fétiches and objects of consumption), pragmatic (the proliferation of patrimonial objects creates conflicts involving antique dealers, dealers of cultural goods and restitution-related issues) and ecological (the increasing number of tourists visiting cultural sites spoils art treasures and historical
The chapter by Gabriel Gatti, "The Materiality of the Dark Side (Notes for a Sociology of Waste)", considers waste as a form of materiality opposed to that of cultural heritage. While the construction of cultural heritage is aimed at enhancing the aesthetic value of objects, bringing their materiality out and turning it into the symbol of an identity, waste materials question this materiality. Through a set of significant vignettes illustrating various forms of materiality (the debris from the Madrid train bombings; the Diogenes Syndrome, i.e. the compulsive hoarding of rubbish; the remains used by CSI investigators; the cartoneros), Gatti shows the meaning that social sciences have attributed to the waste of society: initially regarded as unclassified, anomic materials, it has later been considered as a danger to be controlled (but according to the Chicago School, marginal urban areas are consistent, meaningful and parallel worlds with their own social order and culture), and today it is the object of active development policies. As the volume of garbage grows, people become responsible for it: the rubbish is re-used (as in the case of recycling or second-hand shops) or transformed into energy. In the knowledge society, trash is more a product than a waste material: the more its volume increase, the less waste is considered as such. Our society provides rubbish with new uses and identities; it creates new experts and allows new ways of expression (such as forms of art where waste materials are exhibited in museums, taking on new meanings and new life).

Iñaki Martínez de Albemiz, in his chapter "Talking with Your Mouth Full. The Social as a Regime of (In)compatibility between Eating and Talking", shows that when we eat and talk simultaneously, words (discourse) and things (food) combine and collide with each other in our mouth. The fight against materiality here takes the form of a rule of etiquette ("don't talk with food in your mouth") stating the incompatibility between talking and eating. Socialisation implies the passage from nature to culture, from the uncontrolled oral expression to the articulated language. To make this transition possible, it was necessary to remove materiality, which was seen as an obstacle to the self-sufficient rationality of modernity, and create a greater distance between eating and talking. From the regimes of the past, where eating and talking were compatible (such as in the Christian Agape Feasts and Carnival Banquets), we move to other social regimes. In the bulimic regime of the capitalist bourgeois society, eating is regarded as a public ritual and is the background for a stylised sociality or a public-political dialogue (illustrated banquet), whereas in the private sphere the individual eats in compulsive way. The anorexic regime of the knowledge society is instead characterised by a theoretical curiosity about eating. In this society we do not talk as much about what
we eat as what we don’t (scientific banquet). The combination of cooking and science, the so-called molecular gastronomy, the high-tech kitchens where everything is exhibited as if they were laboratories, the visibility of cooks on the media, and the introduction of new technologies and scientific methods in the cooking field, constitute the socio-technical framework of the knowledge society, where materiality emerges as a distinctive element.

After interviewing mobile users and observing their daily use of technology (in London, Madrid and Paris), Amparo Lasén, in “Affective Technologies - How Mobile Phones Contribute to the Shaping of Subjectivities and Identities”, points out the necessity to explore how the relation with and the use of technology shapes and is shaped by users’ identity. In our society, where sociality is related to multiple and transient identities in variegated groups, subjectivity emerges from and through a network of heterogeneous material and immaterial interactions. Mobile phones, as a part of this network, are an affective technology that allows us to share emotions with others, to construct and maintain social and affective ties, to manage and materialise the others’ virtual absence and presence, to defer social encounters and take emotional distance from embarrassing situations, to personalise services (ring tones, screensavers), to record personal stories and keep track of significant past life events. The tactility of mobile phones embodies the relationship between the materiality of the body and the object (as when we play with our phone while waiting in a café, or when we hold it in our hands when we go jogging). While the design of mobile phone shapes our gestures, postures and code dressing, it also allows us to acquire new perceptive abilities. The possibility to be always reachable, to immediately communicate emotions and obtain information, creates addiction and attachment (Gomart and Hennion 1999; Jaureguiberry 2003). When we forget our mobile phone we feel anxious, isolated and incomplete; we are afraid of losing opportunities and we are worried because friends and family cannot contact us. Mobile phones mediate, transform and affect the meaning and the use of urban spaces and spatio-temporal habits (such as the habit of expressing feelings in public, which was once relegated to the private sphere). Users also delegate some choices to technical devices (it is the phone mnemonic capacity that decides when to remove the virtual presence of people from one’s life by deleting a phone number).

The last chapter by Javier Izquierdo, ”The Authentic False: Things inside People”, shows the limits and opportunities created by socio-technical assemblages. By studying scientific, legal and political controversies, the author analyses the cognitive and the moral ability to attribute responsibility in the cases when human actions are carried out through the mediation of complex technological systems. Izquierdo
points out the absence of a jurisprudence about rights and obligations, credits and responsibilities attributed to these new technological bodies, or subject-machines, which are slowly and imperceptibly populating our societies and can easily escape human control.

In conclusion, we can agree with the authors that in a world where social actions and identities are performed and shaped through the use of an interconnected system of technological prosthesis, it is necessary to regard materiality (food, material waste, mobile phones) as the place of a new agency and to urge social sciences and anthropology to take all these assemblages of humans and non-humans as their object of analysis.

References


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Dominique Vinck

Les Nanotechnologies
(Nanotechnologies)


Bernard Reber

(CNRS Research Center Meaning, Ethics, Society CERSES)

Written by the sociologist Dominique Vinck – professor of sociology of sciences and innovation at the Lausanne University, and former professor at the University Pierre Mendès-France – this very clear book introduces the reader to the controversies associated with nanotechnologies and tries to answer to these questions: What are the nanotechnologies? What are they for? Are the fears related to them
unfounded?
The book pretends not to be a book for scientific popularization of nanotechnologies but to treat what moves the “actors”: problems of technological and scientific policy, market creation, regulation through law or ethical committees, forms of public debate and research, and risk strategy.

The problem of nanotechnologies’ definitions runs throughout the book: they are controversies about their domain. Some of the chapters focus on different possible definitions of the nanotechnologies. According to the answer to the questions along the book, their ensemble could be broader or more precise.

Are they only objects which size is nanometres? If so, what are their sizes? Equal or inferior to 100 nanometres? Some definitions are based on their size, while others are based on their contents and their properties. Some are bottom-up (aggregation), while others are top-down (miniaturisation). The chemical reactivity of nanoparticles, for instance, is higher and reaches some quantum effects that change mechanical, optical, electrical and magnetic properties. Other definitions play with the possible applications of nanotechnologies or they answer to the question: Are they changing (revolutionizing) the science or not?

Possible applications and novelty are the two elements that could convince the investors and future users with possible new applications and problem solutions: nanomedicine, sustainable development, communication, security or comfort. Despite some of these promises are closer to science fiction and far to be ready for uses, ethical controversies appear on possible uses or side effects that are welcome for some actors and frighten some others, who are speaking of “Yuck”. Vinck introduces here a connection with the transhumanist movement that want to be “more than human” and to go over the biological (mental and physical) aspects of the contemporary human being (p. 62). Owing to this Vinck deals with the political issues related to nanotechnologies and the equilibrium between actors, suggesting an orientation to the future, defining some priorities and game rules (p. 73). Furthermore, chapter three gives some examples of actors fighting against nanodevelopment. Among them he mentions (p. 26) Pieces and Labor (Pièces et main d’oeuvre – PMO), a group based in Grenoble, nearby the famous Micro and Nanotechnologies Innovation Campus Minatec Center (http://www.minatec.org/en). Their name, PMO, plays with GMO (Genetically Modified Organism), and tries to make the link with these organisms that are not welcome in France and broadly in Europe.

Dominique Vinck’ position on the relevance of this link is not very engaged: “surely, some elements of the GMO story could be found in the nanotechnologies case, but, very probably, the controversies will be more numerous and diverse” (p. 96).
According to the sociologist, the social questions connected with nanotechnologies are very important for their development. Paradoxically, only 0.4% of the expenses are dedicated to the study problems of such as risk assessment (p. 86) and “social inscription of nanotechnologies in society” (p. 122).

One of the main critical issues and a big challenge in this book of sociology of technologies concerned the study of the actors. As other sociologists of sciences and technologies, in fact, Vinck tries (p. 121) to “follow the actors”: State, industrials, researchers, social groups concerned, regulatory institutions. Actors and their nanotechnologies’ definitions are strictly related, since the latter are strategic for the allocation of resources (research subvention), for the legislation, the standardisation and for social acceptance (p. 20). However, the book does not follow the logic of different definitions and the benefice of them for each actor. Moreover, Dominique Vinck tries to give some possible definitions at different parts of the book (p. 13, 22, 27, 28).

Vinck mentions the Precautionary principle (p. 92) that plays an important role in this controversy. We can regret his too simplistic way to present it, letting only place for the fears of researchers and people, or the opposition of industry against the “discouragement towards the progress”. It could have been very easy to mention the European definition from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle, a consensual text very complete and operational.

Although some references are given to ethical committees (p. 127), the ethical controversy – which is important both in the discourses of pro or con actors and on the ontological level (that is the reality of these new entities and their impacts on human live and environment) – is very weak.

Moreover, another simplification in the book is about the participative democracy, which is presented as the solution (p. 105). This form of democracy is distinct from the direct and the representative democracy. Following Callon and collegues (2001), Vinck proposes participative democracy as an alternative to representative and delegative democracy. Most of the experiments in Participative Technological Assessment (PTA), however, are not considered as an alternative even though they seem to be more consistent with representative democracy on specific issues. The direct democracy as well is not a system where the delegation of legislative power tends to disappear as Vinck writes, but there is also a form of complementarity. The problem with the PTA example is precisely to find the way to institutionalize PTA results and devices and to find their place in the ordinary politics. Indeed, very often they are only “one shot” experience, without strong assessment and with loss of proposals for the counselling in Parliament or in the appropriate institutional bodies.
In political sciences and philosophy the trend is now focused on deliberative democracy. The high epistemic challenge, recognized by Vinck throughout his book, needs high level of reflection and not only participation. These forums are not the panacea as he describes them, but I think they need as much expertise, know-how and assessment as the research on nanotechnologies. These participative devices could offer good public spaces to confront the different actors, following and defending different definitions of nanotechnologies. Among the requirements of a deliberative democracy, in fact, the main point is the obligation to present arguments. In one of the more prominent theory of the argument (Toulmin, 1958), an argument is composed of different steps. The first one is precisely to agree on data and definitions. It would certainly be a way to continue Vinck’s book.

References

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Giuseppina Pellegrino

**The Politics of Proximity, Mobility and Immobility in Practice**


Andrés Felipe Valderrama Pineda

*(Technical University of Denmark)*

The Politics of Proximity, edited by Giuseppina Pellegrino, is one of the most salient contributions to the field of mobility studies and to sociology in general published in the last few years. The main reason for this is that it takes up seriously the question “why do we move so much?” This question is pertinent at a moment in history when two contradictory developments are happening: on the one hand, we have now all the technological development necessary to reduce corporeal travel and at the same time remain connected; on the other hand, the same technologies could support the old dream of living in the countryside and still be part of the urbanity, being permanently connected. However, never in history humans have travelled so much, and never in history humans have crammed so much into dense and expensive cities. Why does this happen? Why do we pay so much money to live in cities and travel in them and between them so often? In short, why do we take so much pain to be in proximity? This is the question for the politics of proximity that the various authors of this excellent compilation take up and
discuss.
The short and concise foreword by John Urry sets the stage for the book, while Giuseppina Pellegrino's accomplished introduction presents the main questions to be addressed in the book and its contributions. The main contributions are four: first, to take up and discuss “the inescapably political character of proximity”; second, the need to move ahead with (apply and discuss) John Urry’s principles for a sociology of mobility and a mobile sociology; third, to perform analyses that take into account the “sociotechnical constitution of our everyday life”; and fourth, to focus on “practice as the situated and material locus of proximity and mobility”.

Three parts constitute the body of the edited volume. The first is dedicated to the theoretical discussion of proximity and mobility. The other two present empirical contributions dealing with diverse methods: the second part focuses on issues of identity; the third on global firms and urban landscapes. For space reasons I will not discuss here all the contributions, but I will focus on some aspects that caught my attention.

Marchetti’s contribution is a brilliant summary of Urry’s theories and a useful discussion on the role of physical and social space. Engelbrekt presents the notion of attainable reach as a useful tool to discuss the politics of proximity. Lamentably, neither of these two excellent theoretical contributions is taken up in the empirical cases, nor in a much-missed summary conclusion to the book.

Buscema’s ambitious attempt to bring together Marxists theories, Foucauldian bio-politics and a superficial reference to social movements in Mexico is incomplete and even dangerous. It misses the opportunity to discuss one of the most salient aspects of the politics of mobility/immobility at a global scale: that for many communities and groups immobility is the result of confinement and aggression. They have not chosen to be immobile, but have been forced to do so because they are allowed to move only under certain conditions.

Gerharz elaborates how some of the inhabitants of Jaffna, in Sri Lanka, became immobile and disconnected during the war. She describes and discusses the various identity clashes occurring when a ceasefire was enforced and emigrants from the city could return after years of exile in various countries of North America and Europe. Unfortunately, she – as a Western anthropologist – chooses to be “strangled” by the way local traditional persons could not understand the Western customs appropriated by the emigrants. Gerharz missed the opportunity to discuss some of the Western perversions, though she reports some allusions to them, as for instance in the following remarkable description by a professor in Jaffna: “Before the ceasefire, Jaffna was a closed prison. Now it has become an open market”.

Shuffling the adjectives could provokingly inspire more symmetry:
open prison, closed market!
In stark contrast to the sufferings of people from Jaffna, in another contribution Gherardi discusses how middle and top managers suffer or enjoy the hyper-mobility required in their jobs. She ably shows how top managers regard their hyper-mobility as a resource and source of enjoyment, because they are able to establish homes in many places. Meanwhile, middle managers – who are also compelled to travel or re-settle, but have fewer resources – suffer the dislocations of multi-territoriality.
I would have loved to see the managers and the inhabitants of Jaffna treated in the same way as sources of knowledge. In the book, however, the latters are “stranged” while the formers are not. As mobilities studies grow in number of case studies and theoretical sophistication, it would be desirable the complete abandonment of the old Eurocentric mania of treating Western and non-Western peoples as ontologically different.
Finally, Paola Jirón’s compelling analysis of mobility practices in Santiago de Chile is worthy of note. This is because it neatly deploys the mobility/proximity analytical spirit to show how people can be “confined in their mobility experiences” (and thus making the point that Buscema misses). These experiences are constituted by a set of choices in which socio-economic aspects play a role. However, the very soul of this contribution is to illustrate how those abstract and sometimes quantifiable