

Comunicazioni Sociali

Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies

CALL FOR PAPERS

Being Humans. The Human Condition in the age of techno-humanism: representations, practices, experiences

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The long-running debate on Post-humanism is now entering a new phase: after the analysis of technological imaginaries and 'frontier cases' that informed the field during the '90s, scholars' attention is now progressively focusing on more common technological artefacts, social practices and socio-technological assemblages that seem to redefine the boundaries of what was traditionally conceived as "human".

Technological artefacts that only 20 years ago were but evocative objects that worried scholars – or triggered their techno-utopic imagination – have now become ordinary presences in our life: from artificial implants to mass cosmetic surgery and body manipulation, from new forms of permanent media interconnection to interaction with artificial intelligences.

As a consequence, the crucial theoretical and political issues addressed in the 90s by philosophers and social scientists are now more and more challenging for each of us in our daily life: the relationship between culture and nature, the meaning of being human, the value and meaning of expressions like "human dignity" and "human rights", among many others.

At this stage a number of new questions arise, calling for interdisciplinary perspectives on social discourses (with their implicit or explicit anthropological assumptions) as well as on social practices.

Is post-human a highly evolved level along that line where the human is but a lower, hierarchically inferior stage, to be abandoned? Does "post" refer to a project of radical overcoming of the human condition? Or, rather, it opens a way to re-frame within the new technological conditions the discourse on "humanity", without excluding the development of a new humanism, less Western and male-centered, not only committed to defending the past but willing to dialogue with the present?

Is the alternative between defense of things as they are and complete dismissal the only conceivable one? How is it possible to rethink the meaning of "being human" (rather than animals or merely machines) today, without falling in the trap of such an alternative? Is the merging of human and technology pushing toward the dissolution of any idea of human nature or is it rather calling for a necessary re-definition? Removing any limit of what can be called "human": is this a real step toward freedom or rather a way to infinite manipulation?

Moreover: Can our body become an impediment to enhancement? Is total disembodiment the path to freedom we are looking for? Wasn't it the same principle that drove world financialization of economy, a process whose effects we could recognize as dehumanizing, yet unable to criticize at its roots?

Maybe a new dualism is rising, according to which our body is actually an impediment not to "spirit", as it was in the past, but to potency and its unlimited expansion: a brake on reality augmented by technique and on economy increased by finance.

Nowadays, when technology is no longer a tool, or even just an environment, but is wearable and incorporated, and can act retroactively on the very structure of the organism, what are the main narratives for making sense of the new human condition?

How the two main lines of healing (diminishing suffering, preventing disease, compensating impairments) and enhancing (overcoming any kind of limits, indefinitely increasing power and eventually create life and attain immortality) relate and intersect in contemporary public discourse?

May a limit to enhancement be legitimate or even desirable? And how to define it? According to which criteria? Are we moving toward a limitless society, and with which consequences?

Is “enhancing” a step in secularization in which the want-to-be-god Promethean attitude reaches its highest point, at the same time revealing that it never really emancipated from the idea of an omnipotent God?

To what extent enhancing through technique feeds a consumerist individualism that is perfectly functional to technocapitalism, while pretending to increase the freedom of choice? Are we becoming less dependent on human beings and more on technical systems?

Is enhancing through technique the individualistic alternative to enhancing through sharing and social bonds?

All these and many other questions may be addressed, in considering the different narratives, in traditional and digital media, that today contribute to build a new anthropo-technical imaginary in the public sphere, to drive the domestication of enhancing technologies and to shape the social practices related to augmented experience.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Representations of augmented bodies in cinema, TV series, comics, especially compared to the ones of the '90s
- Utopias and dystopias in post-human society: the imagined world of radical technological augmentation
- The role of paratexts, promotional material, advertising in representing the idea of human enhancement and in the construction of a new commonsense
- The popularization of the debate on regulatory framework, limits, questions of equity and justice in a society augmented by technics and in an economy augmented by finance
- Narratives of post-human institutions and social bonds in fictional and non fictional media discourses
- Human, machine, animal: the redefinition of their boundaries and relationships in social discourses
- Robotics, artificial intelligence, body manipulation, artificial implants: ethnography of daily-life practices and experiences

Deadlines & Guidelines

Please send your abstract to: redazione.cs@unicatt.it by **April 15, 2015**.

Notifications of acceptance will be emailed shortly after the deadline. Abstracts must be from 300 to 400 words long, and may be presented in English. The proposal shall include 5 keywords, authors, institution, and contacts (e-mail), together with a short curriculum for each author.

Authors will be asked to send the whole article (written preferably in English, but Spanish, French and Italian are also welcome) by **June 30, 2015**.

Contributions will be sent to two independent reviewers in a double-blind procedure prior to publication decision. Articles should be between 4,000-5,000 words (no more than 35,000 characters, spaces and notes included), but shorter articles will also be considered.

Submitted papers should not have been previously published nor currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

A guide for authors, sample issues, and other relevant information is available on the journal's website: <http://comunicazionisociali.vitaepensiero.com/>.

For further information or queries regarding this Special Issue, please contact the editor: chiara.giaccardi@unicatt.it.