

## PARALLEL SESSION 2. THE INCLUSION OF THE SEX/GENDER VARIABLES IN RESEARCH: GENDER IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Session chaired by **Angela Balzano and Rita Monticelli**

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### Posthumanism or transhumanism? Gender and science as marker of divergence

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#### Aims of the contribution:

The aim of this contribution is twofold: to show how Neo-materialist Posthumanist Philosophy deal with scientific innovation adopting a gender perspective, and to attempt a critique of transhumanism as a gender-neutral perspective. The final purpose is to clarify how Posthumanism, when adopting a feminist and a gender sensitive perspective, diverges by transhumanism for its understanding of bodies and matter, its approach to science, its objectives.

#### Description of the research

##### Introduction

Gender and science are two excellent markers of features and divergences to read the current development of Posthuman Studies and Transhumanism. In the attempt of facing the challenges of our tecno-mediated days, this contribution aims to find a bodily grounded theory that does not deny the opportunity opened by the complex tecno-scientific environment we are living in as western people, but that at the same time does not renounce to make a difference in science for the benefit of all, not only of the Human.

##### Materials and methods

The analysis focuses on some key figurations that can illustrate how gender and human have been historically constituted, functioning as categories that allow the exclusion both of the “second sex” and “second species”. Drawing on the methodology of cartography elaborated by Haraway and Braidotti, this contribution refers to Henrietta Lacks and Rosita to show how in the name of Man, Science and Human Reproduction, biocapitalism continuously exploit the females of the species, being them human animals or non-human animals. Rosita is a not-born cow cloned in 2011 in Argentine, where scientists inserted in her DNA human genes to produce lactoferrin, a protein that boosts the immune system, and lysozyme, an antibacterial substance, with the ultimate end to put on the shelves a cow-milk suitable for human infants. Both Henrietta Lacks and Rosita embody a new kind of otherness that we are at the same time producing and consuming.

Another pivotal figuration, material of this study, is Primo Posthuman, a guide to explore the transhumanist scenario and to prove how it is avoiding at the same time gender, class and race's

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questions. Primo Posthuman, a future body prototype designed by Natasha Vita More in 1996 and now part of a more complex transhumanist project titled "Future Body Design" (More 2018), was motivated by a strong interest in superlongevity and life extension.

## Results

Reading Braidotti (2013) and Ferrando (2019), that wrote accurate cartographies of Posthumanism focusing on the neo-materialist and feminist line of thought, while keeping in mind Henrietta Lacks and Rosita figurations, is possible to underline that Feminist Posthumanism is characterized by:

- a) a spinozian understanding of bodies, intended as intertwined with minds, and of matter, intended as a unique intelligent and self-organizing substance not dialectically in conflict with culture nor to technological mediation, rather in relation with;
- b) a curious but critical approach to scientific innovations, one able to grasp the potentialities of new info-biotechnologies not avoiding asking to whom is granted the access to scientific development and to whom is denied, on which bodies and how it has been carried out;
- c) a will to denounce how the notion of Human has been articulated on the notion of Man and a critical stance towards the idea that humans are a superior species in the natural order.

Exploring the transhumanist scenario, thanks to the Primo Posthuman figuration, is possible to summarize that it is marked out by:

- a) a schizophrenical reading of the body-mind nexus, where sometimes the body is the main focus of attention (bodily self-enhancement) sometimes life's mind becomes the only life that deserve to be lived and saved (mind uploading, virtual life, artificial intelligence), as well as a reductive understanding of matter and nature, too often depicted as limits and obstacles for human enhancement;
- b) a too enthusiastic welcome and a proactive contribution to scientific development accompanied by a gender-neutral gaze on technologies;
- c) the will to potentiate human performances, without taking into account the effects of this uninterrupted growth of the human is already having on the other species and on the earth.

## Conclusions

Tackling cutting-edge technologies in the framework of the current neoliberal political economic system and inquiring the role of gender norms in the knowledge construction processes enable Feminist Posthumanism to draw effective figurations of the present, offering grounded locations to orientate ourselves in the science-making projects. On the contrary, transhumanism abstracts science from its socio-political and economic system, never mentioning the intertwined development of tecnoscience and capitalism, thus providing a disembodied figuration, abstracted from matter. Rosita is more posthuman of Primo. Primo has not overcome the Human, it is just the 2.0 version of the western Vitruvian Man, an isolated self, a closed subject unable to create relationships with the Otherness not based on egoistic needs.

The consumption of otherness, in particular of women and animals, has been justified by the supremacy of the human species, a belief deeply rooted in western society that has prevented us to imagine and create an economical system that has the Earth as main stakeholder. Nevertheless, reproducing the future in the Anthropocene requires the collective elaboration of a *posthuman care of the otherness*, that means a more *zoe-geo-centered* approach rooted in embodied subjectivities willing to create cross-species alliances. Enlarging the concepts of sisterhood, going beyond the biological limits of human parenthood, Feminist Posthumanism could work as an effective philosophical framework for our schizophrenic present, a toolbox for the

shaping of a new kinship system in the Real Space-Earth (Haraway 1992), one where all living beings, organic and inorganic compounds, cyborgs and techno-others matter.

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