xCoAx 2020
Computation,
Communication,
Aesthetics & X
2020.xCoAx.org
Graz, Austria

The Technobiotics of Others

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Keywords: Umwelt, Recognition, Base Material, Hybrid Media, Art Science.

The Foucauldian idea of life-power is fused into the realm of multiple technologies, and the subject body is advocated as the hinge of the technobiopolitical system. The paradoxical position of providing descriptions for a mute materialism is demonstrated through graduated instances: Haraway and a biosemiotics of systemic context, Derrida's Kierkegaardian secret and Bataille's base materialism - each elucidating different alterities. The interfusal of code and its biological space is contextualized in an outward-facing system: recognition and (mal)adaption. These aesthetic realities work to obscure and elucidate scientific objects within an environment, creating opportunities in shifting paradigmatic and hypothetical spaces that inform research frameworks.

1. Introduction: Life Powers

In the History of Sexuality, Foucault discusses the idea of biopower—"a power bent on generating forces [...] and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them [...] or destroying them" (136). The suggested life-administering power orders and sustains, the destruction and impedance of the other is replaced by a preservation and monitoring. How do we administer life? Linda Birke discusses machines that graph bodily events—the body as information, the body as a series of systemic curves and trends (Traces of Control, 91). The machinery of the cyborg doctor and the cyborg patient. The system-body is diffused into lines and graphs, and likewise the gazes that objectify are multiplied. Haraway finds this most relevantly represented in immunity, a power that works by "networking, communications, redesign", through "texts and surfaces" and "management" (Simians, 194).

However, is it premature to proclaim the "death of the clinic" as the authors would propose contra Foucault, eliminating "bodies and work" in favour of texts and surfaces, or is it rather that these technologies alter and mutate the form of bodily interaction (194)? Is it rather that, no matter how technologized, human interaction will still be present—now no single gaze, but multiple gazes, not through the filtration of a time and concept-limited account (symptomological report), but through bodily absence and the interpretation of data-driven objectivities. As Shildrick asserts, the "clinic is maintained as an idea and a practice in day-to-day functioning in different societal contexts" (Vital Signs, 171)—its forms and applications are altered, the techniques it uses new, but its permanence—if but as a concept—remains through mutations and control of the technobody and its machine's manifestations.

But the gaze now is multiplied—in Birke's words: "machines that converted what was subjectively felt into number and graphs meant that several observers could discuss the output" (Traces of Control, 91). However, while Birke rightly points out science's dependancy on the "objective data of the graph", there's a mythical move from the ideally non-objective territory of the experiences of the patient to an objectifying mechanization. Foucault's gaze however—while technologically different—is in its very nature authoritatively objective; indeed, for any efficacy the objectivity of the diagnosing action must be presupposed. However, as opposed to Foucault's gaze, in the technogical gaze technologies into which it is codified ramify into corroborative territories, the panoptic view is inverted and cloned, and the multiple system of objectivity becomes a matter of communicative management, a mutually accessible network manual—the view through the graph is through its portability and reproducibility, more generally accessible for its objective information. This networked power, management and communicative authority—the gaze through the text and artificial surface of the machine's diagrams and graphs—lead to Haraway's account of the

biomedical/biotechnical body which "must start from the multiple molecular interfacings of genetic, nervous, endocrine, and immune systems" (American Feminist Thought, 208). Further:

> "Biology is about recognition and misrecognition, coding errors, the body's reading practices (eg, frame-shift mutations), and billion-dollar projects to sequence the human genome to be published and stored in a national genetic 'library.' Sex, sexuality, reproduction - theorized as local investment strategies; body not stable spatial map but highly mobile field of strategic differences. The biomedical-biotechnical body is a semiotic system, a complex meaning-producing field, for which the discourse of immunology, ie, the central biomedical discourse on recognition/misrecognition, has become a high-stakes practices in many senses" (208).

What is high-stakes here is both the immune system as an "iconic mythic object in high-technology culture" and as a "subject of research and clinical practice of the first importance" (Feminist Theory and The Body, 204). This distinction cannot be taken too lightly. As a representative icon it is in no way dictating its actual mechanisms and applications, but rather highlighting its importance and relevance as a primary area in need of study. The actual elucidation of its mechanisms come through a scientific process of experiment and its framing. Conversely, however, what is known gives rise to the epitomizing of contextual material understanding.

The immune system is everywhere and nowhere—there is not a part of the body it does not affect and its recognition faculties are externally oriented. Hierarchies give way to a network of the complex and specific, becoming the means of individual coherence. This omnipresence and absence provides a discourse of constraint and the possible in a world "full of difference, replete with non-self" (Simians, 214). Such a restless movement in an aesthetic context may recall Adorno's constellatory negative dialectics, materiality now a site of multiplicity and conflict, the dialectical embedded in the physical, in its inscriptions. Reproduction is a resource corporation's investment strategy and society's library a set of genes waiting in the statistical wings. Now we have a map of differing postulates, identity is a non-self coding error, and the sequencing of its individual network a billion-dollar global project ideologically suspended. This is a cyborgian umwelt or environment, subject to biologist Jakob von Uexkull's synthetic marks and signals for its interpretation.

Building onto Butler's sense of the ideologico-linguistic defining of the bios is a taking up of that inscribability closer to the terms with which Thomas Sebeok takes up Uexkull—the biosemiotic. For Sebeok there is a mutual implication in "the life science" and "the sign science" (Signs, 114)—however, this leaves a gap that is filled by materialism (as evidenced in biological semantic systems such as Chomsky's). The book, the sculpture,

the river, the horizon all are signal markers existing in relation to their environment according to principles both known and unknown. Our environment is both a physical reality and a constant grounding need in physiological and cultural terms—as Haraway would put it an "artificial intelligence system" where "the relation of copy and original is reversed" (Simians, 206). Replicant substance precedes organic pretension, copy template informatics before originary creativities, artifices enveloping the real, objects well before subjects—we have code possibilities embedded in atmospheric space before becoming incorporated into biomaterial instances. The meanings of this niche are the maps of the Innenwelt (internal world) that approximate a self notion.

2. Death's Gift, Life's Secret

Johannes de Silentio describes Abraham's awareness that obedience requires the gift of death (Fear and Trembling, 22). A pure gift, it has no hope of being returned—also, in Derrida's words, "a gift of infinite love, something that makes us tremble in fear because we lack knowledge" (Gift of Death, 55–56). It is something "which requires him to be absolutely irresponsible toward both law and community, but a responsibility that nevertheless cannot be called into question, that has no language, that refuses explanation" (Gift of Death, x). Derrida continues, "I am responsible to any one… only by failing in my responsibility to all the others, to the ethical or political generality" (GD, 70). This inevitable failure is the burden of the secret.

But while Derrida locates the Other outside of Abraham, it is Abraham himself who is the other as Kierkegaard realizes—in the which the narrator himself is continually mystified at the compulsions of Abraham and his pretended actions. What body compells him, what is his secret? The narrator never finds out—but the materiality, the distinct semiosis of the compulsion is in the event. The description of this materialism is approached in Althusser's aleatory material (Philosophy of the Encounter, 171) with an even more fleshed-out image given in Bataille's concept of the base material.

In the base material there is nothing but unique monsters, there is "nothing but deviation" (Visions of Excess 53–56), the material disconcerts and debases all ideology (16). There is no particular form to it, it is the core of the heterological—"the science of what is entirely other" (102)—not only amorphous or informe, but "violently expelled from every form" (91). The base material is the heterological entity, whose form we don't know, the secret and other whose basic existence violates the laws and ethics of community. The Derridean secret is not a sort of implied spiritual entity, but a material existence that is not yet descriptively known, and that rather than accept that lack of knowledge, is expelled violently from a given artifice. The deviant travel from the Butlerian image of the drag show performer negotiating their public marginalization to a Herculin Barbin not quite fitting into the

idealities of sexual dimorphism our cultural simplifications require. More specifically, it is the infinite number of Herculin Barbins who are miscategorized based on the requirements and ideologies of the societies they live in, preventing the basic scientific reality of their material existence to flourish in light of nonsensical cultural codes that subject.

But the cultural creation of that material alterity is as complex as the technologies that give it rise. Now it is the thalidomide mutant and side-effect junky, the unforeseen result—corporeal inscriptions for heterological propensity, Durkheim and the statistical manufacture of deviance. Both Borges' Immortals and Beckett's eventless prolongations become identified a post-eugenic haphazard sterilization and life support machine. Like the Officer in Kafka's Penal Colony, our revelatory dreams of the machine are finally at odds with the actual experience of it, a basic experimental precept that requires testing before social overcoding with mythological abstractions. The formulation of another self, a sideline material secret builds on the liminal locations and bio-control supplied by Foucault. A system divided unto itself, to socially locate it is to play with its semiotics, write its codes, its possible corollaries with the signs that inscribe it. The base material nodes of its configuration inherent in their simultaneous belonging and utterly unseen difference. No longer do we have the visually grotesque prisoner of Goya, but nor do we quite have the inmate in need of the panoptical asylum's orderly help. Now everyone is free, autonomous, the panoptical schedule moves out into the streets, homes and individual spaces of analysis, reminded in one's own material bearing and existence.

Foucauldian schedules begin this movement but the lack of institutional containment relocate its architecture into the multiplication of material semiotics. Its languages and edifices, its totalized appropriation into the technical is mirrored by the very immaterial discourse which gives it lie. The code-making programmers, like Maynard Smith inscribing game theoretics to explain biological behavior, are engaging in disembodied events - virtual and mathematical—the very pretense of disembodiment leaves only the necessary material circumstances for any symbolic engagement. The acceleration of technical products shifts focus from the consistent object to a modularity within a sufficient rational space of Gibsonian affordances. Quite the opposite of dematerialization this object destabilization becomes a mere reminder of material realities—and yet the brand for the accelerated object in response becomes ever more insubstantial. The immaterial is commercialized, systematized: the unspeakable other, technobiotics created in an unpredictable and unique margin, finding its Derridean Secret parodied in Rhonda Byrne's film of the keys to all life, giving you everything you could want. Media and material technology, their inscriptions, for each entity and new medium it is different, for the same entity in a new medium it is different.

3. Speculations: Fiction, Open Science and Practicality

Science offers a complementary place for what are theoretical hypotheses and practical experience. The key moments of scientific history reveal points where the theoretical apparatus hits a disjunction with experimental activity. Kuhn and his paradigm shifts mark the breaking point of where the institutional edifices resettle into new research frameworks. In this there is an implicit model for inscription, for empirical sight and objectivities—a primacy in experiment, and an openness in the theory which observes. The biosemiotic is always communicating, verbalization under sensorial visualization further relays and translates what has been mapped into tangibility. The inevitability of the gaze is to be framed within its theoretical sense-making bias - its danger of objectification without accountability—the ideal of observation a continual openness that finds the tension of theory next to the experience and signalled communication of the subject analyzed. Insofar as experiment is illuminated by it, it has a utility dependent on the maintenance of its Peircean fallibility.

It is a contingency whose knowledge is, in a Spinozan sense, rationally framed: the experiments are given—but the theoretical constructs necessary for sense-making not. For each inscriptive experimental event, a previously unknown entity exists—so it is that the narcotic, drug or heavy metal can be understood through the toxicity they inscribe, as revealed in controlling designs. What is inscribed is another base material to be discovered, and it is through open scientific theory that there is space for its potential expression and epistemological reception. The role of fictional imagining and hypothetical framing arrive in the territory of play within work—the techne that is not less scientific than artistic. Technobiotics paralleled with scientific needs within a societal apparatus puts art in the role of revealing technobiotic structure. A stepping-aside or reflective mirroring of what is occurring—a location where it has the time and space to be spoken about, and where what isn't is spoken about. It is an index or secondary sign to a testing proposal, an existential frame design that gives place to objective expression, vocal innovation—the needed artifact for laboratory semantics.

Bodies under subjection, experiments to be recorded—aspects of material semiotics to suggest what the pragmatic operations of quotidian received concepts fail to envisage. Its nodes and network points are those which speak the language beyond instantiated need, that practicality lacks the time for, whose language is not immediate enough to be useful. A marginal entity can make no sense to a normal society, is doubted to exist and in this way doesn't—but the space afforded by art gives the time and play terrain to extrapolate new frames, to speculate awareness and dialectical hypothesis. Unproductive voices in their uselessness recreate space and the possible future. It is itself embedded in a perspective that doesn't fit and revolutionizes, the Beckett play whose stillness is both out of place and

increasingly in place—that is a form of the future temporally as an analogue to spatial displacement. The other material is technobiotic, the map complex on which writing and inscription has indelibly taken place, on which the communication and flow of marking has reinvented the umwelt with a paradigmatics invented by virtue of being unfit. In an age of technical multiplicity, the monsters are myriad and ironic in their outward normality, they are cyborgs which appear as media personalities, they are graphing machine robots whose linear progressions represent a particular aspect of material mapping—lifelike prosthetic limbs in a system network that looks innocuously like normalcy.

4. Conclusion

The secret space—the grotesque multiple—infused through and through with the technological and coded—is the space of art and fiction. That Herculin Barbin exists is inevitable, but that Virginia Woolf's Orlando does is artistic reflection, and insofar as its realism values the actual existence which underlies its character so it may prove to be of value in enabling one such. Biopower is infused with a plurality of technologies, which gives it just as many forms in which to operate. As technologies and codes within itself (the experimental graphing machine), it begins in its medial form and only beneath this normal voice is a material heterology glimpsed. It is ubiquitous and ecological immune externalizing, a grotesquery lacking marginal linguistic utilities (consumed) for its own existence. Technology outpaces the alterity of accountability. So the aesthetic realm, subverting and exposing the practicality in fiction, becomes essential for technobiotic speech.

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