

because of disturbances in the regular arrangements of tools, patients or practitioners, Goodwin is able to convincingly suggest that such disturbances are actually a contributing factor to the development of expertise. "Learning to see "normal appearances" from a different perspective, and to accomplish anaesthetic techniques from these altered positions, furnishes a repertoire of techniques that can be used when facing unanticipated difficulties" (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 technologies, 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**

2010, Sage, 247 pp.

*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, politics, 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 extensivity 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's 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 mediated 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)*

2009, Suhrkamp, 388 pp.

Ingrid Metzler

*(University of Vienna)*

At first glance, *Bios und Zoë: Die menschliche Nature im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* – 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 “zoë”, 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