

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.

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.

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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

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 programmatically – 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 Körtner 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 whole 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

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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)

2011, Il Mulino, 250 pp.

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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