

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

television communication – seen as a particular and specific field in media communication, and identified with television programs broadcasted – is part of the process of social construction of technoscience knowledge (today a common understanding in STS studies), the authors suggest a step forward, that consists in considering media “as they actually are”: not a neutral arena for debates or information circulation, but an autonomous actor in the process, with its own logic and its own interests. A step that opens, in the authors' explicit intentions, to a privileged dialogue with the studies on public communication of science and technology (PCST), more than to a critical revision of the basic assumptions of media sociology, today deeply challenged by the radical outcomes – technological as well as social – of digitalization.

Throughout the very large database produced (two full years of television programs recorded from the seven major free channels with national distribution in Italy), the research group selected those useful for the eight case studies presented in three distinct sections of the volume: technoscience and television genres, expert and disputes, bodies and machinery.

In the first chapter Federico Neresini illustrates the structure of the research project, providing a very clear and articulate description of the different frames of reference faced, and of the analytical relevance of the issues specific to each of them (as they have been developed in the

single articles collected in the volume).

A first reference horizon is the interweaving of public policies that, since the eighties, have been designed to support a socialization of technoscientific knowledge as a structural element of economic and political development: starting from the Royal Society Report on “The public understanding of science” (1985) up to the assessment in communication strategy included in EU funding policy for R&D projects, the public communication of science and technology has become, internationally, a stable issue involving public and private subjects, media professionals and scientist, politicians and company executives. As Neresini points out, today scientific research lives in this frame.

A second frame of reference may be identified in the growing popular interest in science and technology issue – perhaps backed by the impetuous growth of the new media market. Although this is a long lasting tradition in Italy, the present widespread circulation of scientific metaphors in common language bears witness of a culturally open attitude towards technoscience, which finds confirmation in the media audience's good welcome towards every new form of scientific popularization: news, publications, public events, as well as television programs.

The third frame of reference consists of the specific role that the television medium plays in the media system, or better, the role it was still playing in

2007-2010, before the web became a serious competitor either in the television audience choices, either in the contention (between media) for authoritativeness in scientific issue debates. At that time (recent but far, in Italian television history) was easier and possible considering television like an insulated medium – as the research group does, more for a methodological purpose, than for theoretical choice – because of the actual dominion that it had on other mass media (newspaper and radio in primis), not only by its economic supremacy, but even in defining agenda-setting and aesthetic rules.

Given this analytical background, Neresini highlights how the presence of technoscience in television programming largely outreaches the canonical boundaries of popular science television programs and creeps in non-specialized areas – such as news, advertising, fictions, talk shows – showing today a great capacity to inhabit the territories of the present social experience and imagination. This theme is studied in deep in the two following chapters of the volume – by Stefano Sbarchiero and Cosimo M. Scarcelli, and by Paolo Magaudda – focused respectively on television news programs and on television advertising.

The complexity of the mediation conducted by television in the social sharing of scientific knowledge is recognized by Neresini mainly on two levels, both textual: by intervening directly in the generation of multiple levels of significance of

the single technoscientific knowledge data, from the information level up to the imagery level, seamlessly; and by creating a new scene, different from that in which scientific knowledge is originally formulated and validated, where the authority of scientific knowledge is negotiated anew, according to new and different principles proper to the medium. Television has an ambiguous and complex position in this negotiation. From one side, television confirms social utility and reliability of technoscientific data, using them as starting point for debates or as sources for news; on the other side, television continues to impose and reproduce the old model of scientific undisputed objectivity – as la Follette already remarked in 1982 – pretending the existence of homogeneous hierarchies and scale of values, without ever showing the process of scientific knowledge production, with its own conflicts. At the same time television tends to impose its own criteria (from audience approval up to political interests) in the selection of topics as well as of “telegenic” experts, superimposing them to the criteria of the professional scientific community. Likewise in the television context the role of scientist as expert is, by itself, ambivalent: from one side, her or his professional expertise actually represents the scientific world in the media world, becoming a sign for it; from the other side, aside of the actual complexity of scientific world, this same emphasis on professional expertise tends to

confirm the traditional “deficit model” of scientific knowledge transmission, so hardly criticized by scientists because of the simplification it produces in presenting technoscience.

This theme is common to all the contributions collected in the volume, but finds an articulated analysis in the three chapters of the second section, which consider the role of experts in talk-shows and infotainment programs (Renato Stella), the function of scientific evidence in television debates (Andrea Lorenzet), and the differing configuration of the representation of scientific controversies in two popular science television programs (Michela Drusian)

The third section of the volume is less consistent, perhaps because of a short circuit generated by the title – “Bodies and machinery” – that allows expectations outside the analytical apparatus that gives coherence to the volume. Coherently with the previous sections, both bodies and machinery are considered more a textual theme than an object (i.e. human or non-human beings in Latour's hypothesis). The three articles deal with three case studies, respectively on how the body is presented in talk-shows on medical issue (Mauro Turrini), on the way television debates trivializes the eating disorders issue (Claudio Riva), and on the way the main infotainment Italian programs argued into the concept of “technological failure” in the Thyssen-Krupp case (Marco Rangone).

Looking at television from an historical point of view it seems to be impossible to ignore the technological changes that, during the last three decades, so deeply altered its traditional pattern of agency. The ancient analogical broadcasting model – which has been the matrix of the mass communication paradigm – lost its constituent elements when digitalization allowed the broadcasters to control the access to the signal. The authority that television communication gained during the Sixties, coming to be considered the most powerful medium in the mass media system (due to the possibility to reach “all” the people at the same time), has been rapidly eroded by the Internet growth; and it is not currently (and will not be) compensated by the broadcasters involvement in it. Television studies and media studies still tend to ignore how this technological process historically worked on the definition of the television social authority in the media system.

Nevertheless it is still true that the current social discourse about the television social authority is today still strong enough to allow us – or better to allow those of us involved in public communication studies – to think that since “so many people” still watch television, the television may be still considered “by itself” a powerful and influential medium. But this is a way to look at the past before us. What we need to face the present change. The technological history of television tells us that the authority of television has changed,

rather than ended: this is why we need to find the way to consider together text and technology to understand how television socially worked and works.

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Gabriel Gatti, Iñaki Martínez de Albéniz  
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**Tecnología, cultura experta e  
identidad en la sociedad del  
conocimiento**

*(Technology, Expert Culture and Identity in  
the Knowledge Society)*

2010, Servicio Editorial de la  
Universidad del País Vasco, 275 pp.

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The book is a collection of contributions presented at the seminar "Knowledge Society, Identity and Social Change – The Material Supports of Identity", organised in 2005 at the University of País Vasco, Bilbao, by the CEIC (Centro de Estudios sobre la Identidad Colectiva) and the Department of Sociology, and it is a material proof that Actor-Network Theory (henceforth ANT) is becoming a very dynamic field of investigation in Spain, thanks to an increasing number of conferences and publications promoted by universities and research centres.

As the three editors state in the introduction, the volume aims to fill two gaps in social sciences focusing on how society and identity are shaped in the knowledge society, which is characterised by the pervasiveness of technology. The first gap is the lack of attention given to the impact of social scientists' representations on their analyses of society and identities (sociology is not purely descriptive but also performative). The second gap is related to the material dimension of the construction of identity, which is mediated by technologies, embedded in heterogeneous artefacts, rather than being the exclusive result of social construction, as a phenomenological perspective has claimed so far, privileging symbolic and intersubjective aspects. The book is organised into two sections, dedicated to these two points.

The first section, "Expert Knowledge and Identity", adopts a sociology of science perspective to point out the influence of scientific representation in the construction of identity and society, which are not static or given once for all, but must be regarded as dynamic, heterogeneous, fluid, porous, hybrid and malleable.

The first chapter, "The Problem of Materiality in Science and Technology Studies", is written by Miquel Domènech and Francisco Javier Tirado, members of the GESCIT (Grup d'Estudis Socials de la Ciència i la Tecnologia), at the Department of Social Psychology of the Autònoma University of Barcelona. The authors have actively