



Angela Balzano, Elisa Bosio, Ilaria Santoemma (eds.)
Conchiglie, Pinguini, Staminali: Verso Futuri Transpecie [Shells, Penguins, Stem Cells: Toward Trans-species Futures], Roma, DeriveApprodi, 2022,
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Conchiglie, Pinguini, Staminali is a collection of essays, previously published in English, by some of the most influential and creative feminist thinkers (Stacy Alaimo, Melinda Cooper, Beth Dempster, Sarah Franklin, Donna Haraway, Luciana Parisi, María Puig de la Bellacasa, Zoe Sofia, Noël Sturgeon). By translating their works into Italian, this book fills, at least in part, the lack of attention on the feminist ecological perspective within the Italian scholarly and editorial world. As the editors' state in their Introduction *Com/pensare la cura transpecie [Thinking(with) trans-species care]*, the collection aims to:

bring in Italian contributions of many scholars and activists who urge us not to untie science and technology studies from the critical perspectives offered by eco/cyborg/transfeminisms. (p. 5, my translation)

The rich introduction is signed by the editors Angela Balzano (author of *Per Farla Finita con la Famiglia*, 2021), Elisa Bosio and Ilaria Santoemma – three prominent Italian feminist thinkers – and offers a very dense (and sometimes even slightly obstructive for those unfamiliar with a certain language) path within feminist new materialist literature. A clear political intent justifies the choice of each contribution, which overall is meant as a toolbox fundamental to the production of critical thought and practice:

it is then a matter of *training*, that is, of continuing to *sharpen with passion and dedication* our thinking abilities, always rooted in bodies and matter, to make them better. (p. 30, my translation, italics in the original).

The book is divided into two parts. The first brings together contributions to “thinking technoscience beyond autopoietic reproduction” (p. 5, my translation) by drawing from works of feminist authors who have reflected on the productive system (i.e., the market) as always a (re)productive system. In these essays, the theme of reproduction, in its connection with new biotechnology, is analyzed through a feminist perspective and the link between new anti-feminist fundamentalism in defense of “life”, heteronormative reproduction and “*ecocidal*” devastation is central. The second part of the book explores “trans-species futures” to “take care of past and

present” (p. 5, my translation). It presents a series of contributions to imagine alternative futures, aware of the interrelationship between past, present and future. The feminist standpoint of the authors allows them to refuse both techno-optimism and technophobia, both transhumanist enthusiasm and humanist catastrophism. Instead, the editors describe themselves as situated “biohackers” (p. 10), committed to imagining alternative, trans-species and anti-patriarchal forms of kinship and new technonatural-semiotic hybrid assemblages, in full Harawayan style.

Melinda Cooper’s first essay, *Stagnazione secolare: La paura di un futuro non-riproduttivo* [original title: *Secular Stagnation: Fear of a non-reproductive future*] reflects on the eternal return of secular stagnation theories that would explain crises of economic stagnation in relation to demographic trends. Cooper points out that at the heart of that theory is an “equation between the nonreproductive logic of finance capital and the nonreproductive (or excessive or insufficient) desire of the surplus population” (p. 61, my translation). The author dwells on it to denounce the return of reproductive nationalism and the obligation to heterosexual reproduction as a tool that conceals the asymmetries of capitalism.

Older than any of the others, but no less relevant, Zoe Sofia’s essay *Feti sterminatori* [original title: *Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, disarmament, and the sexo-semiotics of extraterrestrialism*] (published in 1984) enacts what the author calls a “sexo-semiotics of technology” (p. 64, original version). Sofia discusses the debate about abortion and the obsessive and dualistic focus on the fetus by both pro-life and pro-choice parties, which always excludes the situated relation between fetus and women bodies. She reflects on the abstractness of this rhetoric of the unborn also in connection to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as:

aspects of an ideological apparatus which addresses extinction fears only to distract us from the exterminating practices of the military-industrial complex. (p. 63, my translation)

Reflections on military technologies and abortion are woven into a broader discourse on technologies (which the author believes as always (re)productive), and on the temporality of capitalist progress as well as on the possibility of opening up spaces of real care for the existing.

L’impatto biotecnologico [original title: *The Bio-technological impact and Abstract Sex*] is a translation of the second and third paragraphs of the first chapter of Luciana Parisi’s book *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-technology, and the Mutations of Desire* (2004). The essay, in dialogue with Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), reflects upon the impact of new bio/info-technologies on sexual reproduction and strongly criticizes any attempt to naturalize bodies and reproduction. New technologies allow us to think about bodies not in relation to their functions but rather to their transformative possibilities. The concept of *abstract sex* places the body in

relation to the Deleuzian and Guattarian concept of the abstract machine, as a layering and continuous variation of biophysical, biocultural, and bio-digital elements. As the abstract machine, *Abstract Sex* implies the priority of the virtual on the actual organization of matter (body): the body is always more than its normative biological description and matter has an “unpredictable transformative potential” (p. 91, my translation).

Beth Dempster’s essay *I sistemi simpoietici e i sistemi autopietici* [original title: *Sympoietic and autopietic systems: A new distinction for self-organizing systems*] acts as the glue between the first and second part of the collection. The author discusses the concept of system and, in particular, criticizes Maturana and Varela’s autopoietic conception of living systems. Opposed to it is the idea of sympoiesis, which emphasizes the openness of living systems, characterized by dynamic and complex relationality.

Parentele future [*Future Kinship*. Original title: *After IVF*] by Sarah Franklin is again a translation of the eighth chapter of the book *Biological relatives, IVF, Stem Cells and the Future of Kinship* (2013). The author reflects on IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) to think about new forms of kinship. IVF reveals that technological development does not have a linear path only aimed at satisfying predetermined goals but is always a harbinger of hidden possibilities that can change the goals and transform the subjectivities involved. Moreover, according to the author, it undermines the “imaginary biological naturalism” (p. 139, my translation) and shows that biology itself is not fixed but changes through technology that, in turn, becomes more and more biological along the process. Biological reproduction is no longer the only form of reproduction, and this offers unprecedented scenarios for thinking about alternative forms of kinship and parenting.

The sixth chapter, *Fabulazioni speculative per le generazioni della tecnocultura* [original title: *Speculative fabulations for technoculture’s generations: Taking care of unexpected country*], is a translation of a paper by Donna Haraway on the works of Patricia Piccinini within the catalog of a 2007 exhibition of hers. Piccinini’s works show odd creatures as the result of genetic engineering and cloning. Through them, Haraway reflects on the role of science and technology in the context of the ecological crisis. To the Western technoscience that always destroys the past to replace it with something new (following the mantra of creative destruction), she opposes a technoculture of hybridization that creates new forms of queer care and kinship. Haraway imagines trans-species futures emphasizing the critical role of biotechnology for an ecology aimed not at “restoring” Nature but to unexpected generations.

Valori Familiari fra i Pinguini [original title: *Penguin Family Values: The nature of planetary environmental reproductive justice*. Second chapter of the book *Environmentalism in popular culture: Gender, race, sexuality and the politics of the natural*, 2008] by Noël Sturgeon brings together reflec-

tions on sexuality and reproduction and ecological crisis and the Anthropocene. The author shows how penguins have often been taken as a symbol of climate change but also chosen as an emblem of the heterosexual and familist norm by neo-fundamentalists or even as a symbol of gay parenting by the homosexual community. The author criticizes the anthropomorphization underlying these approaches and the use of a naturalized nature as a tool to establish the boundaries of the acceptable and the unacceptable. Overcoming a naturalized, familistic and heteronormative conception of reproduction is identified as a crucial step for the collective survival of humans and non-humans.

Stacy Alaimo reflects on the limits of the Anthropocene concept in the essay *Conchiglie in Acido* [*Shells on Acid*. Original title: *Your Shell on Acid: Material immersion, Anthropocene dissolves*. Sixth chapter of the book *Exposed: Environmental politics and pleasures in posthuman times*, 2016]. The author engages with some important authors, particularly Dipesh Chakrabarty. By discussing some of his limits, she exposes the potential of a neo-materialist and feminist approach to the ecological question, not avoiding confronting some important critiques. With an overturning of gaze, Alaimo invites us to look at the Earth not from outer space but from the depths of the seas: shells, which due to the acidification of the oceans tend to pulverize, become a warning to think about transcorporeality. Alaimo criticizes the idea that the world is “constituted mainly by entities extrinsic to the self, objects intended for human consumption” (p. 238, my translation).

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s essay, *Pensare con (la) Cura* [original title: *Thinking with Care*. Second chapter of the book *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*, 2017], concludes the collection. The author takes up some of Donna Haraway’s fundamental concepts to reflect on a relational form of thinking practice and on thinking-with as a form of situated care. Thinking-with means finding forms of mutual accountability and transforming thinking into an ethical-political practice that opposes the transcendent ideal of an “objective” knowledge as a gaze from nowhere in favor of a theory of standpoint and situated knowledges.

The book overall is a complex assemblage. The themes of the body/technology, culture/nature relationships are certainly central to all the essays, but each contribution offers a particular perspective and, more importantly, renounces and indeed dismantles the universalistic and abstract claim of an alleged scientific methodology. Instead, a situated (Haraway 1991) and partisan standpoint is privileged by the authors. Moreover, the order in which the essays are arranged is not by chance but rather built to create a second narrative exceeding the content of every single essay. The editors’ introduction helps to grasp this unity: (re)production is undoubtedly at the heart of the collection, reproduction being understood here in a broad sense, in relation to non-human critters and the survival of the planet.

The collection finally translates into Italian some sorely missed cornerstones of contemporary feminist thought. These are authors of the highest caliber, and each essay is very dense and thought-provoking. The assemblage work of the editors really succeeds in conveying the ways of an alternative and situated knowledge and a practice of *thinking-with* the authors and beyond. As a whole, as much as in the single essays, the political and ethical urgency animating the book and so well described in the introduction, emerges. The editors' intent to provide conceptual tools in order to *stay with the trouble* (Haraway 2016) is undoubtedly successful, although at times, precisely because of the richness and density of the contributions, one runs the risk of losing the nexus that holds together these different essays. In any case, *Conchiglie, Pinguini, Staminali* is an essential collection for anyone interested in STS from a feminist and ecological perspective.

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