BIOPOLITICS, MICROBIOPOLITICS, NEUROPOLITICS, COSMOPOLITICS AND OTHER POSTHUMANIST VIEWS OF THE GLOBAL SOCIETY

by

DENISA KERA

The paper compares different views on technological society that develop the posthumanist position but avoid technological determinism or social constructivism. Special attention is given to the dichotomy between the concept of biopolitics (Foucault) and the concept of cosmopolitics (Latour) in relation to the issues of plurality and hybridity.

What do we mean when we talk about technological society, information society or network society that are some of the most common attributes of globalization? Are these attributes supposed to change our view of what is society or what are technologies? Are they only new synonyms for description such as „post-industrial society", „service society", for the post - Fordist concepts of the 21st Century capitalism and transnational empires? What does the emphasis on technology bring to the social, political and economic theories and processes? Do these concepts express anything new or important about the acceleration of technologies or about globalization?

The thesis of this paper is that the concept of the „technological society" is only a symptom of the end of purely social, economical and political thinking. It is a symptom of the growing importance of theories that are hybrid and interdisciplinary in their approach to social and political phenomena. Traditional concepts such as politics, society and even family are becoming

increasingly obsolete and a source of confusion rather than description or even less normativity. In the present complex and hybrid situation we should even avoid such anthropocentric concepts for a similar reason for which we avoid concepts such as god or soul as being too theistic.

Politics is nothing purely social, cultural or political anymore, it involves a very complex relations to technology, sciences and different non-human actors. The same goes for technology and sciences and their close relations to the social, economic and political processes in our world. There is nothing purely technological or scientific that is not already part of some politics or economy. As Bruno Latour and other representatives of Science and Technology Studies show us, we should stop seeing science and technology as something that happens in the laboratories while politics is happening in the public sphere. Not only because the laboratory is a social construction but more importantly because the whole world is becoming a laboratory in a non metaphorical sense. We live in the age of biopolitics, microbiopolitics, neuropolitics and/or cosmopolitics and other similar attempts that brake down the divisions between culture and nature, politics and science/technology, fysis and techné. These new „politics" are developing a non anthropocentric views of collectivity that form the key question in our discussion of technological society today.

WHAT IS THE BASE OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY IF NOT TECHNOLOGICAL FAMILY? [1]

To show an example of what we mean by technological society and to explain our set of questions we will use one service on the Internet that explains the complexity of our situation better than any e-government project. The site called "Donor Siblings Registry" (http://www.donorsibling-registry.com) redefines the supposed base of our society and our identity - the idea and the ideal of a family. The site simply offers a service to mothers who conceive children with donated sperm to connect with one another, find the siblings of their children and create a new type of family. For example, there are eleven women that conceived their children with the same man and find out about each other over this website, after which they started to meet together, celebrate birthdays and behave like an extended family. This is not a polygamy nor promiscuity but a very simple example of

the modern marvels of reproductive science and database technologies. Women who undergo artificial insemination simply put the number of their donor on the website and can easily track the brothers and sisters of their child. Are these kids actually brothers and sisters and can we use the word family for such a collective? In the biological sense they are, in the „social" sense they become family when they start meeting each other and developing these "biological" relations. Nowadays, there are about 7000 registered users and some 2600 of them already created this new type of family involving complex reproductive and database technologies. Not only half-siblings and their mothers are using the website but lately also the donors are starting to come and look for their children out of curiosity or genuine interest for their offspring.

This site is radically challenging our idea of a nuclear family as a norm and the base of society. It is creating something more like a multi nuclear family. We could even say that the reproductive technologies together with the Internet are bringing the paradoxical return of a very traditional form of large families or even of a type of polygamy without "real" men. How to speak of such families? Are these multi nuclear families social or technological phenomenon? Are they a consequence of the human nature and our reproductive instincts? Are they a social phenomenon and expression of the socially constructed need for family or they are simply an outcome of the unnatural possibilities of nowadays technologies? Should we understand these hybrid collectives and families as a victory of the very traditional ideal of a large family or a promise of a radically new future? The relations between humans and machines, society and technology, actually always creates such hybrids that are difficult to categorize. They are hybrid collectives, maybe even cyborg or posthuman collectives in which both sides are necessary conditions. Very similar challenges and problems we are facing in the case of this website are happening on a large scale in the case of todays technological society.

HYBRID AND PARADOXICAL COLLECTIVES SINCE OLD GREECE [2]

How to speak of technological society or similar "technological" families and not fall prey to the lures of technological determinism, sociobiology, or

on the opposite side, of social constructivism? Can we really make a clear distinction today between social and political processes on one side, and scientific and technological development on the other? What is then the difference between the seemingly clear biological process of evolution, political process of globalization and for example the cybernetic process of negentropy? How are the movements and interactions of atoms different from the movements and interactions of cells and the movements and interactions of individuals, nations, institutions etc.? Are these "planes" of existence parallel to each other or they are somehow interdependent and how? How to speak of a whole which contains so many different planes of existence?

There are many examples of discourses that answer to these questions and speak of the complex nature of the contemporary world in non-reductionists terms of networks, hybridity and plurality instead of unity and structure. They are considered contemporary, but it is surprising to see how they represent one of the most traditional idea of what is society which could be traced in Aristotle. In the second book on Politics Aristotle says that the „nature of a state is to be a plurality" which is ruled by a mysterious „principle of compensation". This original and somehow forgotten insight by Aristotle is actually the motto of the contemporary reflexions on technological society: "Is it not obvious that a state may at length attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state? since the nature of a state is to be a plurality, and in tending to greater unity, from being a state, it becomes a family, and from being a family, an individual; for the family may be said to be more than the state, and the individual than the family. So that we ought not to attain this greatest unity even if we could, for it would be the destruction of the state." (Aristotle 2006) It is also worth of mentioning how he imagines the interactions in this plurality. The plural unity is manageable by what he calls the „principle of compensation": "Wherefore the principle of compensation, as I have already remarked in the Ethics, is the salvation of states. Even among freemen and equals this is a principle which must be maintained, for they cannot an rule together, but must change at the end of a year or some other period of time or in some order of succession." (Aristotle 2006)

The elements out of which a unity of a state is to be formed should be different in kind and they are ruled by principle of compensation. Even if

Aristotle does not say it explicitly, his idea is that every citizen has different interests and occupation. The contemporary views on plurality are in this respect more radical and they involve not only humans but also non - humans like animals and natural phenomena in the case of ecological politics or machines in the case of posthumanist views of society. Our main problem today with this plurality remains the same as in Aristotle time: we can not really rule together, but we have to find some order of succession, some "principle of compensation" so we do not risk tyranny.

THE POLITICS OF PLURALITY AND HYBRIDITY BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS [3]

Today, there is a whole group of political thinkers that are trying to develop a new alternative to the liberal and the communitarian positions, between the emphasis on freedom and emphasis on community, by developing the idea of plurality. This strategy could be summarized under the maxim „community without unity" (commonality with difference) that is for example the title of William Corletts book (Corlett 1989). Corlett or more notably Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy 2000) are both influenced by the deprecation of continental philosophy to reduce humans to some essential humanity, subjectivity or rationality which in turn supposes an ideal society. Nancy perceives society as an interaction of what he calls singularities and absolute alterities that create networks, assemblages, which preserve their differences. These singularities and alterities actually become even stronger when they are part of the assemblages, they are never reduced to a common ground. To express this non-unity, this plural unity, Nancy uses paradoxical expressions such as being singular plural etc.. In his view, all existence is essentially plural co-existence and the plural singularity or singular plurality is in a constant flux and interaction. To emphasize this space of plural singularities and assemblages, Nancy but also for example Jacques Derrida (Derrida 2002) brake down all traditional differences between man and god and even between man and animal. The plural unity and other types of paradoxical collectivity simply refuse any transcendental position, any divisions between something "higher" and "lower".

To summarize: contemporary society is described as an open space for hybrid identities or this is at least expected as a normative ideal. The men-

tioned thinkers do not necessarily refer to technologies and to non-humans but they do use metaphors of hybridity and networks that are common in the case of posthumanist philosophies. Other theories that incorporate strong notions of plurality and hybridity like "micropolitics" (Deleuze, Guattari 1988) or "microbiopolitics" (Thrift 2003) refer to different ways in which "non-political" and "non - social" entities enter our social life like media, design, architecture, different techniques of self that are embodied in all possible cultural rituals and structures. These theories are sometimes called "postsocial" theories (Knorr Cetina 2001) for this reason. What serves as an example of hybridity in the case of postmodern and poststructural philosophy - the relation between man and animal or some strong concept of alterity, is in the case of the posthumanist and postsocial views translated into the relation between humans and non-humans, society and technology.

BIOPOLITICS VERSUS COSMOPOLITICS: LEVIATHAN VERSUS VERTUMNUS [4]

Contemporary society as a technological society is viewed explicitly as a plural and hybrid collective of humans and non-humans by thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Daniel Dennett etc.. The concept of cosmopolitics that is used extensively by Bruno Latour (Latour 1993, 2004) is maybe best example of this tendency. Technology and sciences in Latour`s view domestice new entities in our world and open it to the heterogeneity and plurality of different new actors. We are always simply a part of complex and emergent networks that involve both human and non-human actors. Their interactions are complex and emergent so the new networks they create are neither purely social nor biological but hybrid. To describe these interactions between humans and non-humans Latour sometimes uses very strange terms such as "collective experiments", "cosmograms", "progressive compositions", "provisional assemblies", "versions of collectives", "parliament of things" (Latour 2004) etc.

This postsocial and posthumanist view of hybrid collectivity is not shared by one of the most important theorist of contemporary society - Michel Foucault. Foucault sees the technological society more as a threat to plurality and heterogeneity than an extension (Foucault 1978). New technologies and sciences destroy the political life and create what he calls biopol-

itics. It is basically a homogenization of the social beings into a biological specie by means of science and technology. The end of the political and the social is the end of plurality in this view. Science and technology simply reduce the complex and plural nature of human and social life into biological issues of survival, health, politics of population and birth rate, what Foucault calls the „normalized society" (Foucault 2003).

How did these authors came to such different conclusions when studying the relation between technology and society? How to perceive the technological society? Does it bring a dangerous unity of the new biological meta-specie, as described by Foucault, or is it a society of hybrids and even cyborgs as is often described by posthumanist thinkers such as Donna Haraway (Haraway 1992, 1997), Bruno Latour but also Daniel Dennett (Dennett 1993, 1996)? To understand these opposite views on the technological society we will use the visual metaphors of the title page of Hobbes`Leviathan and the painting of Vertumnus by Arcimboldo. They represent the anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric views of the collectivity that are the key issue in the discussion on the technological society.

Leviathan is the most famous illustration of the relation between the individual and the social - political whole. The numbers of people create one big anthropocentric or rather anthropomorphic whole, the body of the new sovereign which fits perfectly into what Foucault's calls biopolitics. People are reduced to the cells of the new organism and all plurality serves to create this new homogeneous unity. A very different example of how to perceive not only the social and political whole but also the individual is the famous painting of Rudolf II. by Arcimboldo. Vertumnus offers a non-anthropocentric view not only of the whole but also of the individual. The sovereign and even the human is reduced to a cycle of vegetables, which were supposed to depict the twelve signs of the zodiac, four seasons and the vegetables from different countries where Rudolf II. ruled. In the traditional interpretation he is the microcosm that represents the macrocosm but from our view what is more important is that he represents an emergent whole in which the original elements are not the same as the outcome. Arcimboldos` paintings offer a great examples of cosmopolitics and illustrate the posthumanist view of society and the individual. The painting "Librarian" is almost a literal translation of the famous quote by Daniel C. Dennett: "A scholar is

just a library's way of making another library" (Dennett 1993: 204).

How to speak of the technological society from this non-anthropocentric perspective? Should we use the same rhetoric that Dennett uses when he speaks of libraries? We can not seriously think that we are here because the libraries need to reproduce but there is not more certainty in thinking that that libraries exist only because of humans. The complex new lifeforms and collectives like scholars, libraries or our body can not be reduced to one actor and one essence. We do not have any idea what our cells thinks of our bodies not we can be completely certain how our thinking and doing affects the larger wholes that we are part of like our cities or states. Technological society is an emerging whole created by the relations between humans and non-humans that have a great potential to reshape the world. Maybe the closest what we can say about this emergent whole is paraphrase of another Dennett`s bon mot: Are we a society or a technology, humans or machines, or both? We are both and more (Am I organism or a community of both? I am both and more: Dennett 1996: 457).

REFERENCES

[1] Annual Report 2004-2005 (2005). New Delhi: Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications & Information Technology. Retrieved November 11, 2006, from: http://www.dotindia.com/annualreport/english.pdf.

[2] ARISTOTLE. Politics. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/mirror/classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.2.two.html.

[3] CORLETT, W. (1989). Community Without Unity. Durham: Duke University Press.

[4] DELEUZE, G., GUATTARI, F. (1988). A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia. London: Athlone Press.

[5] DENNETT, D. (1996). Darwin's Dangerous Idea : Evolution and the Meanings of Life. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[6] DERRIDA, J. (2002). The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow). Critical Inquiry, Vol. 28, No. 2 , 369-418.

[7] FOUCAULT, M. (1978). The History of Sexuality, Vol. I. New York: Pantheon.

[8] FOUCAULT, M. (2003). Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76. New York: Picador.

[9] HARAWAY, D. (1992). The Promises of Monsters : A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others. In GROSBERG, Lawrence; NELSON, Cary; TREICHLER, Paula (ed.). Cultural Studies. New York: Routledge.

[10] HARAWAY, D. (1997). Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium. FemaleMan©_ Meets_ Oncomouse™ : Feminism and Technoscience. New York: Routledge.

[11] KNORR CETINA, K. (2001). Postsocial relations: Theorizing sociality in a postsocial environment. In RITZER, George; SMART, Barry (ed.). Handbook of Social Theory. London: Sage.

[12] LATOUR, B. (2004) Politics of Nature : How to bring the Sciences into Democracy. Cambridge: Harvard University.

[13] LATOUR, B. (1993). We Have Never Been Modern. Cambridge: Harvard University.

[14] NANCY, J.-L. (2000). Being Singular Plural. Stanford : Stanford University Press.

[15] THRIFT, N. (2003). Affective Cities: New Faces of the Politics of Creativity. Panel discussion at MODINET seminar, 2003. Retrieved January 15, 2007 from http://www.modinet.dk/pdf/Aktiviteter/Nigel_Thrift_affective_citites.pdf/.