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**Imaginaries of Technoscience.
Forms, Narratives, Epistemologies**

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In contemporary technological acceleration, the role of imaginaries in shaping techno-scientific paradigms and in defining the relationship between the human and the machine tends to be marginalized. To propose an operative framework for reflection, we present here a selection of contributions from the conference *Immaginari della tecnoscienza*, held between Milan and Como in October 2024. All papers have been reviewed and reworked for this occasion and converge in this special issue of *InterArtes*, which aims to explore the relationship between technosciences and symbolic construction, starting from the hypothesis that imaginaries do not passively derive from techno-scientific development, but rather constitute its generative and orienting presupposition.

From this perspective, imaginaries act as productive and defining forces that contribute to determining the form and direction taken by contemporary techno-scientific paradigms. Adopting an approach connected to the so-called “sciences of the imaginary” makes it possible to investigate, from an inter- and transdisciplinary viewpoint, the structures that unfold between the iconic and the verbal, as well as the different levels of elaboration and transformation of images. This perspective allows us to address the problem of the genesis and function of the images that inform techno-scientific reflection and practice, while highlighting—more explicitly than is usually the case in current critical discourse—the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the human–machine relationship.

In a context marked by the expansion and intensification of the technosciences—from Artificial Intelligence to augmented and mixed digital realities, up to “social” and creative machines—the analysis of the imaginaries accompanying these developments is particularly urgent. Public and scientific debate oscillates between the phobic image of a world without humans, where machines appear as agents of human dispossession, and the manic image of a post-human future that mythologizes the autonomous power of technology as a promise

of redemption and transcendence of species limits. Despite their opposition, both poles share the same symbolic root: the difficulty of conceiving technology as an integral part of the process of humanization.

Hence the need to propose an alternative—*philiac*—image, one that recognizes the co-belonging and reciprocal influence between the human and the technical, without falling either into the logic of substitution or that of identification.

To foster a more conscious and sustainable co-evolution of the human–machine relationship, it becomes a priority to analyze the dynamics of techno-scientific imaginaries—specifically by demystifying obstacle-images and stereotyped symbolic categories that constrain thought and communication about technology; by defining new images and interpretative categories capable of orienting reflection toward a critical and integrated understanding of the techno-scientific; by advancing a genealogical analysis of the stages through which dominant techno-scientific approaches have been constituted and of their tensions with alternative paradigms; and by studying the relationship between technoscience and fiction, with particular attention to how literary, artistic, and media narratives participate in the construction and transformation of imaginaries.

These operative lines are addressed by the authors of this special issue through different disciplinary approaches and individual explorations, leaving open a wide field for further research. The aim, as already indicated, is to promote an epistemological approach capable of inscribing the techno-scientific within the human, restoring to technology its character as a cognitive, social, and ethical mediation, and recognizing the imaginary as a structuring dimension of processes of symbolization, sense-making, and the orientation of knowledge.

If, as argued, the imaginary is the operative ground where both technological practice and thought are rooted, it becomes crucial to uncover the emerging images of the human and the machine, and to understand how they shape the meaning and trajectory of techno-scientific change. Through a process of constant approximation, it thus becomes possible to begin tracing the contours of a conscious co-evolution between the human and the technological—one capable of valuing the ethical and cultural function of imagination and of orienting technical production toward a model of cognitive and social sustainability.

With this underlying ethical aim, we have organized the contributions gathered in this issue into three sections, corresponding to three major thematic axes that we set out to investigate.

The first section, “Imaginaries between Technoscientific Legacies and Cultural Narratives” (*Immaginari tra eredità tecnoscientifiche e narrazioni culturali*), addresses the historical and conceptual dynamics through which representations of the machine and of technology have been formed — from cybernetics to new forms of Artificial Intelligence — engaging both with literary traditions and with the pre-technological worlds of extra-European civilizations.

Patrizia Landi, in *Rappresentare il mondo. Italo Calvino tra scienza, cibernetica e post-antropocentrismo*, offers an analysis of Italo Calvino’s reflections on the relationship between literature and science, showing how the writer conceives scientific knowledge as both a language and nourishment for literary imagination. Calvino interweaves art, technology, and cybernetics to represent a post-anthropocentric world in which the human being is only one form among the many that compose the universe. *Le Cosmicomiche* and essays such as *Cibernetica e fantasmi* express this vision, anticipating contemporary reflections on Artificial Intelligence and on the role of the reader as interpreter and co-creator of meaning.

Along similar lines, Silvia Zangrandi, in *Gli immaginari tecnologici di Primo Levi*, reflects on the ethical relationship between humans and technology through three stories from Primo Levi’s *Storie naturali*. In these texts, Levi reveals how technological inventions, from tools of support, can become threats to human freedom and identity — producing dependence and alienation if not guided by ethical awareness, achievable only through a critical and responsible dialogue with science.

Nadejda and Constantin Ivanov, in *Technology and moral lapses in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Antonie Plămădeală’s Three Hours in Hell*, explore the possible loss of humanity in the face of technological power by comparing two literary works. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the artificial creation, deprived of empathy and familial bonds, leads to the monster’s spiritual collapse; whereas in Antonie Plămădeală’s *Three Hours in Hell*, technology becomes an instrument of torture and alienation, breaking the links between

body, mind, and society. In both cases, moral transgressions generated by the dehumanizing use of technology are denounced, in order to foster a more conscious awareness of our present condition.

The section closes with Blanca Solares' essay *Technodiversité: entre l'ordre magique sacré et le contrôle technico-scientifique*, which brings pre-Columbian knowledge into dialogue with modern techno-scientific thought, overcoming the traditional separation between magic and science. Through her exploration of the symbolic imaginary underlying the technical practices of ancient Mexico — such as maize cultivation and mineral extraction — and their evolution up to today's ecological crisis, the author highlights an ancient ethic founded on harmony between social needs and the ecosystem, in contrast to the modern one based on technological control and the exploitation of nature.

The second section, “Imaginaries of the Body, Subjectivity, and Difference” (Immaginari del corpo, della soggettività, della differenza), examines the corporeal and subjective dynamics of human-machine interaction, laying the groundwork for a reflection on emerging forms of cognitive and relational hybridization.

Claudia Stancati, in *Les récits de la peur: les automates qui nous ressemblent*, retraces the history of imaginaries associated with machines and automata — from their earliest definitions in antiquity to contemporary developments in Artificial Intelligence. The resemblance to the human being has long generated both fascination and fear, oscillating from enthusiasm to distrust. Technological fears and anxieties are amplified by literature, cinema, and digital media, creating a genuine “narrative contagion.” Yet, as the author argues, it is precisely narrative that can also serve as an antidote, offering a means to govern our relationship with intelligent technologies.

Merces Montoro Araque, in *Écofiction et biotechnologie, ou comment devenir “technophile” dans la civilisation «homme-machine»*, analyzes the evolution of transhumanist thought through its dual phobic and manic polarities: from the fear of human subjugation to the machine to the acceptance of the “augmented human”, capable of transcending biological limitations. Through contemporary science-fiction cinema — from *Ghost in the Shell* to *Raised by Wolves* and *The Creator* — the author explores the ethical, identity-based, and reproductive dilemmas that define the human-machine relationship.

Figures such as the cyborg and the AI become symbols of a post-gender, post-biological humanity, where emotion and technology coexist. This representation suggests a cultural shift from technophobia to technophilia, reformulating the very notion of the human within the civilization of the human-machine.

Najate Nerci chooses as her specific field of inquiry the Italian silent film *L'uomo meccanico* (1920) by André Deed. In her essay *Pouvoir et distopie dans le film italien: L'uomo meccanico (1920)*, she explores the intertwined themes of power and dystopia, showing how the film reflects the hopes and fears surrounding technological progress in the industrial era. By staging the conflict between human beings and their own creations, the work anticipates modern anxieties concerning loss of control and the looming dominance of machines. Yet its utopian ending suggests the possibility of an ethical alliance between the human and technology — an alliance grounded in balance, knowledge, and transcendence — thus indicating an ethical path toward coexistence and co-evolution.

The redefinition of the boundaries between the human and the artificial, with particular attention to the body and sexuality within the pornographic industry in the age of Artificial Intelligence, is analyzed by Riccardo Retez in *Tecno-corpi e potere: dinamiche di rappresentazione e percezione delle immagini erotiche artificiali*. Using tools such as deepfakes, image generators, and digital sex work, new performative identities and synthetic bodies emerge that replace real ones. In doing so, these technologies transform not only erotic consumption practices but also reproduce and intensify dynamics of power, gender, and control — raising significant ethical, social, and political questions.

The final essay in this section, *Diventare esplosivi e diventare sfruttati. Territori disabitati, droni e immagini operative nelle opere di Agencia de Borde e Femke Herregraven*, by Carla Ayala Valdés, examines two specific cases — *The Landmine Project* and *Prelude To: When The Dust Unsettles* — to show how automated vision renders uninhabitable spaces accessible while simultaneously concealing bodies and conflicts. These works expose the underlying logics of power and control embedded in contemporary visual production, revealing how such technical devices construct imaginaries of territories that appear uninhabited but are in fact marked by warfare and extractive violence. The two works invite us to reflect not only on techno-political violence but also on the possibility of critical counter-narratives that expose its implicit structures and power dynamics.

The third and final section, “Imaginaries of Interaction and Digital Futures” (Immaginari dell’interazione e dei futuri digitali), reflects on the co-evolutionary aspects of the relationship between humans and machines, pointing to possible directions for the future.

Opening the section is Philippe Taupin’s article *Imaginaires et concept-cars automobiles, sommes-nous à l’ère de l’Utomobile?*, which focuses on automotive design — particularly Italian design — with specific attention to the *concept car* and to the symbolic use of the dragon. The author observes an ongoing shift in automotive design toward what he calls the “Utomobile”, a form of experiential, connected, and interactive mobility that integrates artificial intelligence, environmental awareness, and aesthetic synthesis.

Artur Rozenstraten offers an investigation of *Imaginaires de la collaboration en ligne*, tracing a path from the participatory and idealistic model of Wikipedia — based on shared knowledge and volunteerism — to the distorted uses of collaboration on social platforms following the Cambridge Analytica scandals. He shows how collaboration can take on opposite meanings: from a democratic and creative practice to a tool of control, manipulation, and surveillance. From this emerges a proposal for *non-collaboration* and greater critical autonomy as forms of resistance, as well as, more actively, the idea of new experimental practices capable of reinventing digital collaboration in emancipatory and urban terms, as exemplified by the project *Arquigrafia 4.0*.

Stefano Lombardi Vallauri, in his essay *Il dominio umano della musica*, examines the limits and possibilities of musical production by machines and artificial intelligences. While technology today can compose and perform, listening — conscious, emotional, and rational experience — remains inimitable and constitutes the human core of music. Retracing the historical rationalization of musical material, the author shows how the delegation of creative agency to machines is the result of a long cultural process. He concludes with the hypothesis that artificial music, far from threatening the human, can in fact expand its experiential domain.

The section closes with Riccardo Valenti’s essay *The diachronic way of being. A Survey on Sociogenesis and Technical Inheritance of Meaning in Phenomenological and Post-Phenomenological Debates*, in which the author explores how meaning is formed and

transmitted over time through technical and social supports, proposing a phenomenological theory of material memory. From Husserl to Stiegler, and from Ihde to Blok, Valenti demonstrates that writing, archives, and digital technologies are not neutral tools but active agents in the collective construction of meaning. Accordingly, meaning is both inherited and co-constituted within an intergenerational dialogue mediated by technology — as exemplified in the *Destin-E* project, where this “technical inheritance” is staged, enabling a shared and temporal understanding of the world and its transformations.

The issue also includes, in the Miscellaneous section, an article by Paola Carbone entitled *Opening the Black Box: Configuring the Algorithm of a GPT-Based Professional Writing Coach*. The author explores the design of the Professional Writing Coach (PWC), a GPT-based chatbot that supports university students in learning professional writing within an EMI context. Drawing on theories of epistemic curiosity and semantic capital, the PWC functions as a dialogic tutor fostering rhetorical awareness and learner agency. Rather than generating texts, it teaches students to write through guided interaction, reshaping authorship and instructional roles in AI-supported education.

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