

MICROBES II: THE POLITICAL FUTURES OF MICROBIAL LIFE / MICROBIOPOLITICS

Due to overlap, panels 008 and 017 will be organized jointly and merged at a later stage. The papers offered to both will be looked at together and allocated to suitable sessions, which form a single panel.

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Abstract:

As states experiment their way out of a pandemic and appeal to solidarity, the pharmaceutical industry profits from a global state of exception. Sectors of the public express skepticism towards vaccines, while antibiotics increasingly meet bacterial resistance. Scientific and activist research on the microbiome, support a proliferation on probiotic life styles. Fermentations, post-Pasteurian practices, breastfeeding and non-processed human milk gain in popularity in what has been termed “the probiotic turn”. As we move into the Anthropocene, microorganisms are also rediscovered as allies in caring for the environment. They are increasingly used for soil restoration, to degrade plastic, or to capture CO₂. As people engage with microbes in care and ecological practices, they are also advertised by governments as holding great potentials and promise for new post-petroleum bioeconomies in Europe and beyond. Following a burst in interest on microbes in the public, science and policy, STS scholarship has also increased its attention on microbial life. Yet, what is STS talking about when discussing microbiopolitics? Surfing in the tension of microbial life as the next threat for human kind and the promises of the probiotic turn and their tentacular links to alter kin this panel explores the multiple ways in which the concept of microbiopolitics (Paxson, 2013) is and can be used at the crossroads of STS, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and political science to ask for the political promises and perils of this “intimacy with strangers” (Haraway, 2016:16).

References:

Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying With the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London: Duke UP.

Paxson, Heather. 2008. “Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States.” *Cultural Anthropology* 23 no 1 (March): 15-47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00002.x>.

Key words:

Microbiopolitics, probiotic, intimacy with strangers