



HealthXCross Newsletter 2023-01

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NEWS

The project HealthXCross has been launched by the kick-off meeting “[Microbes: from technoscience to social theory \(and back\)](#)” on September, 14th 2022, with the keynote speakers [Hannah Landecker](#) (University of California Los Angeles, UCLA) and [Jamie Lorimer](#) (University of Oxford) at Ca' Foscari University of Venice/NICHE. The project has started in September 2021. The first year has been devoted to the recruitment of the team and to exploratory fieldwork, conducted by the PI, [Roberta Raffaetà](#), both in a technology-led lab in the US and in the Pacific with ‘indigenous microbiologists’. From November 2021, [Lucilla Barchetta](#), the first postdoc, has led a case study about the intersection between COVID-19, interdisciplinary science and open data practices. In particular, Lucilla has examined the life of an online digital platform created at the beginning of the pandemic to advance multidimensional notions of health. In November 2022, three more postdocs joined: [Marta Scaglioni](#) is inquiring how the microbiome research is developing in Africa; [Valeria Burgio](#) is investigating the forms of visualization of the microbiome; [Victor Secco](#) is following a multi-sited European field expedition that is connecting microbes to the planetary scale. And in February 2023, [Valentina Marcheselli](#) started her research in a US lab on how the study of microbes reframe “health” at both human and environmental scales. In the meanwhile, Roberta has been offered the grant [FARE](#) (Framework per l'Attrazione e il Rafforzamento delle Eccellenze per la ricerca in Italia) to integrate the ERC project with a case study located in a lab in China. The FARE project started in December 2022, funded by the Italian Ministry of Research for 69 months, a total of 273.388€. Therefore, from August 2023 an additional postdoc, [Tam Man Kei](#), will start working with our team.

Right now, we all are in our respective fieldworks in four different

continents in the world and in September we'll be all back in Venice!



GUESTS

19.12.2022

[Margaret McFall-Ngai](#)

Carnegie Institution for Science
ECLT and NICHE Christmas Lecture 2022

Horizons in the study of biosystem structure and function

Margaret argued that we are currently in the golden age of microbiology with the advent of next generation sequencing technology. She described the microbiome revolution and how it will reconfigure the entire field of biology.

Keywords: scales, symbiosis, revolution.



09.01.2023

[Soraya de Chadarevian](#)

UCLA

From Genomes To Microbes. On Historical Metaphors And Why They Matter

Soraya examined the human/environment entanglement by retracing the "turning points" in the historical development from human genetics and molecular biology to microbiome science. In particular, Soraya drew our attention to the intersections between scientific objects, their representation as metaphors, narratives and images, with types of technological investments and funding models.

Keywords: scientific objects, postgenomics, research politics.



25.01.2023

[Maurizio Meloni](#)

Deakin University

Health And Bodies In Post-Genomics. From Genetic Causality To Organism/Environment(s) Entanglement

Maurizio presented his ideas on the emergence of a postgenomic field through historical and sociological analysis of the biosciences. From genetic determinism to epigenetics, Maurizio traced some of the politics at play in biological science. An important aspect of his talk was the pluralising of eugenics discourses beyond the more well known examples to show how ideas of heredity and genetics have interacted differently across contexts and political spectrum in the 20th century.

Keywords: postgenomics, politics of biology, pluralising eugenics



14.02.2023

[Tone Walford](#)

UCL

Ethics Of Participation In Climate Data Science

Tone, drawing on anthropological research in the Brazilian Amazon, presented their reflections on the meanings, ethics and challenges of participation traced out in the data centres and digital worlds of climate change science. Tone discussed how racialization is reiterated across information systems and explored the ambivalent space in which science lies as both a colonial enterprise and an essential resource for societies.

Keywords: participation, ambivalence, data justice.



15.03.2023

[Amedeo Amedei](#) & [Federico Boem](#)

Università di Firenze/University of Twente

New Scenarios On The Research On Microbiota For A Circular Health

Amedeo gave a broad overview of his current studies on the microbiome-immunity axis by exploring the interrelationships between pathogen transmission, immunological response and microbiota diversity. Federico reflected on the notion of biological individuality with regard to pathogen-host interactions. Drawing on his background in the philosophy of biology, he explained how immunology was critical to the foundation of the notion of biological individuality. However, emerging data about the influence of the microbiota on immunological response is extending immunology beyond the individual raising questions about the epistemological value of data.

Keywords: immunology, microbiota, biological individuality.



OTHER GUESTS

Apart from the guests above, from November to June, HXC has hosted discussions on various topics related to science and technology with biologists, philosophers, and social scientists. To start with, we hosted [Pietro Daniel Omodeo](#) and [Babu D. Senthil](#) to talk about science in between history and epistemology, focusing on mathematics to consider abstraction as a form of scientific practice.

[Uri Hershberg](#) presented his work on immunology and complex biological systems, pushing the team to think about ways to connect life and social sciences. We then focused on the *Xylella fastidiosa* in a discussion with [Collettivo Epidemia](#) and their interdisciplinary and activist scholarship on the microbial and social issues connected to the epidemic in olive trees in Puglia.

Thinking about science communication and other formats of producing academic research, we hosted discussions with [Federica Bressan](#), [Nicolo Groja](#), and [Valentina Bonifacio](#). We debated topics spanning from visual anthropology theory to the details of podcast making. With [Cécile Fasel](#), we discussed microbes as interfaces that provide a valuable lens to rediscuss ontological assumptions about biosocial relations.

We also engaged in a conversation with [Robert Meunier](#) on epistemic dependencies between biomedical research and an ecological approach. Moving to discussions on multispecies relations, [Swasti Mishra](#) offered a critical reading of the concept of “interspecies money” that proposes to bring together artificial intelligence and other-than-humans in the financial proposition for a restructuring of economies. Finally, Carolyn Deby presented her art projects through [sirencrossing](#), a collective making sound art and performance on microbiome.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Over the last year and a half, [Lucilla Barchetta](#)'s research has been focused on the role of microorganisms in multidisciplinary collaboration and multidimensional notions of health in an Italian innovation centre for research into plant disease management and climate change.

“As an ethnographer of urban environmental change, I was already familiar with plants as ethnographic subjects. In Turin, where I conducted my PhD field research, I was interested in examining human-spontaneous plant entanglements in post-industrial riverside areas. Spontaneous plants such as riverside grasses, trees, and horticultural plants that turned feral, including the so-called invasive alien species, formed a significant part of

my ethnographic subjects. These were accompanied by many 'human participants': green space users, administrators, grassroots activists, architects, urban agronomists and ecologists. I spent most of the field research 'inside' open fields and 'inside' human subjects' minds. I wanted to grasp the everyday experience and social constructs that mediated the perception and interpretation of these riverside areas 'gone wild' due to urban decay and environmental degradation. The environment of the post-industrial riverside became a laboratory to study how the ecological and the social reworked each other in the Anthropocene city.

It was a pleasant surprise to realise that the new research threw my habitual ethnographic setting upside down. This time, the field of plant-pathogen interactions entered the controlled environments of the laboratory, enabling scientists to move confidently from the genetic interiors of the organisms to the exteriors of laboratory environments. As it has been observed in social studies of scientific practice, moving plants and microorganisms 'outside' of their living habitats makes it possible for scientists to produce knowledge about plants and diseases and thus make them knowable subjects and sites, subjects and sites for knowledge extraction.

In my research path, plants began to materialize two entangled, although radically different, geographies of knowledge production and understanding of the environment that challenged the whole micro-macro distinction. Where does the human end, and where does the non-human begin in these entanglements of knowledge, subjects and environments? What becomes the micro-world that a bigger context assumes to contain? Where has to be found the junction that interconnects what is healthy from what becomes diseased or degraded?"

Pic: "Mausoleum. A shrine to obsolescent technology".



METAGENOMIC FUTURES
HOW MICROBIOME RESEARCH IS RECONFIGURING
HEALTH AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

Roberta Raffaetà



PUBLICATIONS

"Metagenomic Futures. How microbiome research is reconfiguring health and what it means to be human" by Roberta Raffaetà is out (Routledge, 2023)! The book is the English translation of the original Italian version (2020) and it is an ethnographic exploration of metagenomics.



HXC INVITED

In the first year and a half, Roberta Raffaetà has been invited to present HealthXCross project as guest speaker at various venues. [Here](#) the full list.

Pic credits: Roberta Segata, courtesy of Mali Weil/Centrale Fies.



RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Team members [Lucilla Barchetta](#) and [Victor Secco](#) participated as speakers in the panel “Revisiting identification and registration of humans and more-than-humans: long-term perspectives and implications” at the 9th STS Italia Conference held in Bologna, 28-30 June 2023.

HealthXCross is co-organizing the panel “[Molecularizing \(The Molecularization of\) life: The return of the social in biology, medicine and chemistry](#)” at the Fourth National Congress SIAC (Società Italiana di Antropologia Culturale) in Rome, 21 - 22 - 23 September 2023. Come and join us!

HealthXCross is co-organizing the workshop “[La scrittura etnografica. Esperienza e rappresentazione nella produzione di conoscenza interdisciplinare](#)” at the 11th National Congress SIAA (Società Italiana di Antropologia Applicata) in Perugia, 14-16 December 2023. Come and join us!

HealthXCross asks: *how does health come to be reconfigured in a world entangled through microbial data?*

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Principal Investigator: [Roberta Raffaetà](#)

[Project homepage](#)



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