

Posthumanism: An Introduction
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Lecture 15

Lec 15 : Biotech, Biocapitalism and Posthuman Bodies/Biology - I

So we have just finished exploring post-human biology, and the logical sequence takes us to the next subject, which would be biotech, biocapitalism, and the post-human body. Critical posthumanism, which is the main domain we are interested in, includes all the remaining passing references to popular post-humanism. Critical posthumanism is alert to Both Adriana Pechena and others have referred to it as biological citizenship. In which the material body is produced, embedded in techno-science, and capitalist structures of exploitation and bio-power.

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Critical posthumanism is alert to biological citizenship in which the material body is produced in and imbricated with technoscience and capitalist processes of exploitation of biopower.

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This means the body is embedded in technology, science, and processes that include bio-power, where the body is a laboring body, a reproductive body, or an injured body, which is the original sense of biological citizenship. Adriana Pachina refers to the people injured in the Chernobyl nuclear accident and how their injuries determine not just state aid and support but also the nature of their citizenship. So critical posthumanism looks at the material, as in the corporeal body, which is embedded in techno-science and in

capitalist structures. We can study bio-capitalism and its contextual technology, which will be biotech, under three heads. Bio-capitalism and what

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Biotech and biocapitalism can be studied under three heads

- Biocapitalism and 'lively' matter
- The 'judicialization of life'
- Science, capitalism and kinship



Biotech, Biocapitalism and Posthuman Bodies/Biology

People studying biopolitics, such as Kaushik Sundararajan and others, have referred to it as a lively matter. Second, the judicialization of life. And science, capitalism, and kinship. So let's start with biocapitalism. Biocapitalism can be defined as the transformation of human corporeal bodies, whether it is tissues, organs, brain, or

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Biocapitalism and 'lively' matter

Biocapitalism is the transformation of human bodies, from tissues to organs, into resources, commodities and disposable material.

Biocapitalism is the merger of late 20th century biotech with capitalism, and is a key aspect of contemporary *biopolitics* (defined as the state and/or corporate control over and management of populations and biological bodies).

It treats human bodies as suitable for and open to extraction, exactly like land, by companies.

It also means creating bodies and biological matter – such as animals for greater meat yield, clones as servants – exclusively for this purpose.

[Biocapitalism is the] 'convergence of the life sciences with systems and regimes of capital ... the ways in which the life sciences are increasingly incorporated into market regimes' (Sunder Rajan)

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Whatever it might be, into resources. The resources can be commodities, can be disposable material, can be used for transplantation and organ trafficking, but they serve the purpose of capitalist processes, capitalist economies, which means that we can think of this as biocapitalism. Biocapitalism is the merger of 20th-century biotechnology with capitalist processes, as you can make out from the title, biocapitalism. And the bio capitalist tendencies, which are basically datable to the 1980s and after, become a key component of biopolitics.

Biopolitics, as it was famously defined by Foucault, Rabideau, and others, is the state's and/or corporate control over populations and bodies. So, quarantine effects, compulsory vaccination, compulsory healthcare these are forms of the biopolitical, which means that the state has control over bodies. Large numbers of bodies, entire populations. It can also be defined in terms of large-scale refugee cultures, incarceration of people of particular ethnicities and races; bodies used for experimentation and extermination also fall under the category of biopolitics.

Biocapitalism treats human bodies as resources. They can be used for extraction; they can be treated as commodities. It means effectively treating biological bodies as animals, as clones for servants. It effectively means you transform human life, animal life because in posthumanism, as you know, we tend to look at both of them. Biocapitalism means transforming, converting, and rendering. Rendering is the term Nicola Shukin uses in her work on biopolitics and animal studies.

You render the body into a commodity. You render the body into a commodity. This also leads us to the next step: it's not just one or two individuals but sometimes an entire species that is subject to biocapitalism. The identity of the species, their biological material, becomes subject to control, appropriation, and commodification. This commodification could be by states, corporations, industrial laboratories, and so on.

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In biocapitalism it is not just individuals but entire species, their identities and their biological material - whether human or nonhuman - are subject to control and appropriation by corporations, industrial laboratories and the state.

Biotech companies own and patent biological materials, from DNA to entire bodies.

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Note the fact that biotech companies can now patent biological materials. They can patent the DNA of various people. They can patent the DNA of an entire species. They can patent entire bodies. When does biology become central to capitalism?

That's our overall question. What has become central to capitalism when technology evolves to control and manipulate bodies? This could be the biotech experiments we have just mentioned. But its antecedents, its genealogy, lie in things like health control, public health measures, and laboratory science, which transformed bodies into guinea pigs into experimental creatures subject to different kinds of experiments.

That means the body has a certain value. The value is prescribed in the laboratory by the state government, by the corporate company, or whatever it might be. So, biotech companies are the cornerstone of biocapitalism. Biocapitalism also produces a form of biosurveillance.

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Biocapitalism produces a biosurveillance, where organs, tissues, offspring, thoughts, and memories are all databased by the state or corporations, the second, capitalism, is the power held over life, and its constituents, from tissues to memories again, by corporate houses working with state laws and bioscience.

'What neoliberalism wants to capitalize is not simply the public sphere and its institutions, but more pertinently the life of the nation, social and biological reproduction as a national reserve and foundational value of the welfare state'.

Melinda Cooper

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And biosurveillance has one component with which we are all more or less familiar. Bioprospecting. That is prospecting, like it used to be for gold, but now it is for biological matter. This includes things like surrogate motherhood, which, as you know, is basically wombs for hire. So, if you can afford it, you hire a woman who can carry the fetus to the point of delivery so that you have a baby.

Biocapitalism, therefore, includes biosurveillance and bioprospecting. And here, organs, tissues, infants, and children are all put into a database. That database is often corporatized. It is otherwise controlled by the state. Capitalism is therefore going to control and manage life.

And it becomes a legitimate model of manipulating life itself. It also means that some lives become more valuable, some kinds of tissue become more valuable, and some kinds of transplantation become more expensive because they are more valuable. So, if you think about it carefully, Biocapitalism, as I said, is a rendering of biological matter into an object for sale, for consumption, for experimentation, and for control. Right?

Are all bodies valued the same way? No. For example, we do know that if you have even a passing familiarity with transplantation, there is an evaluation of the organs. For example, the internal organs of a person prone to alcoholism will have less value in the market than those of somebody who has a better lifestyle.

This means there's an evaluation of the biological material in terms of similar features, not just its physiological functioning, but the person itself. Did the person lead a dissolute life given to substance abuse of various kinds, or did the person have a clean living? So, we are looking at the evaluation of life. And biotechnology, in conjunction with the law and with science, has enormous power to be more accurate over biological matter.

That is, the states working with science, by which I mean laboratories, working with the law, working with the market, the demands for certain biological matters, produces legislation that enables it to control the population, the people, the bodies, and biology basically. We will be looking at these examples later, but many of you I'm sure are aware of Margaret Atwood's classic text from the 80s, *The Handmaid's Tale*. And it's a good example at this point to mention this point because *Handmaid's Tale* is about biocapitalism. It's about how a group, a country has a problem because they are mostly sterile. ensures that the race, the species, the humanity there continues by converting some fertile women into handmaids.

It's not by marriage, but it's still legal. It's not by choice, but it's legal. So the women who are fertile are meant to serve as wombs. They're impregnated and they will, at the end of the period, produce a child. After which, the maid is sent away to another house.

The child is born to the handmaid, but the handmaid has no power over the child she has delivered. And this is legal. This is perfectly legal because that is what the legislative system, the science and technology people have done in this particular country, in Madarak, at least now. So, bio-capitalism produces bio-surveillance and bio-prospecting. So, let's be very clear about this.

There is a very clear link between capitalism, the question of ownership of new and current forms of life, and intellectual property. Periodically, you see news items like Genetically modified foods and organisms are being subjected to scrutiny, whether they are subject to legislation or not, and that there is a considerable amount of financial investment in these. And you have frequent fights and disputes over patent rules, patent rights, especially in the 21st century. What does that mean?

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There is now a clear link between intellectual property, capitalism, and the "ownership" of new and some old forms of life. The development of hybrid varieties—GMO, genetically modified organisms—has resulted in new regimes of knowledge-gathering, heavy financial investment, and tighter intellectual property laws.

Patent disputes over plants, seeds and other biological materials, so common to the 21st century, are an index of this link between

"The mapping and sequencing of rice genomes provides an interesting set of cases for exploring the development of global governance through intellectual-property rights. The recent effort to map and sequence the rice genome not only illustrates the production of new scientific information, but also the simultaneous constitution of new intellectual-property regimes that do not (always) reflect current legal notions of property rights".

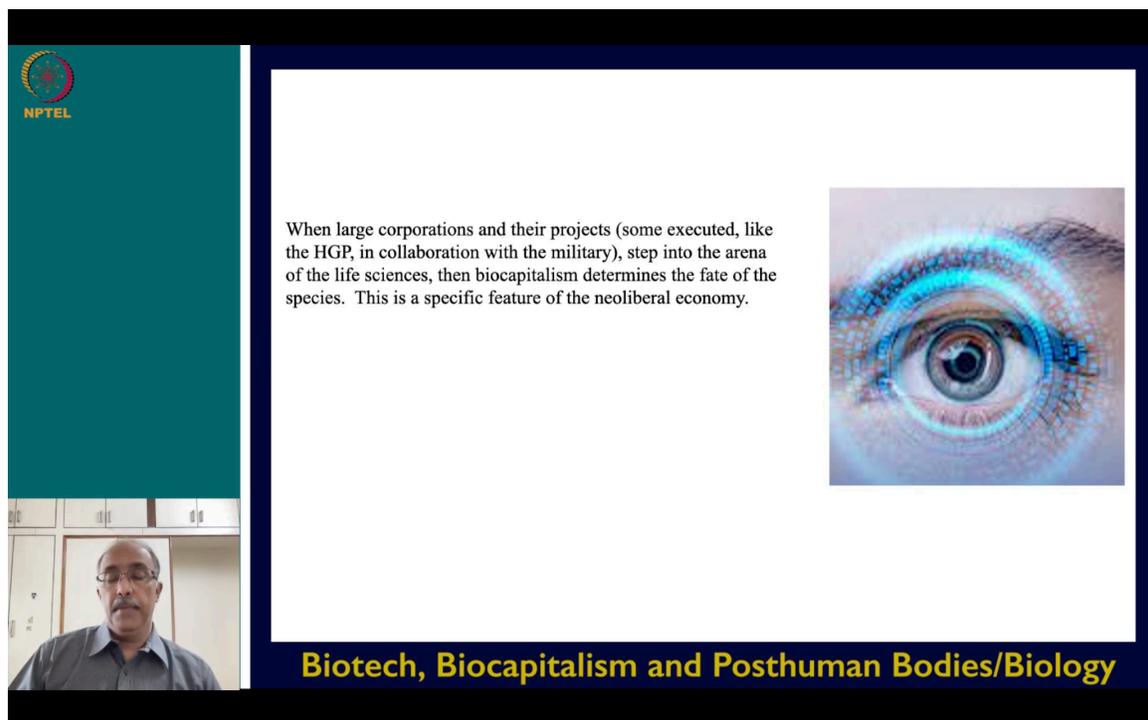
Elta Smith

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It means, very simply, people are going to put money into biological matter. People are going to put thought into creating intellectual property rights around this. Just look up Henrietta Lacks. L-A-C-K-S and her story. The HeLa line.

H small e, L capital A small. The HeLa line. It's interesting to see this as the preeminent example of how biocapitalism operates and how, say, legislation supports corporate agency or bodies over patents and things like that. Now, when you think of massive corporate bodies, such as the Human Genome Project, which some of you might be familiar with.

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When large corporations and their projects (some executed, like the HGP, in collaboration with the military), step into the arena of the life sciences, then biocapitalism determines the fate of the species. This is a specific feature of the neoliberal economy.

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So the large corporation collaborates with biology, collaborates with the life sciences to produce new species of some kind, knowledge about new species, whatever it might be. Let me draw the triad for you. There is a corporate body. There is the scientific organization body, you see. Right?

And then there is the state. So this triad is crucial to our understanding of biopolitics. The state, by which I mean the government, is interested. It might even be investing. Second, the scientific organization.

The organization of the body is also interesting because it is at the cutting edge of both technology and cures for diseases and things like that. So capitalism needs science and needs the government. Science needs the corporate office and the state. This triad is important because that's where biocapitalism has its most effect. Second, the judicialization of life.

This is simply the health regimen. For example, we are told that for a child, you take several vaccinations up to a certain age and some afterward. So we have vaccinations for whooping cough, hepatitis, diphtheria, polio, and a variety of such conditions. The second thing in terms of what happened in the pandemic year.

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The 'judicialization of life'

The health regimen that mandates the taking of pills and medication, the monitoring of health parameters (and their integration with health services where health records are databased), the forced quarantine procedures in contemporary culture, driven by, say, insurance policies or state-ordered measures constitutes a 'judicialization of life' (Nayar).

Carried far enough, with memories of eugenics of the modern era, the reproduction of *life* itself becomes corporatized and judicialized.

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What happened? During the pandemic, the government, working with the health services, said there would be quarantine, lockdown zones, and all these restrictions on traveling outside; everybody would wear a mask, get tested, etc. It also said it is your responsibility to ensure that you stay indoors, wear a mask when stepping out only if necessary as in stepping out only when necessary and follow a proper course of medication. The emphasis here is biopolitical, and it means the judicialization of life because this is a law. So you remember the circulars issued by health departments and the government, saying we would take these measures to ensure your safety.

This is what you can think of as the judicialization of life. Right?