

INTRODUCTION: THE BODY AND TECHNOLOGY

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This issue has its origins in the July 2020 ICOHTEC online conference, when online-only academic events were still new and their longevity in the academic world was uncertain. The embodied nature of academic conferences was a given, until suddenly it was not. It was at this conference that some of the other authors in this issue and I gave papers in a video-conference atmosphere for the first time. Thus, these articles were written, presented, and edited in a world in which our bodies as academics were physically separate and only partially visible through video-conference technology. Online, we could still engage with each other's ideas, faces, and voices, yet the spontaneous coffee break conversations and free-flowing exchanges of ideas that characterize academic conferences outside the panel setting were absent. As scholars of technology, we were perhaps particularly aware of the ways that video-conference technologies kept the conference format alive in practice but less so in spirit. Our minds were together, but our bodies were apart.

The COVID-19 pandemic's effect on scholarship in the history and sociology of technology has yet to be determined. Scholars of body and technology interactions, though, may be particularly well equipped to offer insight into how shifts in technological availability and socio-political circumstances affect individual and collective understandings of personhood, bodily integrity, and the ways that technologies shape and are shaped by human relationships. None of these articles addresses the pandemic as a subject per se, but all of them show how the introduction of technologies into a human activity—whether that is walking, driving, menstruating, undergoing amniocentesis, giving birth, or having sex—changes the people using the technology and their relationship to the larger society in which they operate. However and whenever the pandemic abates, it will have altered the relationship of bodies and technologies (many of them new or newly adapted) for the foreseeable future.

The articles in this issue are connected through their explorations of the tensions between individual and state control over bodies engaging and interacting with technologies; the use of technology in the shaping of human behavior and identity; the challenge of finding the technology that suits an individual body best to support its health and flourishing; and the place of technologies within individual, social, and national control mechanisms. The aim of this special issue can be summarized

in the research questions that it addresses: what did it mean to have a body that engaged with technology in the twentieth century? What does it mean in the twenty-first century?

Each author takes a unique approach to one of these questions. The first article considers the research and activism of the gynecologist Hannah M. Stone, who, as research director at the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s, used her years of experience conducting pelvic exams and barrier contraceptive fitting sessions to shape contraceptive research practices and academic representations of patient experience. Stone focused her professional work on bodies that could become pregnant, and her work showed how many kinds of barrier contraceptives needed to exist in order to provide secure technological control over reproductive capacity. She was willing to challenge federal law preventing the importation of contraceptives for use and research, illustrating how direct action can be necessary to manifest social change. Jacqueline H. Wolf's article studies the standardization of labor and childbirth in the 1960s and 1970s United States via the Friedman curve and the electronic fetal monitor. The establishment of these standards—not to mention the increased fear of lawsuits if injury or death occurred during childbirth—meant that obstetricians paid increasing attention to machine readouts and less to the laboring individual. In this case, technology and society shifted the attention of physicians from bodies to technologies and devalued non-mechanical knowledge thereof.

Azumi Tsuge's article also examines technologies of pregnancy but shifts geography and attention to an earlier phase of the process: prenatal testing in Japan. The arguments of two interest groups shaped debates over prenatal testing there from the late 1940s onward: women's rights activists, who sought to preserve the right to abortion under the 1948 Eugenic Protection Law, and disability rights activists, who sought to reduce the number of abortions conducted to avoid giving birth to a disabled child (particularly a child with Down syndrome). Tsuge shows how the use of amniocentesis and other tests increased over time as higher numbers of women timed parenthood later in their reproductive lives. The use of prenatal tests in Japan marked the pregnant body as a risky (and riskily aging) body in need of specialized medical attention and counselling. Camilla Mørk Røstvik draws attention to another technology for people with uteri—the menstrual cup. A modern brand, the Mooncup appeared on the UK market in 2002. Røstvik illustrates how the Mooncup was developed with the support of feminist activists, who championed its environmental friendliness and distance from industrially manufactured pads and tampons. Technologies for managing bodily emissions demonstrate the interest of many individuals in not only proving their environmental consciousness by what they eat or wear on their bodies, but also in disposing of effluvia in a non-wasteful fashion. Furthermore, Røstvik shows how the company's leadership navigates the challenge

of maintaining its branding and status as an “outsider” technology and the need to operate in a global system of neo-capitalism that requires profit to survive.

In another realm of interactions between bodies and technologies, Marcin Stasiak studies mobility devices for children, adolescents, and adults in communist-era Poland and shows how the Polish state intended their availability to support ideas of the Polish citizen as a productive worker. Children and adults often found these devices cumbersome and uncomfortable—not suited to their individual bodies—and that access to everyday spaces outside the home, such as schools, playgrounds, and markets, was often a hardship. Magdalena Zdrodowska addresses prostheses in the 1990s through the lens of critical disability studies: how people missing limbs or parts of limbs sometimes reject prostheses. She examines three instances of disability activists undertaking these actions in the US and France to draw attention to how prostheses interact with the identity of people with disabilities. Stasiak and Zdrodowska identify how “technological fixes” designed to assist persons with mobility concerns are not always congruent with the assistance that they want for themselves—rather, they adapt devices to suit their own needs or advocate to improve accessibility to public space and transit for all.

Bodies and the meanings of bodies change in different socio-political circumstances and places, wherever they are. The interplay between technologies and bodies shapes our human past and present. From our fingertips to your eyes, these articles shed light on these interconnections and lead readers to make further connections of their own.