

Narratives

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Half by choice, half by chance, the present December issue of *NanoEthics: Studies of New and Emerging Technologies* has a focus on narratives. While it starts with an informative analysis of a social science course on globalisation at a US technological university that included a module on nanotechnology, ethics and policy, the narrative focus comes to the fore in the following two blocks of articles.

As planned, the special section on *Body Hacking: Self-Made Cyborgs and Visions of Transhuman Corporeality*, guest-edited by Bárbara Nascimento Duarte (Brazil and France) and Enno Park (Germany), covers academic attempts to start engaging with the new cyborgism movement, as well as first-hand accounts and reflections by individuals who identify themselves as ‘cyborgs’. It is thus not only testament to the journal’s ambition to report on and stimulate discussions on emerging developments in our technoscientific culture at a very early stage, but also an example of *NanoEthics* opening its pages to a narrative bioethics or, more broadly, a narrative ethics of technology. As has been argued by Helmut Dubiel, the author of the very important and beautiful book *Deep Within the Brain: Living with Parkinson’s Disease* [1; cf. 2], the project of such a narrative ethics is not in competition with traditional forms of ethical justification, but personal narratives demonstrate how human identity can be conceived of as a provisional result of permanent reflexive efforts that

continue for as long as we are alive [3]. Although the new ‘cyborgs’ usually do not define themselves as patients, Dubiel’s work, and other scholarly reflections on the role of patients’ narratives in bioethics and medical ethics are also relevant for our understanding of how the users of ‘cyborg technologies’ make sense of their lives and self-experiments with these technologies. Recently, the new cyborgism movement has received considerable attention in the mass media of various countries. In an account of one of their ongoing projects [4], researchers at the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Parliament (TAB) point out that for quite some time now the debate on ‘human enhancement’ – which has also been taking place in this journal – has involved discussions about the consequences of a progressive merger of humans and technology. Taking the artist-cyborg Neil Harbisson as an example, the TAB researchers argue that cyborgs have recently become even more topical and are now clearly not merely a futuristic vision any longer. In their view, these developments necessitate a reconsideration of the boundaries between humans and machines, as well as an assessment of the societal consequences of the possible further spread of cyborg technologies. The special section in the present issue of *NanoEthics* can be viewed as an initial attempt to contribute to such efforts.

Besides the inclusion of personal accounts and reflections by new cyborgs, there is a second reason why the present number of *NanoEthics* can be said to have a focus on narratives. In a somewhat polemical piece, Erik Thorstensen takes issue with the influential, EU-funded DEEPEN project, from which some of the finest and most important contributions to *NanoEthics* have stemmed. In his article, Thorstensen focuses on the

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work done by DEEPEN researchers concerning the role of narratives in discourses on nanotechnology, and other new and emerging fields of science and technology. Frankly speaking, I find large parts of his critique inappropriate and was hesitant to publish it despite advice to the contrary. I eventually decided to accept the article, mainly for two reasons: Firstly because, as Thorstensen himself emphasises, it seems well highly commendable to reflect on the potential significance of the DEEPEN findings, and future approaches to the analysis of discourse about new and emerging fields of science and technology. Secondly, especially with regard to the new discourse around ‘responsible research and innovation’ (RRI), we would be well advised to go back to the legacy of the DEEPEN project, and I fully agree with Thorstensen that it is worth engaging closely with the project’s findings. I would therefore like to thank him again for submitting his paper to *NanoEthics*, although I find it rather surprising that he did not inform me several of the DEEPEN researchers had provided him with comments on earlier versions of his paper, something that should have been acknowledged at least at the end of the article. The second reason for publishing his paper in this journal was that the work done specifically on the role of narratives under DEEPEN is in fact quite often misunderstood, as I have witnessed in several discussions at conferences over the last couple of years. I am therefore grateful that the DEEPEN researchers Matthew Kearnes, Phil Macnaghten and Sarah R. Davies have contributed a paper to the present issue that not only provides the readers of *NanoEthics* with a rebuttal of some of Thorstensen’s claims, but also revisits their work on the role of narratives, relating it to a number of ongoing discussions, for example on sociotechnical imaginaries, which are of the utmost importance for our understanding of the ethical and societal aspects of new and emerging technologies. Moreover – only partly in response to remarks by Thorstensen concerning the legacy of Enlightenment thought, and making reference to Charles Taylor and others –, Kearnes and colleagues offer a broader historical contextualisation of our current discourse about technosocial imaginaries. Such efforts at contextualisation, which embed insights from science and technology studies into discourse on broad tendencies in the modern history of ideas and social practices, are also crucial from my point of view if we are to arrive at a more thorough understanding of the challenges posed today by new and emerging technologies. Pre-modern narratives concerning the relationships between

humans and technology, and indeed the narratives of progress developed during the Enlightenment are still highly relevant when it comes to the assessment of our current narratives about, and so our ethical reflection on, new technologies. I would also like to express my gratitude to Heidrun Åm, whose response to Thorstensen introduces yet another, crucially important perspective on our understanding of the role of narratives in discourse about science and technology, referring *inter alia* to seminal research by the late Herbert Gottweis. While she remarks that narrative theory is not a field in which either she or this journal have specialised, her discussion note convincingly demonstrates the high relevance of narrative theory to studies of new and emerging technologies, and in consequence its salience for *NanoEthics* as well.

Dealing with controversies can be a very challenging task for editors, but many other editorial tasks are less difficult and should be routinely dealt with in an effective manner. Unfortunately, there have recently been shortcomings on my part concerning one of these routine tasks, and there has been a lack of editorial oversight over copy editing processes. The lack of editorial oversight, together with an unfortunate series of misunderstandings and technical problems, resulted in the publication of two papers in the present issue that were in need of additional language editing. I wish to express my sincere apologies both to the authors and to the readers of *NanoEthics* for these shortcomings, and assure you that measures have been taken by the publisher and myself to prevent similar problems in the future.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish our readers a very happy festive season and a prosperous New Year!

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