
# Capturing Phantasm in Academia: Evaluation Artefacts and Gender

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# Capturing Phantasm in Academia: Evaluation Artefacts and Gender

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*Abstract:* In light of some international research, we will try to show that the persistent inequality that muddies statistics is the result of processes that concern women social experience in academia. Starting from some quantitative evidences, we will try to go beyond the data to understand how media forms assumed by visualization requirements in research, teaching and practice related to institutional work influence the representation of women professional experience. In particular, analysing the ASN evaluation artefact, we focus on how this performative level interacts with the dimension of gender. More analytically, the question we ask is whether the interfaces constituting the new academic spatiality "hold" a phantasmal media (Harrell, 2013) requiring conformity, and how this phantasm removes or accentuates gender performativity.

*Keywords:* Evaluation artefacts, academia, gender performativity, phantasmal media

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## 1. Introduction

Although for at least twenty years *Gender Studies* have been compared against new technologies and digital productions, there are still few studies, at least in the national context, that analyse the complex relationship between gender and the new visualization processes of academic work, which, through the proliferation of technological artefacts (Latour, 2005) aimed at evaluating merit, are profoundly redefining the practices, models of organization and above all the experience of professors/researchers. The goal of this paper is to problematize any presumed neutrality of such artefacts, emphasizing how technology itself and gender are socially constructed categories, discursively reproduced and thus potentially re-definable. If gender is a technology, it is equally true that technologies are *engendered.* All technologies are in fact produced, conveyed and consumed within a complex network of historical-social relationships, within which they influence both gender relations and the symbolic and material conditions of existence of female subjects, in a sort of reciprocal and continuous feedback (Hayles, 1999). As Wendy Faulkner writes, «both gender and technology are built and potentially rebuildable and both have a performative and procedural character, rather than given once and for all and unchangeable» (Faulkner, 2001, p. 80).

Starting from these theoretical premises, we will stop to consider the forms and processes through which technology - specifically linked to the evaluation of merit - becomes gender-related. The focus will therefore be on the gender "of" technology, i.e. on analysing the "removed" contents of technologies through the use of discourses, practices and algorithms that are posed as intrinsically gender-neutral. Constructing analysis around this focus is a complex operation. The claim to neutrality of discourses and technologies and, more generally, of the «culture of evaluation» (Pinto, 2014) which, to quote Foucault, stands as «aleturgy» (Foucault, 2012), is in fact an expression of an attitude that Maddock and Parkin (1993) call «gender blindness» and which translates into suppression of gender awareness and an exercise in control, especially through organizational practices that depersonalize, objectify and reinforce existing cultural and power structures.

As we will try to highlight, however, technology is never neutral, and above all it is not simply composed of a set of objects, algorithms and tools, but is socially constituted and concerns the formation of power relations at different levels. In particular, as Bevilacqua and Borrelli write, in the case of evaluative artefacts such power relationships are established and maintained through a justification and naturalization of a classification mode that is imbued with «symbolic violence» (Bourdieu, 1984), since «it also induces those who are in the position of subordinates within a relationship of domination to understand

themselves on the basis of patterns and models of thought that are an internalized product of those classifications» (Bevilacqua & Borrelli, 2014, p. 81).

Referring to the concept of *phantasmal media* (Harrell, 2013), further pointed out, it will first be necessary to try to reveal the gender phantasm and make it explicit. Paradoxically, in fact, dismantling the gender order means first of all making it visible (Lorber, 2000), paying attention to discursive practices, to bodies and their language, to fractures, to "things unsaid" and to male-female dualism as an axis of separation inside and outside technologies (Martin, 2004). Only in this way is it possible to state, as Judith Butler did (2004), that gender is not a cold category of normalization. Gender is a space of individual and collective action that can and must be constantly occupied and challenged by subjects and practices that are deconstructive - undoing gender - and reconstructive.

In light of some international research we will try to show that the persistent inequality that muddies statistics is the result of processes that concern women social experience (Dubet, 1994) in academia. Statistics reveal that there are different forms of discrimination at national and international levels which still characterize women's situation in the academic world. For example, at the European level the *She figures* point out that women literally disappear at the top levels, i.e. where power, resources and influence begin to grow (*She Figures* 2003; 2006; 2009; 2015). *She Figures* (2015) - the European Commission dataset on the presence of women in the tertiary sector - shows that in the 27 countries of the European Union (EU) only 15% of Higher Education institutions are administered by women. Furthermore, this trend seems to affect countries that implement very different gender equality policies. In the countries of the EU, *She Figures* (2015) also shows that women's careers in academia remain strongly segregated vertically. The proportion of women who in 2010 represented Grade A (full professorship) was, in fact, only 7%, while the difference in success rates in obtaining funds for research seems to suggest that the same category of "merit" cannot be defined as gender-neutral (Thornton, 2013)[1].

In the Italian context as well, data analysis (MIUR, 2016) highlights and confirms the same phenomena described above in a scenario that, as Bianco stated, when observed transversally by disciplinary field, appears to show a

[1] For example, in the 2017-2013 period, the male success rate in ERC Starting Grants was 30%, while that of women was 25%; for Advanced Grants the rate fell to 15% for men and 13% for women (Husu, 2014). Even in the northern European countries, traditionally more advanced in gender policies, women occupy only 2% of top positions in top research centres. The lack of recognition of women's research capital is also evident in the British 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), in which male academics had about 40% more opportunities than their female colleagues to be evaluated positively (Schucan Bird, 2011). As if this were not enough, in the United Kingdom women's salaries also remain significantly lower than those of men who hold the same roles, as emerges from the Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA, 2013).

female population divided into two groups: one - the largest - of women who have little opportunity for progress and remain confined to inferior roles for the rest of their lives, the other consisting of women who manage to have slower, but not very dissimilar, paths than men. More specifically, the MIUR Focus *Le carriere femminili nel settore universitario* (2016), reveals that the percentage of women in the different academic levels stands at: 50.6% for holders of research grants; 45.9% for university researchers; 35.6% for associate professors; 21.4% for ordinary professors (MIUR, 2016). These data make it possible to highlight and confirm some well-known phenomena in the studies on gender equality, namely: 1) the *vertical segregation* of women's academic career: the more we climb the hierarchical ladder the more we spread the gap in favor of men; 2) the so-called *leaky pipeline*, or the progressive exit of women from the path of academic careers once the period of university training has ended; 3) the *glass ceiling*, a famous metaphor of a sort of invisible barrier, measured by a specific index that expresses the difficulty of women to access top positions for obstacles that are often difficult to identify. While comparing several years (for example 2005 and 2014), the data offered by MIUR allow us to find that, in this period, the changes detected are very small and not such as to change the general trend.

It is therefore not surprising that women are more present in the younger age groups: almost 48% of the total are under 35 and are predominantly holders of research grants (43%). In the age group of the over 55, there are, instead, just over 30% of women and they are mainly ordinary professors (10%) and associates (12%). Even the distribution by disciplinary area and gender of teaching and research staff is not very homogeneous and rather traditional. In fact, while about half of women (49.5%) belong to the "Humanities" area, just over a quarter (26%) belongs to the "Engineering and Technology" area, highlighting once again the existence of horizontal segregation (MIUR 2016).

Starting from this quantitative evidence, we will try to go beyond the data to understand how media forms assumed by visualization requirements in research, teaching and practice related to institutional work influence the representation of professional experience. In particular, our interest is focused on how this performative level interacts with the dimension of gender. More analytically, the question we ask is whether the interfaces constituting the new academic spatiality "hold" a phantasmal media (Harrell, 2013) requiring conformity, and how this phantasm removes or accentuates gender performativity.

## 2. A phantasm wanders the university

The transformation of the university from a social institution to a social organization, according to Chauì (1999), has gone through a series of phases:

the *functional university*, characterized by a close relationship with the dictates of the market, for which the university adapts its contents and offers new courses to intervene on employability; the *university of results* defined by a closer relationship with industry, both for employability and for innovation; and the *operational university*, regulated by development contracts, evaluated by performance indicators, designed to be flexible, governed by programs and strategies of efficiency and organizational effectiveness. In this paper, the field of investigation is the so-called operational university. There are at least three levels involved in the operational transformation of the university: a *macro* level concerning the structure of national systems on the global level, a *meso* level in which the restructuring of central organizations such as universities, faculties and departments is determined, and finally a *micro* level that redefines the practices mainly of research and teaching, in our case, among professors/researchers. The prevailing objectives of the three levels are, respectively: the classification of universities within a global ranking; the systematization and management of data on all the typical activity flows of the academy; the collection and visualisation of the same activities by those who operate there.

At all levels, the transformation was closely linked with the technological evolution, for which technological artefacts have ever-increasing importance, especially databases designed to connect, systematize and centralize information.

This brief introduction to the section serves to bring out what we define as a *new academic spatiality*, articulated in the interfaces of the systems we, as professors/researchers, are called upon to deal with. The interaction channelled through the interfaces has, from our point of view, a strong influence on the representation and, retroactively, on the perception of the work and thus the reflective professional experience of being an academic.

The rhetoric conveyed by the global paradigms guiding the transformation of systems of *Higher Education - knowledge society*, the NPM (New Public Management), excellence, the process of building a European space for university offerings (EHEA)[2] etc. - are stratified and translated by technologies. However, the hypothesis advanced in this essay, according to a bottom-up reading of practices, is that regardless of the absorption of rhetoric, the technological artefacts aimed at mapping the productivity of academia contain social models, social relations and implied ideas *of and on gender*, allusive and tacit, which resist a superficial analysis. The prevailing idea is that these result from a mere translation of policy objectives. What escapes this analysis is the social, cultural and linguistic constraints that contribute

[2] European Higher Education Area: quality Assurance system finalized to standardize Higher Education in Europe.

to the "empowerment" and "naturalization" of technological practices; these restraints once they are established in media technologies aimed at setting the flows of university activity (Landri, 2015).

We have therefore chosen to adhere to an anthropology of materiality (Bray, 2007), artefacts and interfaces. In the perspective to explore the possibility that 'agency' is not only an attribute of individuals or institutions but also of non-human entities (Mancuso, 2014) and developing Ahern (2001) anthropological standpoint, it can be said that the language of algorithms produces a specific agency, the questions that guide this paper are the following: what are the systems, artefacts and interfaces that map the activity of the researcher/professor? What kind of logic do they use? Is there an 'agency' of technology inherent in the language of classification, cataloguing, positioning, objectification and taxonomy of the academic activity? And finally, to what extent is the agency of the artefact measured against the dimension of gender.

Although in this paper it will not be possible to give full answers to all these questions, we believe it necessary to explore the question of how this orientation to techno-accountability yet again disadvantages women, or those who choose to not adhere to a univocal logic - masculine, white and oriented to a highly formalized knowledge. To this end, we have first tried to develop an on-site analysis of the artefacts/interfaces that define the work of visualization, control and management of academic work (*Table 1*). By analysing the artefacts described in the table below, we pose the more general question of how the social experience of the university professor/researcher includes not only the role but *the way in which one embody the role* (Dubet, 1994), thus the subjectively oriented dimension "plunges" into this new academic space. The verb "to plunge" is intended to suggest a hypothetical tension between the subjective gender-sensitive dimension and the demands of accountability. More than fifteen years after the intensification of the so-called reformist season in Italy, it is possible to state that standardized quality procedures represent both the objectives and the tools of the system. The consequence has been the formation of undifferentiated institutional identities in which the prevailing logics continue to be neo-bureaucratic (Benadusi, 1997).

In this paper, therefore, we do not consider the artefacts mentioned above as *dispositif* (Foucault, 1977) but we pose the question of how these can be transformed into dispositives if they are presumed neutral. Having to certify a profile that meets certain criteria, the major risk in artefacts is in not evaluating the starting conditions and lateral strategies of the social actor, and therefore the variety of ways in which one inhabits the role of professor/researcher. First of all, that which refers to gender performance.

Table 1. Main artefacts/interfaces that define the work of visualization, control and management of academic work

| Artefact/Interface | Stated objectives |
|---|---|
| **Email** | Institutional relations, relationships, communication, visibility, institutional commitment |
| **Infostud** | Student career monitoring |
| **IRIS formerly U-GOV** | Research activity monitoring |
| **Course description - GOMP teaching staff** | Self-certification of teaching and service to students |
| **ASN** | Certification of scientific qualification |
| **VQR** | Evaluation of research results |
| **OPIS-teachers form** | Teachers and students survey |
| **SUA** | Departmental activity declaration - Department work input |
| **University projects** | Access to basic research funding |
| **Organization of conferences, internationalization activities (Erasmus, visiting professorship, etc.)** | Access to teaching resources |
| **PRIN** | Access to research funding |
| **European funding** | Access to research funding |
| **Administrative area** | Salary and social security treatment |
| **WOS SCOPUS** | Bibliometric classifications |

### *2.1 Phantasmal media and blackboxing processes*

Tiziana Terranova introduces some interesting reflections on the fact that every software produces models of subjectivity and social models (Terranova, 2004; 2016). Behind every interface there are models of social physics, social relationships that are, in a way, never *a-gender* because they draw on social images. The concept of *Phantasmal Media* introduced by Fox Harrell in 2013 already focused on the issue. Phantasmal media is a heuristic tool for understanding the way cultural values are built within computational systems, or useful for investigating how some assumptions of the real world persist in the virtual world and how algorithms implement both existing forms and new phenomena of identity[3]. Such mirages operate within sys-

[3] In this case, consider the NoVQR movement developed in several Italian universities in recent years. It is a protest movement, with the keyword STOP-VQR, aimed at boycotting (VQR), with many researchers refusing to submit their work for evaluation. To be aware of

tems and one can immediately understand their meaning derived from an artefact-held view of the world. Investigating the production of a phantasm by *computational media*, *phantasmal media* constitutes above all an approach to a fundamental area for the social sciences, or the convergence among programming, representation and performance. Unmasking phantasmal media means introducing a fissure into the process of world hyper-evaluation (Perniola, 2009) that keeps the relationship between programming and representation constantly open and to maintain a critical look at the closure and naturalization of the black box (Harrell, 2009). The high technical and mathematical content of artefacts produces what Mazzotti defines as a *blackboxing* process. These are procedures of a logical-deductive type, and therefore - presumably - neutral, instrumental (Mazzotti, 2015, p. 266) but which in the end become closed technologies, mostly incomprehensible to the non-specialist observer. Putting technology into the black box means making it so obvious that it will be escape notice by users, sometimes even by analysts, who then cease to see it as contingent and modifiable and instead accept it as natural (Mazzotti, 2015, p. 465). In this regard, a paradox pertaining to the blackboxing process is suggested by Žižek (1997): the implicit request for data in the pressing and constant demand for visualization, following the transparency rhetoric typical of *New Public Management*, ends up undermining this principle, in that downstream of the process it is almost never known how that classification was produced.

### *2.2 Phantasmal media and gender performativity*

In this section we will attempt to see how cultural values are built into computing systems; how some of these issues from the real world persist in the virtual; how actual data structures, how actual algorithms implement both long-existing and newly-emergent phenomena of identity. The issue we consider is indeed gender.

Our hypothesis is, therefore, that the phantasm triggered in technological artefacts for visualizing/evaluating the activities of research professors neutralizes the controversial relationship between gender and the academy. As already shown, the question is still very present in research. We mean that the alleged neutrality of the algorithm, the non-gendering of design processes, removes the key question of the relationship between performance and power in universities. Using Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), we wonder how the meritocratic phantasm, carried by black boxes, ignoring the privilege of being *male, white, global and with a privileged habitus*, transforms it into merit.

the extent of the protest, consider that in some universities the rate of refusal has been up to 50%.

At this point we will refer to some studies that describe the experience of being a woman in the academy, and we extrapolate some key concepts to verify to what extent these works suggest the presence of the phantasm. This reference is made, first of all, to the "portrait" of the "ideal academic", traced by Thornton (2013), which the author views as the model of a worthy academic constructed from new discourses of the performative university. Despite the rhetoric of the neutrality of merit, the model does not appear to be gender-neutral at all. The ideal academic is first and foremost a *technopreneur*, an intellectual strategy to combine scientific and technical know-how with a sense of business: «This 'ideal academic' is expected to engage in a sort of business politics by promoting the self and exercising something akin to marketing role» (Thornton, 2013, p. 134). Subjected to discourses that affirm quality, performativity and accountability, the ideal academic is also a *Benchmark Man*: «the normative masculinist standard which favours those who are white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class, not elderly, espousers of right-of-centre politics and a nominal mainstream religion, if any» (Thornton, 2013, p. 1). For the author, in summary, despite the ostensible "feminisation" of the academy, the liberal myth that merit is stable, objective and calculable lingers on. She also argues that a re-masculinisation of the academy is occurring as a result of the transformation of higher education wrought by the new knowledge economy. In response, the ideal academic has become a scientific researcher with business acumen who produces academic capitalism. Through his "mobilising masculinities" practices (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), this new ideal academic evinces a distinctively masculinist hue in contrast to the less-than-ideal academic humanities or social science teacher with large classes, who is more likely to be both casualised and feminized (Thornton, 2013, p. 127).

The ideal-type of "less-than-ideal academic" is then a woman, in the humanities, a precarious researcher and devoted to teaching, a thesis that also supports Fitzgerald's view that the "new" restructured university really does nothing but reaffirm the traditional gender division of labour: despite the rhetoric, especially in the UK, which maintains the need for flexibility, today as in the past "rewarded" academic careers continue, in fact, to be structured around family ideologies that allow men to undertake uninterrupted professional paths, based on unpredictable schedules and commitments, periods of training abroad, participation in international conferences, and experiences as visiting professors at other universities, showing that freedom from responsibilities is still strongly gendered, also in the academic context (Fitzgerald, 2014). The author also describes the pressures women are continually under, to respond to the imperatives of new university institutions that aspire to become transparent, through the use of new forms of control

based on accountability, performance, efficiency, individualism and competitiveness.

On the other hand, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) focus on the processes of capitalization of emotions, ending with the reflections of Arlie Hochschild (1983) that "emotional work" should also extend to professions of teaching and research. In fact, according to the authors, women continue to be placed differently compared to their male colleagues, in the gender division of emotional work linked to management and research. The roles related to the "care" of students, human resources, teaching and, more generally, all institutional housekeeping activities (the running of the home-university), still numerous and tiring emotionally and psychologically, in fact, continue to be entrusted mostly to women, but are competencies not rewarded by the new mechanisms for assessing merit (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007).

The work of Leathwood and Read (2013) also shows that women in particular, at all levels of the hierarchy, feel strong pressure to perform and be constantly visible. The authors also report Hacker and Armenti's study (2004) from which disturbing symptoms related to profound qualities emerge, such as the concern of female academics of not being sufficiently smart and constantly having to justify their value in a university culture mainly oriented towards men. Linda Henderson's research finally exposes some of the drifts that processes involved in doing research can lead to. In particular, in *The production of the academicwritingmachine* (2016), Henderson, Honan and Loch report the results of research on the ways young female academic teachers write, and on teaching practices. These researchers risk being devoured by what Henderson describes as a dangerous and monstrous machine that demolishes their scientific creativity, reducing them to "mechanical writers", without thought. But the *academicwritingmachine*, like Thornton's *ideal academic*, continues to be *gendered*, in this case because it tends to reproduce binarisms - work/private life, success/failure - based on a clear model of normative masculinity. As the authors observe, in this regard:

We wonder why academic life is defined by binaries: work-life, success-failure. What are we doing when we work so hard at this never-beginning, never-ending work of the academicwritingmachine? Why do we allow this machine to define-determine the binaries? We can take pride in our skills in navigating the machine's workings: journal rankings, teacher evaluations, university journal lists, ROPES, SCImago, FOR codes, ERA, Scopus, Google Scholar (Henderson *et al.,* 2016, p. 8).

The *academicwritingmachine* now looms heavily, as Henderson, Honan and Loch had investigated in 2015 research on the satisfaction of university teachers, or rather the desire to work on lessons and devote themselves to teaching students, deriving from classroom experiences the "pleasures" of teaching that would suggest topics of interest to be explored in publica-

tions: It's only the endings that matter in the neoliberal university, not "the silences and elisions". The paper reporting the research experience is titled: *Producing moments of pleasure within the confines of an academic quantified self* (2015).

At this point, inspired by the aforementioned studies, we return to our table and hypothesize how the phantasm might behave, particularly focusing – in the next subparagraph- on the ASN artefact. This is obviously an exploratory hypothesis. We propose again Tab.1, reducing it to those artefacts to be passed through for recognition and career advancement.

Tab. 2. Artefacts to be passed through for recognition and career advancement

| **Artefact/Interface** | *Phantasmal media* | *Agency* |
|---|---|---|
| **IRIS-ex UGOV** | Continuity in the publication, homogenization and verticalization of the knowledge produced; strategic and performative marketing and communication skills; language skills and time resources (having spent long periods abroad to learn languages and cultivating useful career relationships); choice to oversee global issues (less interest for what is rooted and local) | Productivity control; global placement of research results; assessment of socio-economic impacts |
| **Course description - GOMP teaching staff** | Purely quantitative and non-qualitative reading of the relationship with students; standardization of the teaching experience; | Visualization and accountability of the time dedicated to teaching; |
| **ASN** | Time resources for organization and networking; self-appreciation; combativeness; mobility (exemption and outsourcing of care); | Evaluation of organizational skills, management, strategic marketing, competitiveness, networking, internationalization |
| **VQR** | Reputation, authority, pertinency, relevance, rank, impact, scrutiny | Distribution of prestigious and economic resources; |
| **SUA** | Face time, self-appreciation | Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation (AVA) |
| **University projects; PRIN; European funding** | Compliance and conformity | Coordination, networking, bureaucratic and administrative skills, reporting skills |

In the light of research on experience, we can state that the persistent inequality that pervades statistics is the result of processes that relate to experience and the way one subjectively fulfils one's role. Making the choice of not performing a hegemonic masculine academic role means attributing meaning and purpose to some processes and not to others; it means having made choices or having suffered them. Above all, it shows some skills have been absorbed and others have not. The expertise required to perform well in the interface, and not have the sense of lack, of inadequacy, is too tilted to the masculine because it calls for "neutral" competencies with respect to the cultural and social difference to perform a feminine identity in academia, and this risks not to take into account how deeply innervated power is in self-promotion practices, of *self-appreciation* (Feher, 2009).

This means then that the phantasm is *engendered*, meaning it has traits that frustrate women's role, thus far performed and settled in the academies. The phantasm continues to wander in a place where roles of responsibility within the organization are the prerogative of men, where there is a culture of distrust towards a woman who is out of step and does not conform to the idealized profile. The phantasm favours the male, white, global, with certified titles, techno-entrepreneur and endowed with economic resources or capable of mobilizing them; with a lot of time to devote to research and little inclined to caring/teaching (Pulcini, 2003), able to mobilize resources for networking and power. Though the dominant logic is networks, the time of organizations remains pyramidal (Leccardi, 2009, p.113); it is a time when the only place to make one's voice heard is near the top, while the female, more marginalized, remains mute - less frequently, but still.

Many studies agree that motherhood during training is a bottleneck in the professional lives and careers of academic women, because it imposes a time frame on the body and life, and because it opens up a hierarchy of priorities that is no longer that of work. Suffice it to say that while male university teachers are married, almost all with children (a higher percentage than for the population as a whole), women show an extraordinarily low propensity to marriage and motherhood[4].

But the point of this paper is not motherhood per se but as a symptom of a way of fulfilling a role that is relational, a combination of logics, a holding of opposites. Touraine (2006) writes that women no longer want to choose between emancipation and care, between work and children, they choose both, they choose ambivalence. But ambivalence (Tabboni, 2007) takes time and how much time is the phantasm willing to grant?

[4] In Italy, for example, the share of single and childless academic women increases systematically by bracket, so that 30% of women researchers are unmarried and childless (no small number, for adult women with an average age of well over 40); among women as a whole at the end of the 1980s they actually numbered 60% (Bianco, 2004).

The phantasm imposes: internationalization, linearity, sequentiality, reticularity (non-relational), innovation but already consolidated (the notorious category A in publications). The "lateral" adaptation strategies that women have had to adopt to survive in the academy are neither seen nor recognized. The university rewards full time commitment. The phantasm pretending to be neutral wanders it saw instead conservatism, and in our country a Mediterranean and sacrificial model. The algorithm that manages the interfaces mortifies the ambivalence (Touraine, 2006; Tabboni, 2007) that makes it possible to balance work, life, rationalization and orientation to subjectivity. This ambivalence is that strategic resource that then translates into relational, negotiating skills which we also see within the academy, and which the phantasm does not detect because it is designed to peg those who can amass resources of money and power, which women are harder pressed to mobilize (Fontana, 2015; Giancola & De Vita, 2017).

*2.2.1 "Conjuring" the phantasm through ASN*

We have decided, by way of example, to show in more detail how the phantasm "works" in one of the artifacts mentioned above, that of the ASN (National Scientific Habilitation) introduced by the law n. 240 of 30 December 2010 as follows:

> *(Pursuant to Article 16 of the Law of 30 December 2010, n. 240): The legislation in question introduces a new way of recruiting teaching staff, based on the achievement of the requisite of scientific certification. This assessment is carried out by national commissions and certifies the scientific qualification of the candidates.*

The first question that arises is where this dispositif originates from. Artifacts are never fixed objects but undergo changes over time, they are always on the move (Mazzotti, 2006). In the case of the ASN, in fact, we are at the second round since its introduction. So, the hypotheses we pose concern the "strong trait", the imprinting of this artifact. It is a dispositive grafted into the global policies of transformation of university systems with a review in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Our national system has thus looked at the Franco-German experience, but also the Spanish one in which *Habilitation* is a prerequisite that certifies suitability for the profession and career advancement. While sinking its roots in the Humboldtian university, this dispositif in the implementation seems to have absorbed the logic of regulating scientific production, typical of New Public Management, since the ASN is closely related to the VQR (*Research Quality Evaluation*). By way of example, reference is made to the discipline and neo-categorization processes of scientific production determined by the introduction of the new criteria for the eligibility of scientific research products: the lesser use of the *monografia* (monograph) in favor of articles published in class A journals,

the downgrading of *curatele* (curatorships), the push towards co-authorship with foreign authors as an indicator of internationalization, etc.

Returning to the gender question, to show more closely how the phantasm operates, the question arises whether the phantasmal media ASN discriminates by gender? It is not easy to answer this question even because the data relating to the last ASN session are not yet available. In a note by ROARS edited by Baccini (2014), which refers to the first data, the question is nevertheless debated. According to MIUR data (2013), although the professors are still 79% men, the ASN provides signs of improvement: the share of women among those qualified to associate is 39.3% and the share of women qualified to ordinary is 28.9 per cent, therefore in line with what happened in local *concorsi* (local competitions) until 2012. Moreover, looking at more recent aggregated and stock data about the number of full professors in Italy, it is also evident that there is a progression in the representation of women. *Table 3* provides an overview of the evolution of the proportion of women professors, for each of the 14 disciplinary areas of the ASN: between 2012 and 2016, a slight increase occurred across all the disciplines (Marini & Meschitti, 2018).

There is therefore no reason to state that the evaluating commissions were discriminating on the basis of gender. Yet, it seems that this time it is enough to "conjure" the phantasm because women have chosen to voluntarily surrender to participate to the ASN. To be interesting, for the purposes of our reflection, is in fact the self-selection phenomenon reported in the same works (Baccini, 2014; Marini & Meschitti, 2018). However, the overall results of the ASN show a lower proportion of women than men in relation to the number of applications submitted. The percentage of those who presented enabling to associate is in fact less than proportional to their share in the role of researchers (11%), and especially in the rating to ordinary share of women among the participants in the competition for the ordinary is 38% lower than their weight in the lower roles (see ASN repository and *Tab.3*). Women seem in fact choosing to voluntarily surrender to the academic game, resulting in an unbalanced flow of qualifications by gender and perpetuate the vertical segregation (Abramo et al., 2015; Bagues et al., 2017; Marini & Meschitti, 2018).

Although there is therefore no direct correlation between ASN and female under-representation, it was enough to "shake" the phantasm ASN because women (especially the associated) have deemed not to possess the requirements produced and deemed by the evaluation commissions essential for upgrading. As we will see these requirements call into question a phantasm of power that once again favors men or to better say a performance for men (Butler, 2004).

Table 3. ASN and promotion by gender and disciplinary area, absolute numbers and percentages. Source: MIUR Ministry and ASN repository (in Marini e Meschitti 2018)

| | **ASN** | | | | | | | **Promotions** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Disciplinary Areas** | M | | | F | | | M | | F | |
| | a | b | c | a | b | c | d | e | d | e |
| **A1 Mathematics and Informatics** | 725 | 309 | 42.6 | 261 | 111 | 42.5 | 63 | 20.4 | 18 | 1 |
| **A2 Physics** | 1063 | 635 | 59.7 | 255 | 154 | 60.4 | 68 | 10.7 | 11 | 7 |
| **A3 Chemistry** | 430 | 253 | 58.8 | 249 | 163 | 65.5 | 49 | 19.4 | 19 | 1 |
| **A4 Earth Sciences** | 327 | 141 | 43.1 | 98 | 30 | 30.6 | 24 | 17.0 | 2 | 6 |
| **A5 Biology** | 821 | 449 | 54.7 | 591 | 270 | 45.7 | 72 | 16.0 | 33 | 1 |
| **A6 Medicine** | 2427 | 1185 | 48.8 | 735 | 318 | 43.3 | 219 | 18.5 | 48 | 1 |
| **A7 Agricultural and veterinary sciences** | 531 | 324 | 63.2 | 237 | 138 | 58.2 | 58 | 17.9 | 22 | 1 |
| **A8 Civil engeneering and architecture** | 801 | 323 | 40.3 | 310 | 116 | 37.4 | 75 | 23.2 | 22 | 1 |
| **A9 Industrial engeneering and information system** | 1338 | 690 | 51.6 | 282 | 138 | 48.9 | 153 | 22.2 | 27 | 1 |
| **A10 Classical studies, philology, arts and literature** | 961 | 484 | 50.4 | 1010 | 525 | 52.0 | 78 | 16.1 | 63 | 1 |
| **A11 History, philosophy and psycology** | 920 | 355 | 38.6 | 571 | 261 | 45.7 | 66 | 18.6 | 48 | 1 |
| **A12 Lax** | 688 | 299 | 43.5 | 326 | 165 | 50.6 | 86 | 28.8 | 39 | 2 |
| **A13 Economics and statistics** | 911 | 532 | 58.4 | 457 | 247 | 54.0 | 114 | 21.4 | 47 | 1 |
| **A14 Political and social sciences** | 331 | 138 | 41.7 | 164 | 71 | 44.5 | 36 | 26.1 | 16 | 2 |
| **Total** | 12.256 | 6117 | 49.9 | 5546 | 2709 | 48.9 | 1161 | 19.0 | 415 | 1 |

*a. Number of applicants, b. Number of winners, c. Percentage of success, d. Number of promoted, e. Percentage of promoted*

If this hypothesis is plausible, it is necessary to explore why women do not feel they possess the requisites requested. As we have tried to demonstrate during our reflection, the main factors behind the reasons for the minor presence of women at the university and especially the still more limited presence of them at the highest levels of the academic hierarchy are intertwined and mutually reinforcing: organizational cultures (implicit patriarchal system that still acts), the lack of social capital and higher social networks and the insistence on the gender neutrality of the evaluation criteria. In our opinion, these factors are not removed by the ASN but even reinforced by a convergence of the criteria towards a single competence that we could define as: ability to move, aggregate, publicize and enhance power (relational and economic resources); this competence still remains a purely male privilege.

Entering the merit of the criteria, the strong isomorphism that characterizes the dispositif allows us to make a general reasoning regarding the different disciplinary sectors. In addition to the scientific productivity reported by the so-called *mediane* (medians) or measurement standards that act as first skimming, the other criteria appear to be:

1. organization or participation as a speaker at scientific conferences in Italy or abroad;
2. direction or participation in the activities of a research group characterized by collaborations at national or international level;
3. responsibility for scientific studies and research entrusted by qualified public or private institutions;
4. scientific responsibility for international or national research projects, eligible for funding on the basis of competitive calls for peer review;
5. direction or participation in editorial committees of magazines, editorial series, encyclopedias and treaties of recognized prestige;
6. participation in the faculty board, or assignment of teaching assignments, within the research doctorates accredited by the Ministry;
7. formal assignment of teaching or research assignments (fellowships) to qualified foreign or supranational universities and research institutes.

Meanwhile, with respect to scientific productivity, there is ample evidence (Baccini et al., 2014) that women have scientific productivity, measured in terms of quantity of publications, lower than men. Therefore, given that the ASN, in particular through the *mediane*, has given exclusive importance to the quantity of publications and citations, rather than to quality. For the bibliometric sectors the thresholds were in fact set mainly on the quantity parameters of the research produced; for non-bibliometric the thresholds were exclusively quantitative. Furthermore, the calculation of the *mediane* was done regardless of gender. As Baccini writes: «If it is true then that Italian women are less productive than men, having identified a median for the

population regardless of gender means in fact have set a bar that for women is on average higher than for men. The weight attributed only to the amount of scientific production may have played a significant role in pushing many women to give up starting the competition» (Baccini, 2014, p.6).

Moreover, although it is undoubted that some of the listed criteria (for example the 2, 3 or 4) meet the need to select based on the ability to manage internationally competitive research groups, it is equally undoubted that this competence is based on those skills of networking that are at the base of the aggregation of economic resources and finalized relational resources. Organizing conferences, directing international research groups, obtaining project management tasks, being part of editorial committees of prestigious magazines and having the opportunity to conduct a fellowship abroad reveal the requests of the phantasm. Those of having time resources, social capital and ability to activate functional and instrumental networks, but above all self-appreciation and self-promotion skills more connected with the male gender performance and the possibility that man can "escape" the care: it is the triumph of the "*pavo academicus*", called to "publish or perish", to be carefree, to continually confirm that it deserves its panoptic position, to "sell itself well", to compete with everyone, but first of all with himself (Mauro, 2017).

It is useless here to remember that although there is a movement taking place in new women' generations - all yet to be demonstrated - the role of family responsibilities within the career paths of women is still debated and unclear (Fassari, 2009; Spanò, 2017). Self-selection, accentuated by the intrinsic *techné* of the dispositif that also acts by applying quantity parameters to evaluate the research produced, seems to discourage a female already weakened by the gender division of academic work. Face time (Gherardi & Poggio, 2003) also required to comply with those criteria that mobilize financial, organizational, relational, and collide with the problems of time required by care, here understood as the care of the world (Pulcini, 2003).

## 3. Implication

Returning to the beginning of the paper - that we remember is exploratory and requires an ad hoc empirical study - if the reform movement passes from institution to organization, we now witness a further transit made more visible by the new academic spatiality of interfaces; this step can be defined as being from the "organization as space" to "organization in the subject". The level of responsibility is totally delegated to the subject, because performance is presented as virtuousness without otherness. Virtuousness defined by a phantasm that "suggests" adhering to sequential stages, to the linearity of the journey, to vertical cognitive maps and to the finalization

and optimization of academic times and spaces. From this point of view, the female continues to be threatened because she is made to compete with curricula built and evaluated by thinking that is performed and performing in the male way. The weaknesses of the past, established by statistics, are thus removed from the technological design, but above all the specificity of the present (intended as choice) of performing the female role through relationality and ambivalence, because the phantasm considers these horizontal qualities to be marginal, because the phantasm imposes a stable and univocal meaning (Borrelli, 2015), mortifying the desiring relationship intrinsic to *Beruf* (Weber, 2004).

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