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Francesca Ferrando (2019), *Philosophical Posthumanism*, London-New York-Oxford-New Delhi-Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 271 pp.

Francesca Ferrando's recent book on *Philosophical Posthumanism*, published by Bloomsbury Academic¹, does not posit itself in only the philosophical field: it reaches out to the broader realm of humanities and cultural studies. Considering the current development of posthuman studies and its theoretical potential in reconfiguring the paradigm in humanities, Ferrando decides to scrutinize its major concepts and the various modes of their development, offering an overall compendium on this new and exciting interdisciplinary field and implementing order in its understanding.

Researchers in posthuman studies conduct their interdisciplinary research

in broadly conceived cultural studies, aiming to transform reflection on the human and the world in the face of contemporary technological and mental changes we face as humanity. Cybernetic and biotechnological development leads to the growing popularity of such concepts as "posthuman" and "transhuman" as the subject of philosophical and scientific inquiry, with such founding figures as: Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Bruno Latour, Kevin Warwick, Steven Fuller, Katherine Hayles, Karen Barad, among others. They envision a new future: trying to define "who is the posthuman coming after the human" and to answer how agency works in assemblages of human and non-human, as well as material and immaterial forces; they consider ethical challenges developing in a new existential situation of close entwinement with technology and increasingly prevalent artificial intelligence; they redefine relations between science, epistemology, and ontology, in perspective of the discoveries of quantum physics.

The rapprochement of hard sciences and human sciences is clearly argued, especially by Karen Barad, who

¹ This monograph is a revised and updated translation of Dr Francesca Ferrando's book *Il Postumanesimo filosofico e le sue alterità* published by ETS in 2016 and based on her PhD dissertation, which was recipient of the "Sainati" Philosophical Prize awarded in 2014.

explores the onto-epistemology of New Materialism and is well supplemented by Rosi Braidotti's idea of the nomadic identity of a posthuman subject². Karen Barad, one of the main theorists of New Materialism, expounds the way in which matter and language, nature and culture, ontology and epistemology are entwined: «Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter»³, because biology is culturally mediated as much as culture is materially constructed. The posthuman endeavour, understood as such, challenges academic humanities and proposes a new direction of development after post-structuralism and deconstruction, which have exhausted their paradigmatic explanatory potential, unveiling the need for a new worldview. However, this endeavour is neither completely coherent nor unidirectional: on the contrary, it splits into «Posthumanism (Philosophical, Cultural, and Critical); Transhumanism (in its variants as Extropianism, Liberal Transhumanism, and Democratic Transhumanism, among many currents); New Materialisms (a specific feminist development within the posthumanist frame); the heterogeneous landscape of Anti-humanism; the field of Object-Oriented Ontology; Posthumanities and

Metahumanities» (p. 1) that Ferrando scrutinizes, tracing overlaps and differences between the trends.

Ferrando expounds the importance of posthumanism, taking on board subsequently: Part One: *What Is Philosophical Posthumanism?*, Part Two: *Of Which "Human" Is the Posthuman a "Post"?*; Part Three: *Have Humans Always Been Posthuman?* Around these major questions the author organizes her reasoning, which is bulleted with specific questions that are to be found in *Navigational Tool: A Glossary of Questions* (pp. 7-17) as well as within the text of dissertation. This methodological move facilitates the reader in orientation through the diverse research field of posthuman studies in understanding key concepts, lines of divergence between trends and approaches, challenges, and possibilities in a biotechnological, posthuman, and post-anthropocentric world.

Post-anthropocentrism is one of the important orientations of posthuman studies, effecting the displacement of the human from the centre of interest, and towards conceiving the broader picture of worldly interactions. This move is motivated from a few sides, especially from feminist and post-colonial perspectives, by critique of the idea of "human" (in many languages referred to as a Man – and ultimately meaning rational, white, heterosexual male dominating the Other, that is: a woman, a person of colour, nature, body, or emotions). Deconstruction of traditional concepts taken for granted and naturalized by supporting ideologies leads however not to a symbolic void, but is instead filled with new ideas like the posthuman nomadic identity, differentiation of *bios* (organized life) and *zoe* (life before definition), or valorizing

² Barad K. (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham et al.: Duke University Press; Braidotti R. (1994), *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press.

³ Barad K. (2003), *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*, «Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society», 28, n. 3, pp. 801-831, in particular p. 801.

life in itself and desire over rational and logical powers; this is a broadened conception of causality resulting not from an individual agent, but an assemblage of various actors.

Post-anthropocentrism is then critical towards the Anthropocene, the era of our humangeological mark on the Earth, when «hundreds to thousands of nonhuman species go extinct every year due to human activities» (p. 38). The beginning of the Anthropocene Ferrando locates, after Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000), in the latter part of the eighteenth century⁴. Connected to processes of industrialization, «the Anthropocene [...] more than an isolated process, shall be addressed as one of the effects of an anthropocentric *Weltanschauung*, based on an autonomous view of the human as a self-defying agent» (p. 104). A critical approach towards the Anthropocene does not therefore mean rejecting the importance of cultural heritage, but rather orients its blade toward industrialization, colonization, and capitalism. For this it reconsiders human history and culture, finding roots for posthuman thinking in the history of mankind, because «hybrid imageries have been part of the human symbolic heritage since the very beginning of recorded civilization» (p. 22)⁵ and they are the basic metaphors for posthumanism, realizing themselves in biotechnological laboratories.

⁴ Different than, for example, Yuval Noah Harari – who claims that the Anthropocene era started with the emergence of *Homo sapiens* around 70 thousands years ago. See Harrari Y. N. (2018), *Homo deus. Krótka historia jutra*, transl. to Polish by M. Romanek, Wydawnictwo Literackie: Kraków, p. 97.

⁵ «Hybrid representations can be traced as early as the upper paleolithic age – for instance, the lion-headed figurine of the Hohlenstein-Stadel (Germany), which is determined to be

Ferrando's book *Philosophical Posthumanism* is therefore in an important position on the market of ideas, providing a broad and powerful argument for the reconsideration of human cultural heritage in light of our upcoming future. We are responsible for the redefinition of history, which has a performative power on the form of the world we are to live in. The meaning of history and understanding of culture supports the specific form of organization of the social world, whether we consider medieval or modern times. Confronting transformations of a world facing climate change and development of technologies, humans redefine their relationship to technology, nature, and culture itself, and with themselves too. This endeavour is supported by reference to posthuman reflections, as exquisitely presented by Francesca Ferrando. The form of argumentation, clarity of concepts, and profound knowledge on the field are combined in *Philosophical Posthumanism* to create a wholly exciting, easy to follow, and useful reference.

The importance of the perspective outlined by Ferrando has to be recognized in the times of Anthropocene, because the heritage of Enlightenment has to be critically examined and revised, considering grand narratives of human emancipation focused on the idea of rational progress that brought us to the point of undeniable climate changes and mass species extinction. Environmental turn noticeable in work on various scholars in the field, as Rosi Braidotti or Karen Barad, on which Ferrando comments (p. 127) is not resigning

about 32,000 years old, is the oldest known zoomorphic sculpture that has been found in the world till present» (p. 22).

from the culture, but fulfilling the view on it in nature/culture continuum, in which nature and culture are inherently entangled⁶.

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⁶ Haraway D. (2007), *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Barad K. (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham et al.: Duke University Press.

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