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## REVIEW

***Posthuman Glossary*, editors Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 538. ISBN: 978-1-350-03025-1**

Posthumanism envisions institutionalization.

During the last two years, Rosi Braidotti has followed her seminal work, *The Posthuman* (2013), with three works prefixed “posthuman”: *Posthuman Glossary* with Maria Hlavajova (2017), *Posthuman Ecologies* with Simone Bignall (2018) and *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019). *Posthuman Glossary* is a presentation of the conceptual work done in the envisioned “Critical PostHumanities” (Braidotti 2019) that substantiates the theoretical framework for this emerging field of studies.

Particularly in *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti lists the institutionalization of posthumanist studies: Using the familiar transhumanist-posthumanist distinction, she counters the transhumanist Oxford’s “Future of Humanity Institute” and Cambridge’s “Centre for the Study of Existential Risk” with the posthumanist “Human Futures” project in Aarhus (an affiliation of these reviewers), the German “Anthropocene Project”, Linköpings “PostHumanities Hub”, Brock’s “Posthumanism Research Institute” in Canada, the New York-based “Posthuman Research Group”, etc. Braidotti seeks to unite these last-mentioned critical institutions in an over-arching category.

The reason we are repeating Braidotti’s listing is that the *Posthuman Glossary*, interpreted in light of her recent publication, appears as a strategic documentation of the actual work in the Critical PostHumanities. It is a peep into the Deleuzian production of concepts within a Foucauldian focus on institutionalization - a crossover of impure metaphysics that has been characteristic of Braidotti’s elaboration of the French radical thinkers since *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991). We recognize the strategic usefulness of an over-arching categorization of posthumanist studies, though we are critical as to whether the posthuman imagery risks blurring in the smoke of conceptual explosion offered by the *Posthuman Glossary*. This critical point is elaborated in our evaluation on the sections of art.

The ambition of Braidotti and the *Posthuman Glossary* seems to be an expansion of a phenomenon, the posthuman, into a hybrid formation that is at once 1) a post- or trans-disciplinary discourse, 2) a paradigm of critical posthumanism and 3) a vision for what the university can become. One can perhaps label an anti-Humboldtian *Bildung* that intends to direct the knowledge production of the Humanities towards a solidary project that realizes the “posthuman turn” in research and practice. The *Posthuman Glossary* is

freed from all senses of lingering nostalgia for 19<sup>th</sup>-century Humanities projects. It wants to guide its reader into the experimental workings of the constituting posthumanities.

In continuation of Braidotti's long-held cartographic method, the *Posthuman Glossary* draws a conceptual assemblage that enables students and researchers to navigate in the field of posthumanist studies (the cover art by Natascha Unkart also signals the assemblage, where dried paint stains of light blue, salmon-pink, rust red, etc. intermesh as cracking layers of meaning). The assemblatic character of the work stays true to the rhizomatic philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari by offering connections and relations among the entries without suggesting an overarching organization or hierarchy. This take on the glossary genre is avantgarde as it, rather than representing what already is, situates itself in the frontline of what is to become. The reader is invited to follow its outlined trajectory, and if well-grounded one can pick the fruitful seeds from the critical posthumanist branch of the posthuman turn.

As the policy of contribution for the *Posthuman Glossary* has been wonderfully egalitarian, with its "faculty" listing Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe next to PhD candidates Goda Klumbyte and Lindsay Grace Weber, not to mention the many independent researchers, freelance writers and artists present in the volume, the institutional mode of representation is based on a relationality of interest. One can start reading an entry wondering whether Haraway has written on the Chthulucene, or a rising star in the field (Haraway did write it). Following one's interest, it is hence possible to identify future research companions no matter your own credentials. We welcome this new tool of navigation for our proceeding engagements in the posthumanist complex.

Following the hybrid institutionalization that we outlined in the first section, *Posthuman Glossary* invites to engage in postdisciplinary research in a critical posthumanist paradigm that is realized as a Critical PostHumanities. These categories are not carved in stone as the entries offer different perspectives. There are multiple entries that contest what the 'posthumanities' should be, ranging from Cecilia Åsberg's feminist posthumanities, Stefan Herbrechter's critical posthumanism, Cary Wolfe's distinction between the 'posthuman' and posthumanism, Braidotti's posthuman critical theory, Francesca Ferrando's distinction between transhumanism and posthumanism, etc. These all inspire to make connections between the many intricate and often overlooked aspects related to posthumanism. Though the glossary format does not allow for longer arguments, that loss comes with the gain of having a more fine-grained net to catch the elusive concept of posthumanism.

Braidotti and Hlavajova's introduction offers a matrix to this conceptual range by arguing that the conceptual explosion is triggered by what they designate as "the posthuman convergence of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism". The entries are brought together by the critique of the humanist ideal of 'Man' coupled with the critique of species hierarchy. Arguably, this results in a highly conceptual posthumanism that is skewed more towards the post-anthropocentric side of the posthuman predicament and not, as the title suggests, to the idea that something could supersede the human. This choice fruitfully assists knowledge production but also becomes more the work of reason than

imagination, as there are not many visions present on the modes of existence and multiple appearances of what kind of human that is underway.

This is visible in the lack of aesthetics in the volume, where the entry on “Art” by Tom Holbert is more on the side of art theory than artistic imagery, while Ingrid Hoelzl’s text on the “Postimage” engages with the technicity of shooting the image rather than capturing what is inside it. “Art in the Anthropocene” by Heather Davis only mentions one concrete artwork, which is quoted, and the painting is a Monet. These entries do what they propose but, picking up again on the Deleuzian undercurrent, it would have been interesting if the tripartite division of philosophy, art and science that Deleuze and Guattari presented in “What is Philosophy?”, which is praised in the introduction, permeated the volume in a more balanced way. Even though Lenin said that there are three keys to success: “read, read, read”, the focus on concepts may be too narrow a starting point for connecting “scholarship and critical thought to the real-life praxes that are of immediate relevance to individuals and society today” (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2017: 4). We need to envision the concrete issues that are changing the world as we perceive it.

We do not argue that the glossary should have abandoned its alphabetical index for something like a documentation of artworks documenting technologically altered humans, but rather that, within the framework of the volume, the posthuman imagery could have been enhanced. Propositionally, this could have been done by including Sylvia Wynter’s concept of the “hybrid human”, which proposes a new mode of what it is like to be human. Wynter is quoted, but only for her critical points. However, the aesthetics of a concept can also point to inner transformation, as for example Anneke Smelik and Elisa Fiore’s well told conceptualization of the history of the “Pill” as a posthuman icon of the twentieth century.

This negative point on imagery is softened by the scholarly quality of the *Posthuman Glossary*. This is not a closed club for the already inaugurated, as all counter-paradigms are referenced accordingly. Few of these are invited as contributors, with notable exceptions being David Roden on speculative posthumanism, Matthew Fuller on software and Johanna Seibt on robo-philosophy. Yet, this choice also ensures the consistency of the volume. The glossary engages in depth with transhumanism, OOO and speculative realism, so that the trajectory is opened for those who have entered the field from a different path. The cumulative bibliography is another proof of the scholarly credibility of the glossary, as it shows the transparency of the editorial outline (Deleuze clearly tops the list) while making room for those less credible (Heidegger has his place too).

And although we miss some stipulation of the imagination, the *Posthuman Glossary* is a playful treatise. One of the best entries is on “Youth” by Koen Leurs, Tamara Shepherd and Alison Harvey, as they avoid generational quasi-avantgardism on young people as the frontier of a new era. The virtual colonialism of digital natives is firmly renounced. Rather, the authors analyze gold farming in *World of Warcraft* as a “very real and embodied instance of contemporary posthumanity” that often remains “invisible in dominant academic and corporate narratives of shiny and sleek human augmentation”. Entries like

this demonstrate that there is room for unconventional research topics in the posthumanities, making the *Posthuman Glossary* more than a political stance for paradigm change.

When the scope and ambition of the *Posthuman Glossary* is taken together with its egalitarian ethos and scholarly credibility, its heavy production of concepts successfully establishes a persuasive project. Scholars at all stages of their academic as well as extradisciplinary career can use the *Posthuman Glossary* to continue working for knowledge structures that may no longer just be to come. And as the categorization of posthumanist studies is actually documented in the *Posthuman Glossary*, its strategic stance is ignited by a substantial fire that justifies the conceptual explosion.

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