

# Posthuman Glasses for Nomadic Subjectivities

## *A Comment on Il postumanesimo filosofico e le sue alterità (Philosophical Posthumanism and Its Others), by Francesca Ferrando*

**Angela Balzano**

*Research Fellow, University of Bologna*

doi: 10.7358/rela-2016-002-balz

angela.balzano@unibo.it

---

To read the current development of Posthuman Studies we need new glasses, that is to say a new conceptual framework. In order to develop it, Francesca Ferrando refers to the patient work of “artisans-philosophers” who came from the past (or just returned from the future). Sometimes an idea is born before its time. The quiet, constant act of intrepid thinkers breaks the continuity, and the rigidity of *Kronos*’ line, revealing its truth and effectiveness only many centuries later.

Critical genealogies, as *Il postumanesimo filosofico e le sue alterità* (Ferrando 2016)<sup>1</sup>, help keeping track of the openings determined by concepts in the course of their development. Without this kind of genealogy, the present overtakes at full speed our ability to understand it. All the more so today that new media and bio-technologies have become viral and pervasive, contributing to erode the old categories of subject, man, knowledge and power.

*The Posthuman: Philosophical Posthumanism and Its Others* is an invitation to get rid of outdated mental habits, of theoretical and practical schemes of identity and repetition of the Same. It innovates from within philosophy and creates a dialogue between conceptual characters in an unexpected and unusual way. It is a book that aims to show how the history of Western Philosophy, for a long time, has done nothing but collected explanations of the world only apparently different, but always focused on

---

<sup>1</sup> For the English version of Ferrando’s book follow the link below: [http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/4356/1/TESI\\_Ferrando\\_DEF.pdf](http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/4356/1/TESI_Ferrando_DEF.pdf).

Man as a molar and carrier subject. We could, in fact, consider the modern formations of “knowledge/power” as blocks of representations/interpretations of the human. Philosophy, in particular, has attempted to cultivate the human in order to extract from it a subject and a truth, which in late capitalism coincide with the *homo economicus* and hyper-productivism. Aware of this, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari stated that philosophy has to detox, divest its traditional dualistic and anthropocentric glasses, thus becoming able to conceptualize the intermediate zones between the human, the natural and the machinic. Ferrando moves on this track, which interrogates both quantum mechanics, cybernetics, literature and philosophy, hybridizing knowledges and points of view.

The book of Ferrando is a conscious and informed discourse on the desire to re-invent ourselves, in a spacetime that is constantly changing. Following the coordinates of french Poststructuralism and Neo-materialist Feminism, she proposes that is necessary to intend a self as a nomadic and free subjectivity, capable both of agency and recognition of otherness. Overcoming the human means first of all abandoning the monolithic Cartesian subject, conceived as a mind separated from the body and from the rest of the world. Posthumanism means to step over this subject, beyond the rational and calculating man, beyond the owner and subject of rights. Posthumanism is rooted in the body: no theory, or practice can ignore the knowledge of the multiple materiality of the world. This implies an innovative approach to individuality, holding together ontology and ethics, epistemology and the history of ideas, aimed at affirming that a singularity is, always and in every case, an assemblage of simple bodies.

*One is not born, but rather becomes, posthuman.* For this reason the politics of location are still very significant: from which place do our bodies speak? It is a fundamental question. Equally important is to ask what are our bodies becoming today. How do we think and know our bodies in the times of biotechnology and advanced capitalism? The category of nomadic subjectivity is the key to finding a non-relativistic and ethical solution for the new challenges we are called to face in the possible futures. Ferrando reminds us of the hypothesis that from Nietzsche comes down to Feminist Theory: the subject as multiplicity.

In feminist practices: we need to say where we came from, including the humanist tradition, and at the same time attempt to understand what we are becoming, including posthuman subjectivities. In this sense the book of Ferrando is extremely effective. From Latin playwrights to theoretical physicists, she denounces, wherever she finds a trace, the self-centered arrogance of Man. Ferrando leads her genealogy with curiosity, nomadism and transversality. These attitudes in her book evolve into complex meth-

ologies, aiming at the elaboration of a knowledge and an ethics able to take into account the sudden and schizophrenic changes we experience everyday. A methodology, out of all possibilities, seems the most appropriate to keep up with the speed and non-linearity of the present: cartography. Cartography is a methodology able to inform the style, a writing that allows us to see the coexistence of contradictory elements and strong geopolitical inequalities in the posthuman world. It was inherited from Poststructuralism, but developed in the frame of the Neo-feminist Materialism by Rosi Braidotti, who in *The posthuman* follows a precise cartographical track that has much in common with that of Ferrando: from Humanism to its refusal, up to the survey of the double face of the posthuman condition itself.

We still ignore if posthuman times are better than human times. New media and bio-technologies, features of the present, are harbingers of considerable idiosyncrasies. We all know that they can be used for military purposes, or to damage the environment, or to cause harm to others, especially to subjectivities that are not human, as animals and earth. Rosi Braidotti, Melinda Cooper and Donna Haraway have written accurate cartographies on the genesis of new military technologies. They are often presented to us as technologies of “life”, despite the fact that they schizophrenically produce death. At the time of advanced capitalism “the posthuman” has a terrible dark side: eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva call it *bio-piracy*, Rosi Braidotti calls it *neropolitics*. The price of *bio-piracy* is actually been paid by migrants, women, LGBTQI subjectivities, animals, lands and cultures. Ferrando writes clearly: “Feminist and womanist studies have exposed the racist and sexist frame within which the discourse on *techné* has been historically formulated” (Ferrando 2014, 139).

She reminds us that the “post” of posthuman makes sense only if it is effective, if we are able to leave behind all the mechanisms of exclusion typical of anthropocentrism. Her style is proactive, a kind of affirmative profession of philosophical writing. She does not forget, in fact, to outline the bright side of posthuman days, showing us that there are many ways to stay on the positive side, without falling into the traps of Western Humanism: “Posthumanism is a praxis, as well as a philosophy of mediation, which manifests post-dualistic, post-centralizing, inclusive and comprehensive types of approach” (Ferrando 2014, 14).

Beyond the limited vision of eurocentric Humanism, Ferrando reminds us of the role of Oriental Humanism and explains how the multiplication of Feminist, Postcolonial, Environmentalists and Cyborg Studies is an opportunity to act from within the crisis of the Humanities, to overcome the hierarchical system of privileges and exclusions that they have sustained for centuries. Aware that the status of the human was not granted

to “all embodied human beings” Ferrando detects social and existential affirmative practices in the same subjectivities that have been devalued during the process of “humanization”. She raises a crucial question: “How have the (categories of) humans who have been repeatedly dehumanized, dealt with their humanness? How have they re-configured such a denied status?” (Ferrando 2014, 13). Her answer is radical, she finds a source of new configurations of the human in the feminist oral history and in the anarchist “ironic praxis” of Indiani Metropolitani.

Subjectivities which were not considered human are not necessarily marginal. The fact that they are taken into mechanisms of marginalization does not mean they are worth less than others: “[...] animals, automata, children, women, freaks, people of color other than white, queers etc. marked the shifting borders of what would become ‘the human’ through processes of performative rejections” (Ferrando 2014, 70).

We can not continue to organize life on this earth (and in this universe) as if we were the only inhabitants. On the contrary, it seems that we inhabit densely populated spaces with many forms of life. For centuries, the “Man of Reason” has used anthropocentric theories to preserve his status of owner and Master. For too long “the human” has functioned as a regulatory standard, and too many forms of life were considered “different” in a pejorative sense in its reference. Luckily, we now know that this trend can be reversed. Feminist and women’s movements, environmental and anti-racist activism have taught us, practically, that no dualism will ever account for the plurality of the world. Differences also have powerful positive meanings (Spinoza *docet*). They are vectors of *potentia* and desire of contamination.

## REFERENCES

- Ferrando, Francesca. 2014. *The Posthuman: Philosophical Posthumanism and Its Others*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Ph.D. in Philosophy and Theory of Human Sciences, Università di Roma Tre, Rome. Retrieved from [http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/4356/1/TESI\\_Ferrando\\_DEF.pdf](http://dspace-roma3.caspur.it/bitstream/2307/4356/1/TESI_Ferrando_DEF.pdf).
- . 2016. *Il postumanesimo filosofico e le sue alterità*. Pisa: ETS.