



Book Review

## Review of Rosi Braidotti's, *Posthuman Feminism*

Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*, Polity Press, 2022, 302pp, ISBN 9781509518071

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**Abstract:** A single paragraph of about 200 words maximum. For research articles, abstracts should give a pertinent overview of the work. We strongly encourage authors to use the following style of structured abstracts, but without headings: (1) Background: Place the question addressed in a broad context and highlight the purpose of the study; (2) Methods: briefly describe the main methods or treatments applied; (3) Results: summarize the article's main findings; (4) Conclusions: indicate the main conclusions or interpretations. The abstract should be an objective representation of the article and it must not contain results that are not presented and substantiated in the main text and should not exaggerate the main conclusions.

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Critiques to the universal condition of the human have defied the boundaries of the body and what is meant to be considered as “normal” or “neutral”, prompting the so-called posthuman turn. This book, by Rosi Braidotti, contends that “mainstream posthuman scholarship has neglected feminist theory” (p. 2), postulating feminist theory as not only a contributor, but also as a precursor of the posthuman turn. Braidotti aims at offering a more sophisticated analysis of the reframing of the human as an embodied and embedded “heterogeneous assemblage” (p. 6), that understands the prismatic nature of feminism and builds on a multiple standpoints emergent from the birth of ecofeminism, feminist studies of technoscience, LGBTQ+ theories, black feminisms, decolonial feminisms, and Indigenous feminisms and that recognises such complexity within the structural socio-economic dynamics and upcoming environmental challenges that shape the subject. Braidotti defines this volume as a “navigational tool, a conceptual toolbox, a roadmap” (p. 13) that could be considered a state of the art of the literature on the convergence between posthuman scholarship and feminist theory.

Braidotti's approach is twofold: on the one hand, she voices a clear discontent with the mainstream posthuman scholarship, absorbed by dominant stands that neglect minoritarian narratives; on the other side, she commends feminists to demonstrate a more assertive attitude towards discussions on the understanding of the human. For Braidotti, both these elements are key to an understanding of the human will be sympathetic to care, compassion, and solidarity, leading to a community that recognises the right of all its members to a sense of companionship, without englobing them in an illusion of uniformity. Braidotti provides a genealogy of posthuman feminism that results in the “intergenerational and transversal exercise, constructing a discursive community that cares for the state of the world and wants to intervene productively in it” (p. 9). It lays the foundations for alternative knowledge production practices that aim for the generation of blueprints based on the collective imaginings shared by a community capable of becoming together but that it is not one, or the same. Posthuman feminism is a force of affirmative ethics that creates diverse amalgamations respectful with the complexity of those alliances. The goal of the volume is to

encourage a paradigm shift that recognises the subject as interdependent, capable to affect and be affected, only able to address the challenges it faces through collaboration.

Braidotti divides the volume in two parts that frame posthuman feminism in two completely different and yet complementary roles. The first part reintroduces the concept of posthuman feminism as a critique to mainstream humanism, exposing the tacit complacency of said scholarship to “[...] structural inequality and forms of social and symbolic disqualification” (p. 10). The second part explores a more constructive character of posthuman feminism, drawing together recent literature on boundaries between technology, material bodies, and sexuality. The book *Posthuman Feminism* is divided in seven chapters and an epilogue, and it devotes its chapters to the analysis of the intersection of socio-economic, technological, and environmental challenges, that prompts new definitions of what it might mean to be human.

Chapter 1 calls for the urgent review of humanism, a scholarship that, until recently, had successfully advocated for an undifferentiated paradigm of the “Man” based on Vitruvian Eurocentric masculine parameters. Such standards anchored stiff boundaries that disregarded any expression of diversity and that deemed as deviant, abnormal, monstrous, or even unnatural, those subjects that did not comply. Yet, the limitations of a scholarship do not entail its failure, as Braidotti underlines the useful nature of the humanistic ideals of equality and emancipation. Chapter 2 points at the attempts of feminist movements to produce subjects that, while variant, remain still aligned with a dominant idea of the “Man”, resulting in a paradoxical empowerment reliant on a form of hyper-individualism that legitimises and reproduces a patriarchal “[...] binary sexual difference and compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 52). This chapter is a reminder that feminist theory must seek a transformative and multi-layered answer that challenges human exceptionalism. This is further explored in Chapter 3, a chapter that incorporates ecofeminism, decolonial feminism, and Indigenous feminisms to the discussion of the posthuman turn, and that posits the need to decenter “Man” as a species. This chapter outlines the consequences of a species-ism that feeds onto patriarchal, capitalist, colonial, and anthropocentric dynamics of abuse, and appeals to a shift that recognises the interdependencies subjects have with their environment.

Chapter 4 introduces this thought explaining the relevance of new-materialist feminism and its aim to highlight the complex multiplicity of embodiment. This form of feminism introduces innovative ways of recognising matter and materialisation. In this chapter, Braidotti conceives new-materialism as “a plane of encounter” (p. 109) where matter is structurally independent of human representation, irreducible to a socially constructed reality, and that cannot be accommodated within dualistic thinking. This new-materialism acknowledges a sense of interdependence and care between species, drawing materiality as the common denominator across all species. Within this form of feminism, Braidotti suggests carnal awareness as the only epistemological method capable of producing a cartography of power relations respectful of the heterogeneity, complexity, and immanence of the location from which the subject experiences. With special emphasis, Braidotti defines the subject as complex nodes, characterized by the juxtaposition of *zoe-geo-techno* spheres, that enable a better understanding of the key alliances that the posthuman subject has access to. In chapter 5, the author offers an overview of the contributions of feminist studies of technoscience, highlighting their convergence with new materialisms and ecofeminism, and analyses the implications of an evidently divided feminist scholarship, which contradictorily advocates for both the process of de-naturalisation and that of the renaturalisation of the body with their environment. Braidotti attributes the dualistic interpretation of these strategies to a paradigm of the body that fails to understand its neglected complexity, and defines posthuman bodies as “simultaneously exploded [...] and reasserted as locations of powers, pleasures, and values” (p. 144). The author introduces the “double pull” (p. 149) of technology, that dematerialises the body only to reground it in an alternative way, other than normal.

Both processes resulting from technological mediation, Braidotti believes they are part of a greater phenomenon of constant transformation, and uses them to address discussions on gestational politics, queer and trans movements, and sexuality. It is the latter that the author addresses in chapter 6, with matter defined in an open-ended way, mutated as it is sexuated. The process of sexuating matter turns ethical and political, embedded within multiple layers that render sex-gender distinctions obsolete. When not constrained, the sexuate force is transgressive, and recognises “autopoietic matter operates as negotiable, transversal, and affective spaces of multiple becoming” (p. 189). Sexuality is powered by desire, and reveals an urge for new political, ethical, social, epistemological, and spiritual scripts to be produced. This transformative capacity leads the author to the last chapter of the volume, that Braidotti uses to present her proposal of an speculative feminism and its utopian futures as a form of activism that celebrates the “undutiful daughters” (p. 219) and offers a common imagining to those who aspire to different worlds.

The conclusion of the volume is developed in its epilogue, as Braidotti offers a picture of the function posthuman feminism has for the future. Posthuman feminism is meant to enable the production of alternative human lived experiences, exceeding predetermined templates, and empowering subjects to “constitute alternative human subjects and communities” (p. 236). These knowledge production practices arise from a collective imaginative force, through “projective transpositions” (p. 237) that construct an environment in which the human finds alternative becomings and act as mapping tools that allow humans to develop their own production toolkit. This evolving cannot occur in isolation, but needs connections and alliances to thrive. The recognition of the complexity and multiplicity within these communities enables subjects to develop a “critical cartography” and the opportunity to reflect on contemporary injustices. It is through collaboration that the subject accesses these transformative forces, as they recognise their interdependence with not only other humans, but with other species, and understand alternative becomings should arise from transversal and plural ways of caring, involving the entire ecosystem we live in.

This volume constitutes a carefully crafted genealogy of feminist posthuman trends, with a detailed analysis of the intersections of socio-economic, technological, and environmental forces, intertwined in relations of power that put the ideal subject in check. Tapping on ecofeminism, technoscience, LGBTQ+ theories, black feminisms, decolonial feminisms, and Indigenous feminism, Braidotti produces a framework that invites for a review of the notion of subjectivity, one that recognises the heterogeneity within the communities humans are part of, without rejecting its collaborative nature. Braidotti aims to enable the reformulation of the “posthuman condition”, one that includes the critical analysis of knowledge production practices, “neither post-power nor post-injustice” (p. 8), inevitably based on care and community.

Despite touching on different feminist traditions, the volume presents a clear leading thread, with coherently structured and contained chapters that allow readers, regardless of whether they are familiar with these feminist trends or not, to follow the main argument and understand the role each trend, each piece, has in the posthuman project Braidotti develops. Without it being its primary aim, the book provides those familiar with feminist traditions with a conceptual map that reconciles perspectives often pictured as conflicting. Ideas from Beauvoir, Jaggar, Harding, Irigaray, Cixous, hooks, Tuana, Spivak, Wynter, Anzaldúa, Lugones, Haraway, Lloyd, and Franklin are reviewed and cleverly linked to contemporary referents like Greta Thunberg, or even Lady Gaga, supporting a topic of sheer complexity with present-day examples. Braidotti highlights the common areas these feminist trends present, succeeding at reaching to the core of these traditions and building the argument of the volume from a common ground. This makes parts of the volume particularly enlightening and refreshing.

Yet, it is to be noted that, whilst feminist trends are successfully summarised and illustrated, they only appear in broad strokes. Further elaboration may be required on the role these trends have in the posthuman convergence, and if core concepts within those traditions can be incorporated to the project Braidotti presents without prior scrutiny. Whilst the author aims to establish a common ground for feminist trends to engage with mainstream scholarship, the insularity of some of these traditions might need to be recognised and protected until the groups and minorities they represent are accordingly acknowledged and understood. It is in the production of a shared understanding that Braidotti places a collective future that is led by solidarity, yet, this assemblage ought to be purposefully designed to create a sense of community that does not divest minorities from their uniqueness. Rather than a drawback, the broad view Braidotti offers leaves room to collaborate with scholars and mainstream referents from each tradition to build a sophisticated, thorough, and truly shared agenda of the posthuman convergence. This, thus, prompts the question whether this first attempt of a posthuman feminist confluence can constitute a strong enough bid to create an intersection of a multi-layered field of knowledge and, moreover, for the productive confluence of different trends of feminism.

Thus, Braidotti proposes the reconciliation of feminist trends that historically maintained a critical distance, pushing them to move from inward-looking stances and towards understanding the working ground of feminist scholarship as collaborative and in need to break with outdated ideas of normality. The activity of collaboration is actively demarcated from absorption or amalgamation, underlining the individuality and authenticity all subjects may preserve when involved in feminist discussions. It is recurrently emphasized that, whilst subjects are not One, or the same, they are in this together. Through the genealogy developed by the author, the volume advocates for an effort to reconnect, respecting intergenerational and transversal relations, and producing an outline of what would result into the posthuman feminist agenda.

The posthuman feminist agenda drawn by Braidotti appeals to the conditions that are yet unknown but will shape the future of this convergence, fueling this aim through imagination or “collective imaginings”, which allows her to incorporate to the feminist posthuman project an utopian element, “forms of posthuman sexuality, a myriad of post-patriarchal genders not only across cultures and ethnicities, but also across species and even planets and galaxies”, (p. 212). With an open end, Braidotti sets the first cornerstone of this exceptional endeavor, and provides the complex field of feminism with a common cartography that should be utilised to modify, review, and elevate, current feminist narratives and discourses, incorporating to the discussion a myriad of elements that rightfully deepens their complexity and takes the posthuman approach a step closer to an all-encompassing, collaborative, and recognising sphere. Such effort will surely trigger a vivid debate among scholars from distinct disciplines and areas of knowledge, from anthropology, philosophy, and gender studies, to other fields closer to the life and environmental sciences, leading to not only a collaborative but also an interdisciplinary dialogue.