

BOOK REVIEW

SYMBIOTIC POSTHUMANIST ECOLOGIES IN WESTERN LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY AND ART

WENYI PANG♦

Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki (eds). *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art: Towards Theory and Practice*. Peter Lang, 2023, 326 pp. ISBN: 9783631845011

Abstract: This book builds on the previous works and shifts away from ecohumanism and anthropocentrism to critical theory. The editors affirm that posthumanism serves as a valuable lens for navigating contemporary conditions, emphasizing dignity for all beings. The contributing authors engage deeply with the concept of symbiosis, offering insights into what it means to exist as posthuman humans in both theory and practice in the 21st century. Through interdisciplinary dialogues—particularly across Western literature, philosophy, and art—the book revisits themes in mythology, engineering, and aesthetics. It explores human-more-than-human relations, advocates symbiocentric politics, and reflects on the future of both the Humanities and humanity.

Keywords: *Art, Ecologies, Eco-narratives, Literature, Parrhesiastic Cosmopolitanism, Philosophy, Symbiotic Posthumanism.*

Ecological thought has a rich legacy, and its intersection with

♦ Wenyi Pang is affiliated with the School of Foreign Studies, Guangxi Minzu University, Nanning 530000, China. Email: cidongci@163.com This research is supported by the Planning Project of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Henan Province under the project titled “Studies on the Writing of Community in Elizabeth Bishop’s Traveling Poetry” (Project No. 2022BWX034).

posthumanism and environmental humanities continues to evolve. Contemporary studies emphasize the symbiotic nature of all life, including the technological and non-living, and calls for decentering the human in light of the Anthropocene. *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art: Towards Theory and Practice* is a significant contribution for philosophers, critical theorists, environmental scholars, literary critics, and feminist thinkers. The volume initiates rich interdisciplinary conversations that reimagine human and more-than-human entanglements in the 21st century. It urges readers to reconsider the frequencies through which both human and non-human experiences are perceived and represented. The editors emphasize a crucial concern: "we must keep in mind that the erasure of species differences for the sake of affinities in some contemporary posthumanist discourses – as it is in many chapters overtly criticized – results in a reductive approach to the world's complexity, which is hazardous to the planet's sustainability" (p. 31). Rather than synthesizing these symbiotic encounters into a dialectical whole, the volume offers a heuristic and open-ended vision of posthumanist ecology. It gestures toward the emergence of a "Symbiocene" – a post-geological epoch grounded in mutual interdependence and multiplicity, where humans are no longer the sole protagonists of planetary life.

The first part of the volume deals with the theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding symbiotic posthuman ecologies. In Chapter one, Roberto Marchesini challenges the auto-poietic view of the human by examining *techne* and its transformative impact. He explores the ethical and ontological dimensions of technoscience – its roles, creativity, and multiplicities. Teresa Heffernan, in Chapter two, interrogates the notion of robot rights within techno-scientific and philosophical posthumanist frameworks, critiquing human exceptionalism. Through political, philosophical, and fictional lenses, she discusses complex relationships among humans, animals, robots, and AI, arguing for their interrelatedness beyond reductive analogies like the "animal-machine." Chapter three, by Mieke Bal, turns to the terminological implications of "inter-," "trans-," and "post-" in philosophical and eco-art contexts. She emphasizes

image-thinking as a core posthumanist method that reframes human knowledge through artistic practice. In Chapter four, Peggy Karpouzou examines the concept of “smart cities” by linking urban planning to posthumanist and environmental humanities discourse. Her analysis of ecosystem, agency, symbiosis, democracy and citizenship reveals how these ideas are reconfigured in the context of technologically mediated urban futures.

The second part of the volume delves into posthumanist eco-narratives within Western literature and art, offering insights into what kind of posthumans we are becoming. Central to this section is an exploration of posthuman consciousness and the envisioning of sustainable, symbiotic futures. In Chapter five, Bruce Clarke presents a new narrative framework for understanding symbiotic posthumanist ecologies. He conceptualizes life as a “sentient symphony,” encompassing sensation, cognition, and volition across all living beings. The remaining chapters in Part II extend the narrative of posthuman ecologies by further examining the interrelation between art, technology, and embodied experience. Aleksandra Lukaszewicz offers a critical reflection on how biological processes, technological mediation and perceptual frameworks converge in the context of posthuman embodiment. Drawing on the experimental art of Neil Harbisson and Moon Ribas—whose prosthetic technologies serve both as bodily extensions and artistic media—Lukaszewicz explores how the cyber body becomes a site of creative expression and ecological inquiry. Following this, Dimitris Angelatos analyzes the concept of “folded tactility” to describe how waste-based and toxic-material sculptures cultivate a plastic symbiotic relationship among artwork, space, and the spectator—mediated through sensory engagement and material resonance. The section concludes with David Fancy’s exploration of geomancy beyond the Anthropocene. Here, the geomancer is conceptualized as a figure attuned to the energetic flows of the Earth, capable of tracing relationships between terrestrial forces and planetary vitality.

The third and final part of the volume engages deeply with

philosophical interpretations of symbiosis in a more-than-human world, incorporating images, cartographies, literary reflections, and ontological illustrations. Drawing on thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, this section examines symbiotic processes that transcend the boundaries of the autonomous human subject. It positions posthumanism and environmental humanities within a dialogue that moves beyond anthropocentric frameworks and temporal limitations. For example, Nicole Anderson challenges anthropocentrism by analyzing the long-term interspecies relationship between a human and a wild animal. She critiques the misuse of deconstruction within posthumanist discourse, arguing that the recurring philosophical question “What is...?” reinforces human sovereignty and ipseity—a tendency Derrida also warns against. Fred Evans analyzes the concept of “parrhesiastic cosmopolitanism” as a response to global capitalism’s homogenizing tendencies within the Anthropocene. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of parrhesia (truth-telling), Evans advocates for an ethical, symbiotic cosmopolitanism that honors multiplicity and resists territorialization. Again, Glen A. Mazis and Cassandra Falke by exploring the notion of a matrixed ontology argues that embodied phenomenology and literature must be brought into dialogue to recover a posthumanist sense of philosophy and meaning. Tracing the conceptual lineage of climate perception from Freud and Goethe to Nietzsche, Falke portrays these thinkers as “weather prophets” whose reflections provide a critical framework for imagining futures beyond the Anthropocene. In this context, Avital Ronell’s view of climate change as a catalyst for political rupture and ethical transformation is also noted. This is a thought-provoking research study that investigates the relationship between humans and non-human species, deconstructing harmful posthumanist discourses, and reinforces symbiocentric politics, while also contemplating the future of humans and the humanities for the sustainability of the planet.