From Anthroparasitism to Posthuman Symbiosis: Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki: *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art. Towards Theory and Practice*

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Over the past few decades, a veritable plethora of literature has been produced delineating what has come to be termed the „posthuman" or „nonhuman" turn in cultural, social and political theory. This connects to a broader *Zeitgeist* centered around the recognition that humanism and anthropocentrism are unsustainable. Posthumanism is inseparable from the various strands of ecological thinking, which all share a realization that global civilization must abandon its current modern, anthropocentric frameworks, a configuration responsible for numerous deleterious effects upon our shared planet. The ecological crisis entails the urgency of a shift beyond humanism. We cannot remain human if planetary life is to stand a chance. An increasing number of scholars and researchers, working in both the Humanities and the natural sciences, have used the term „Anthropocene" to describe the current geological era, one in which the unintended and uncontrollable side-effects of human activity have perturbed the natural processes of Earth, resulting in an ever less predictable climate regime. The relative homeostasis of Gaia has been unhinged and displaced by climate rupture. Indeed, the very status of the natural and the social are put in question by the sheer scale of these unintended artificial effects. Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki's anthology, *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art. Towards Theory and Practice* (2022) is intended to showcase various posthumanist ways of thinking beyond the nature vs culture binary, in an era when the results of human activity have gone global. As we ourselves are proponents of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism, in this book review we cannot lay any claim to neutrality or impartiality. Rather, our goal, apart from summarizing the contents of the anthology, is an evaluation of how effectively the book conveys the essentials of posthumanism for readers. In this regard, critical reflection upon the various chapters and more broadly upon the structuring of the anthology cannot be avoided.

The anthology is composed of fourteen thematic chapters, as well as two forewords by leading posthumanist theorists Pramod K. Nayar and Francesca Ferrando (who, regrettably, did not contribute chapters of their own to the book in question), as well as a highly informative Introduction by editors Karpouzou and Zampaki. The chapters are organized into three broad Parts, „Part One: Framing the [sic] Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies", „Part Two: Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Literature and Art" and „Part Three: Symbiotic Posthumanist

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Ecologies in Continental Philosophy." The reader is therefore under the impression that here we shall find various elaborations on the same theme, namely the place of the concept of symbiosis within posthumanism. Indeed, the Introduction provides us with a helpful and concise summary of symbiosis, this term denoting any form of relation lived in close connection, even beyond the point of indiscernability (Karpouzou and Zampaki, 2022, 16). Posthumanism, in Karpouzou and Zampaki's view, would be founded on the recognition that we have never been strictly human to begin with. Posthumanism envisions the end of the autonomous, liberal human subject, an atomistic, truncated egoistic subjectivity isolated from its ecology. In this sense, posthumanism is highly critical of liberal individualism, building upon previous ecophilosophies such as ecocentrism and biocentrism. As process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead already recognized, "no fact is merely itself" (Whitehead, 1938, 13). Nothing is ever self-contained; rather, the world is composed of complex interrelations, and posthumanism generally shares this relationalist worldview.

Symbiosis is originally a term used in theoretical biology, and comes in various forms. As the Introduction makes clear, not all symbiosis is beneficial: „it can be mutualism (all agents benefit), commensalism (one benefits and others continue to live unharmed), and parasitism (one benefits and the other one, who is the host, is harmed)" (Karpouzou and Zampaki, 2022, 16). From an ethical perspective, one can therefore evaluate which symbiotic relationship is helpful and which harmful to the agents involved. The Anthropocene, for instance, can be conceived of as an „anthroparasitism," in the context of which humans extract resources from fellow beings and ecosystems in a one-sided manner. Indeed, much of the texts contained in *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies* critique the modern, alienated mode of being, describing it variously in terms of „anthropocentrism," „capitalism," and so on. Following Donna J. Haraway, the editors in their Introduction emphasize how symbiosis purportedly makes it possible for us to open up our thinking, going beyond closed systems. In Haraway's words, "symbiosis makes trouble for autopoiesis" (Haraway, 2016, 61). Autopoiesis would be the idea that living beings and/or social systems are closed, self-organizing systems that construct their own boundaries). There is hence an antagonism between ideologies that foreground autonomy and symbiotic posthumanism. Opening up systems can also danger them though, a risk Claire Colebrook faces head-on when advocating for the idea of „sym-thanatosis," the idea of life as being inherently self-destructively anarchical (Colebrook, 2012, 203).[3] What these diverse perspectives show is that symbiosis in itself is neither desirable nor undesirable, neither good nor bad. However, a symbiotic cosmology can nevertheless help us envision a posthuman future.

The chapters in the anthology are purportedly intended to assist in the task of elaborating a posthumanist ontology, using diverse fictional and nonfictional, scientific, artistic and philosophical registers. But do they actually fulfil this task effectively? That is the question our book review must answer. Part One, dedicated to „Framing Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies" commences with posthumanist philosopher Roberto Marchesini's chapter, „Somatizing Alterity: Technology and Hybridization in the Post- Human Era." The essay in quesiton begins with a striking declaration: humanity is not autopoietic, and it is illusory to believe so (Marchesini, 2022, 43). The „humanist revolution," which Marchesini entirely

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[3] Many mass species extinctions have been demonstrably caused by the overabundance of life. Biologist Peter Ward, for instance, has hypothesized that life is inherently self-destructive (Ward, 2009).

correctly identifies with modernity, conceived of the hu(Man) as a self-sufficient, autonmous, self-determining autopoietic individuality that creates itself (43-4). The ecological predicament reveals, so Marchesini supposes, the obscenity and unsustainability of such an impoverished perspective. On a posthumanist view, humans are always already hybrids, engaged with a technosphere in acts of „techno-poeisis" (45-6). Yet this begs the question: do we not risk throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater if we abandon autonomy, self-determination and autopoiesis altogether? For instance, the potential for political tyranny is all too present, as demonstrated by biopolitical measures such as anti-terrorism legislation or COVID-19 pandemic-related government interventions in the life of society. A premature rejection of the autonomous individual could very well impair efforts to extend the regime of rights to nonhuman beings. Critics of liberal individualism such as Marchesini and other posthumanists seem to overlook this clear and present danger. Why not extend autopoiesis and the right to autonomy instead of abandoning it? The very „techno-poiesis" Marchesini emphasizes points toward a recognition that technology itself could very well be on the path to becoming a self-organizing autopoietic system. Indeed, Marchesini admits that the technosphere has indeed become a new ecosystem, characterized by specialization and recursivity, a superorganism (46). Despite the rejection of autopoietic theory therefore, Marchesini does end up at something remarkably close to this theory. Why privilege techno-autopoiesis at the expense of the autopoiesis of the human individual? This question seems to elude the focus of the chapter, and we do not find – at least here – any answer. Admitting that the human is not completely self-sufficient or autarchic (something not even classical liberals such as John Stewart Mill would ever have argued for) simply is not the same thing as claiming that humans absolutely cannot be autonomous to any degree. This crucial difference of emphasis remains unaddressed by Marchesini in the essay in question. That being said, the denial of the humanist idea of the human as a „deficient animal" is important. Far from merely enhancing us, technology represents a complete rewriting of what humanity means in the 21st century. Furthermore, Marchesini also highlights how technology is the product of „epiphany," or suprarational mystical realization, and not merely the rational application of scientific principles (49).[4] Against humanism, we must recognize that technology is a genuinely new mode of being, which is neither ergonomic, nor ancillary, nor a mere enhancer of human capabilities (51). We cannot hope to entirely control this new mode of being or bend it to our will, but neither is complete fatalism warranted. Rather, by recognizing technology as a virus, we can create social forms amenable to more harmonious forms of techno-somatization (52). In general, we are very much in agreement with Marchesini's outlook, but the rejection of the human individual's autonomy nonetheless appears to constitute a classic case of going too far too fast.

Chapter Two, penned by Teresa Heffernan, is entitled „Rethinking 'Queer Kin Groups': Cyborgs, Animals, and Machines," and in many ways continues where Marchesini leaves off. Centering on Haraway's classic metaphor of the „cyborg," Heggernan elaborates a convincing critique of recent neo-mechanistic ideas that on the one hand conceive of organisms as complex machines and neo-vitalisms that attribute sentience or lifelike qualities to robots. The key question, one ever more prevalent in the literature, is whether robots are worthy of having

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[4] In this regard, Marchesini echoes the most compelling sections of Henri Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, the last chapter of which argues that only a mystical revolution or „machine myth" of sorts will allow humanity to make the next technological leaps forward (Bergson, 1935 [1932]).

rights or not. Certain lifelike machines elicit our sympathy. As Clifford Nass, a robotics researcher predicted years ago, robot rigths will exist sooner or later: „either we get tougher on technology abuse or it undermines laws about abuse of animals" (quoted in: Heffernan, 2022, 62). An advocate of legislation against „technology abuse" might argue that an abusive or excessively asymmetrical relationship with robots could possibly translate into other forms of abuse, hence we must punish human offenders. An advocate of robot rights, David J. Gunkel claims that ontology is irrelevant to the attribution of rights. We cannot know the Other entirely, yet we nevertheless intuit that we ought to respect their right to integrity and autonomy (Gunkel, 2018). Posthumanists such as Rosi Braidotti and N. Katherine Hayles also reject the idea that any ontological status in and of itself is sufficient for restricting rights to autonomous, rational human subjects alone. Following Haraway's idea of „queer kinship groups," we could potentially extend rights to includes robots that live together with humans and fulfil social needs. Yet Heffernan remains unconvinced by such views. In her opinion, posthumanism, for all its egalitarianism, ignores the material footprint of „smart" technologies such as robotics (Heffernan, 2022, 68). Furthermore, much AI (Artificial Intelligence) research problematically assumes that intelligence is something which can be built or engineered. Indeed, for leading AI theorists such as Geoffrey Hinton and Marvin Minsky, even humans are just complicated organic machines, while machines and animals are, for all intents and purposes, interchangeable (68-9). The key issue for Heffernan is that robots cannot be properly called autonomous, as they are enormously dependent on huge consumption of raw materials and energy. Of particular interest is Heffernan's warning regarding „literalist" readings of science fiction. As Heffernan shows, much contemporary robotics research is informed by superficial, aesthetic appreciations of sci-fi narratives, all too often without accounting for the social critiques. There are also clear limitations to computational models of society, hence caution is warranted and we must not go too far when attributing lifelike characteristics to robotic entities (71). Indeed, to truly think the ramifications of new technologies, we must go beyond the similarity principle (Bencivenga, 2023). Heffernan's essay is a helpful counter to techno-optimistic narratives, but also to some of the more speculative techno-affirmative manifestations of posthumanism which are perhaps overeager to wash away the border between the organic and the inorganic. However, grounding a critique of robots as being „costly" because of their carbon footprint does have its pitfalls. After all, human children and pets are also immensely costly. Does this entail that we ought to practice anti-natalism, or eliminate the very notion of companion species? One could easily make such a claim, but Heffernan does not seem to reflect sufficiently upon the utilitarian direction her train of thought is taking us.

Chapter Three, „How to Say It? Symbiosis as Inter-Ship" is the work of Mieke Bal, a remarkably prolific cultural theorist and award-winning artist whose work defies simple categorization. From our perspective, Bal's chapter was by far the most thought-provoking, although not in the best sense of the term. Interestingly, the essay is nothing short of an all-out assault on the very idea of posthumanism. Bal uses her space to assail the very idea of „post-ism" (as we shall see, the author is not alone in this among the contributors to the volume), specifically critiquing the notion that we as human beings can ever achieve a posthumanist perspective. For Bal, posthumanism is an „irresponsible, unthinking gesture," nothing more than facile intellectual posturing that repeats the very worst excesses of postmodernism (Bal, 2022, 84). „We" as humans purportedly cannot go beyond the human condition. Obviously we as posthumanists cannot agree with such an assessment, but neither

would a Friedrich Nietzsche or an Henri Bergson. The latter would argue that the very essence of philosophy consists in the striving to go beyond a narrowly human perspective (Ansell-Pearson, 2018). Bal's text smacks of stunning superficiality and even intellectual hubris: one gets the distinct impression that the author reaches too far, to the detriment of a text that could have functioned as a radical and noteworthy critique of posthumanism. Unfortunately, Bal wastes her space and the reader's time by mobilizing art examples, the theoretical relevance of which are not always made entirely clear. The chance for elaborating a genuinely noteworthy (and for that matter, response-worthy) critique of posthumanism is wasted. Instead of engaging in a genuine dialogue with posthumanist literature, Bal enumerates various disjointed theses about temporality (time in her view is continuous, supposedly making „postism," or any other scientific paradigm shift for that matter, irrelevant), hanging together in the loosest manner imaginable. While Bal is in agreement with posthumanists regarding the necessity of abandoning anthropocentrism, she ventures the claim that „anthropomorphism" is an essential component of critical interpretation, something no posthumanist would really argue against (Bal, 2022, 85-6). Posthumanists do not seek to ban anthropomorphic interpretation or commentary, but rather emphasize that other modes of being also matter; everything is not about interpretation. Furthermore, Bal, citing Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, also argues for an epochal view of time centered around „contemporariness, coexistence, coevalness," rightly emphasizing how Bergson's philosophy of time allows for the simultaneity and coexistence of all types of durations (88). Once again, the issue is not with Bal's thesis – one that, in and itself could indeed be correct – but in how this supports her case against posthumanism. It remains a mystery how or why accepting temporal simultaneity ought to lead us to abandon the tenets of posthumanism. Could one not say that the posited equality of durations is a reason *for* accepting a post-anthropocentric worldview? Posthumanists are also guilty in Bal's view of arguing against the idea that humans can change society, undermining efforts at political and social transformation (90). Bal conveniently ignores the fact that many posthumanists *do* argue for social reform, even revolution, while many distinctly *non-posthumanist* political theorists hold that humans do not, cannot, or even should not, change their social conditions. The correlation between political activism (or passivism) and a posthumanist outlook seems tenuous at best. In summary, Bal's train of thought is not coherent enough to be anywhere near sufficient for demolishing the philosophical claims of posthumanism, leaving the reader with a severe case of disappointment.

Chapter Four, by the volume editor Peggy Karpouzou, bears the title „Symbiotic Citizenship in Posthuman Urban Ecosystems: Smart Biocities in Speculative Fiction" and indeed delivers upon its promises. Karpouzou asks the highly pertinent question: who or what is the citizen of the prospective, posthumanist „smart biocity"? (99). Ecoprecarity, to quote Nayar's expression, has become an ubiquitous condition shared by many modes of being in the Anthropocene. Against the destructive epoch of the Anthropocene, Karpouzou argues for a new „cene," the „Symbiocene," centered around a plea for mutualism as the ideal type of symbiosis (Karpouzou, 2022, 100). Existence is always already coexistence, and smart city planning must take into account the need for experimental citizen-centric participation within „urban metabolisms" (104). Most of the smart city discourse is informed by a technocratic and computational vision of urban planning, focusing upon the application of ICTs (Information-Communication Technologies) to urban infrastructures. For Karpouzou, this top-down approach characterizing mainstream smart city discourses smacks of

„neoliberalism," although this is something of a misnomer, as neoliberal theory is actually opposed to centralized decision-making and central planning (103; for a neoliberal critique of top-down urban management and a concept of decentralized urban planning, see: Moroni, 2015). Despite this conceptual imprecision (Karpouzou's concerns are mostly shared by the neoliberals she casts as technocrats), the idea of self-regulating experimental polycentric posthuman cities is noteworthy, as is her emphasis on the very real trade-offs between ecological sustainability and digitalization (Karpouzou, 2022, 104). As Karpouzou reminds us, to a great extent it is illusory to believe that we can be both „green" and „digital" simultaneously. By deconstructing the city vs countryside and culture vs nature binaries, we can reconfigure our societies and our urban conglomerations. In particular, Karpouzou's proposal for a „symbiocracy" that replaces existing forms of democracy is compelling, but we do not see why such a political framework ought to replace decentralized market institutions altogether (106-7). The characterization of the posthuman city as „self-organizing, decentralized and distributed" indeed bears all the hallmarks of the market, yet Karpouzou does not draw extensively upon political philosophical and political theory literature relating to problematics of decentralization, city states and secession (111).

As mentioned, the chapters in Part Two, „Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Literature and Art" are dedicated to elaborating concrete aesthetic examples of symbiotic posthumanism from fiction. In Chapter Five („Cracking Open: Ecological Communication in Richard Powers' *The Overstory*") Bruce Clarke, a „nonhumanist" theorist of cybernetics and autopoetic theory, presents a reading of Richard Powers' novel *The Overstory* that foregrounds what has come to be known as „plant theory," one of the most interesting trends in recent contemporary theory (see: Marder, 2013). Recent scientific discoveries about interspecies communication have revealed that plants are not passive, receptive and immobile entities, but rather very much responsive agents. Inter-plant communication is widely recognized, in large part thanks to the scientific breakthroughs achieved by Dr Suzanne Simard, who discovered that trees assist each other via carbon transfer through mycorrhizal networks. (Clarke, 2022, 135). Posthumanism for Clarke is grounded upon a „redistribution" of an animacy beyond the human and even the animal. Simply put, the „animate" is synonymous with being itself, leading to the realization of a neo-animism (129). Powers' novel, *The Overstory*, presents us with a fictional representation of trees helping humans build a sustainable nonhuman future, one that is consonant with the latest developments in scientific knowledge. Of crucial importance for Clarke is the elaboration of nonmodern cosmologies. Cultures labelled „animist" by the early anthropologists such as E. B. Tylor, who invented the term „animism," represent examples of what a nonmodern ontology could look like, a cosmos in which everything is alive to a greater or lesser degree. Following Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we may even speak of a „classical posthumanism," an anachronism that helps our minds become „greener things" (131-3). What makes Clarke's outlook particularly compelling is that, as distinct from critics such as Bal, it combines the „non" of nonmodernism and nonhumanism with the rhetorical effectivness of „posthumanism." What Clarke makes clear is that we are not necessarily compelled to choose between „nonism" and „postism," an invaluable theoretical insight often lost upon overly hasty critics of transcendence.

Chapter Six, Irene Sanz Alonso's „Posthuman Subjects in Rosa Montero's *Los tiempos del odio*" introduces the work of award-winning Spanish cyberpunk author Rosa Montero, specifically the third installment of the *Bruna Husky* trilogy. As Alonso emphasizes rightly, posthumanism is not yet another „post-trend," but a vital part of the conversation about our planetary future

(Alonso, 2022, 141-2). Alonso is also correct in focusing upon science fiction as the single most privileged register for thinking about posthuman and symbiotic futures. This genre, through its combination of speculation with scientific rigor, is singularly well-suited to world-building, in both a literal and figurative sense. The choice of novel is on the one hand refreshing, given that at the time of writing the third installment of Montero's trilogy (*Los tiempos del odio*) had not yet been translated into English, but the work itself is also rather derivative of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, a fact Alonso herself admits (145). Indeed we are hard-pressed to find significant differences between Montero's work and that of Dick. Both novelists foreground the disappearance of the natural vs artificial boundary through mobilizing the figure of the android. Montero's novel on the whole seems like a rehash of by-now highly familiar cyberpunk tropes, including the different categories of human, quasi-human and transhuman entities within a dystopian, highly urbanized context. There really is nothing here that strikes us as unique or exceptional, although Montero's clear parody of Isaac Asimov's kitsch humanist „Three Rules for Robotics" is certainly of note. The ludicrousness of humanism is summarized very well by a fictional law in Montero's universe, the „Law of Human Integrity," which stipulates the exact percentage one can modify of one's own body before one falls out of the „human" category (150). Perhaps the overarching message of Montero's novel is that we have never been entirely human, i.e. the very category itself is porous and open to scrutiny. Indeed, the novelist herself accepts the posthumanist label, and consciously integrates theoretical insights into her works with a skill and imaginativeness that partially offsets their somewhat derivative nature. On the whole, Montero presents us with a „pessimistic posthumanism" lacking in any guarantees or promises of a utopian future (154).

True to its title, Aleksandra Lukaszewicz's chapter presents a reading of the cyborgian performance art of Neil Harbisson and Moon Ribas, artists who have implanted smart devices into their bodies, enacting a quasi-transhumanist „broadening of sensibility" (Lukaszewicz, 2022, 157). These two pioneers of posthuman cyborg art encapsulate for Lukaszewicz the „proactionary principle," the libertarian idea that individuals should be free to experiment with their own bodies, insofar as this does not pose excessive risks to others. In the summarization of „extropian" transhumanist theorist Max More, the proactionary principle stipulates that „people's freedom to innovate technologically is highly valuable, even critical, to humanity. This implies several imperatives when restrictive measures are proposed: Assess risks and opportunities according to available science, not popular perception. Account for both the costs of the restrictions themselves, and those of opportunities foregone. Favor measures that are proportionate to the probability and magnitude of impacts, and that have a high expectation value. Protect people's freedom to experiment, innovate, and progress" (More, 2004). In Lukaszewicz's view, Harbisson and Ribas are living empirical proof that not only humans can make art: the two aforementioned artists are cyborg persons, more-than-human entities who have become one with their technological implements. Harbisson, who was born color-blind, can „hear" colors thanks to an antenna installed in his brain, while Ribas can sense earthquakes around the world. Regarding the author's position, we would nonetheless urge caution when it comes to ontological statements. The cyborg body, despite its technological augmentation, is still very much human, Lukaszewicz's assertions notwithstanding (Lukaszewicz, 2022, 169). Instead of seeing technological enhancement as a break or fundamental innovation, could we not conceive of technology as retroactively showing the absence of anything purely human to begin with? Furthermore, Lukaszewicz

conveniently side-steps the epistemological question that haunts all performance art: how can we as an audience know that the performances actually happened in the exact way the artists mediate and represent them? Artists have a tangible interest in exaggerating, hyperbolizing and rhetorically framing performances in ways that can be deceptive. Indeed, art itself is at least as much about false appearances as true performances, therefore a healthy dose of scepticism is warranted when commenting upon art. Whether the bodies of Harbisson and Ribas have truly become „postmedial," as Lukaszewicz claims, is debatable (171).

One of the less ambitious texts in the anthology, Dimitris Angelatos' „Folded Tactility: Tracing Metabolic Artistic Practices in Contemporary Sculpture" summarizes two examples from contemporary sculpture, that of Greek artist Yiannis Markantonakis and Kenyan artist Tahir Carl Karmali. Markantonakis' pieces work with pulp materials, mostly discarded old magazines, creating artworks that, as Angelatos quotes Jean Baudrillard, perform a „liquidation of all referentials" (Angelatos, 2022, 180-1). Metabolic art is a direct aesthetic engagement with the dialectic of discarding and production. Refuse and waste come back perpetually, in an Eternal Return of the indisposable. This is particularly acute in Karmali's *Three children stand and lay in the soil* (2018), which is composed of textiles treated with chemicals extracted from discarded lithium-ion batteries, enacting „an open metabolic field of dynamic interaction" (184). As Angelatos shows convincingly, the sheer material presentness and immediacy of the works in question testifies to the material resistance of indisposability, giving the lie to our global economy and its illusions relating to waste treatment. The wasted, rubbished surplus refuses to disappear; Markantonakis and Karmali's artworks lay bare the lies of productivism. An immensely important merit of Angelatos' essay is that it is not overwritten, containing just the right amount of theory and examples that fit seamlessly with the chosen philosophical framework. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for all the essays in the anthology.

One of the most enigmatic pieces featured in the book is David Fancy's „Geomancy vs Technomancy: Resonance, Divination and Gilbert Simondon's Thought." Firstly, it must be mentioned that we find it somewhat odd that the chapter is not featured in Part Three, being a commentary upon the work of exclusively Continental philosophers. Fancy offers a fascinating reading of the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Gilbert Simondon, foregrounding a supposed dualism between „geomancy" and „technomancy." Almost certainly the enigmatic, even mythopoetic mode of writing is the sole discourse suited to the sub-genre of „Deleuzian" philosophy, but this does have its pitfalls. „Geomancy" would be a „resonant" relationship with the Earth, whereas „technomancy" denotes the systemic closure enacted by technocapital. At the outset, Fancy identifies geomancy with various nonmodern traditions, such as that of Chinese feng shui practitioners, Celtic druids, Arabic sand „geomancers" and Native American shamans (Fancy, 2022, 189-190). Mythopoeisis of course has its pitfalls, chief among them the romanticization of nonmodern and non-Western spiritual practices. Fancy takes Deleuze's following assertion, from the latter's book on Marcel Proust, as a methodological credo of sorts: „Everything is implicated, everything is complicated, everything is sign, meaning, essence. Everything exists in those obscure zones that we penetrate as into crypts, in order to decipher hieroglyphs and secret languages. The Egyptologist, in all things, is the man who undergoes an initiation—the apprentice" (Deleuze, 2000 [1964], 92). Against the idea that material reality is bereft of meaning, this method of doing philosophy is certainly refreshing, but it does have its risks. One could ask whether this really is true or valid for all modes of being, or even whether it

represents an anthropomorphization of materiality. The danger is reading too much into matter. Fancy introduces the neologism „echealogy" to denote the new philosophy of resonance, derived from resonant columns called „echea" designed to enhance the sounds of stage performers in Greek and Roman theaters (Fancy, 2022, 192). As Fancy admits, the *echea* described by Vitruvius could very well have been made up, fictional embellishments to the Roman architect's book, but speculation ought to go beyond narrow empiricism (194). In this regard, we are in complete accord with Fancy's position, which represents on the whole a very enlightening antidote to the empiricism and scientism all too prevalent in philosophy and society as a whole. Nature in the traditional outlooks mentioned by Fancy and in Deleuze and Guattari's ontology is full of resonances (195). Also of interest is Fancy's criticism of Haraway's cyborg metaphor, too often uncritically celebrated as liberating us from technocapital. In Fancy's view, Haraway unwittingly contributes to the „mythologization of technocapital" and we must reject technomancy, defined as the almost „magical" yet diabolic manipulation of reality by technology (198). On the whole, Fancy's work is thoroughly anti-technological, but this is also its main drawback. Despite drawing upon Gilbert Simondon's work on resonance, the non-dualism of Simondon is not highlighted by Fancy, who insists upon a rather too strict dualism between a more nature-oriented form of resonance (geomancy) and an anti-natural, non-resonant mode of being (technomancy). We definitely agree in the need to go beyond reductive and human supremacist scientism (203). Yet the very intransigence of Fancy's dualism does not seem particularly helpful, and indeed seems to go against the symbiosis advocated for by other posthumanist scholars. Fancy overly hastily downplays the highly technological nature of the „new Earth" alluded to by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. Indeed, the latter being all but synonymous with a planetary „Mechanosphere."

Part Three is dedicated to specifically Continental philosophical examples that underline the symbiotic posthumanist position. Chapter Ten, entitled „Animal- Human Differences: The Deconstructive Force of Posthumanism" was authored by Nicole Anderson. Not unlike Bal, Anderson exercizes a critique of posthumanism centered around the rejection of the „post" label. It would be an exaggeration to call this piece focused, well-written, or even terribly original. Ostensibly a commentary upon Jacques Derrida's work, primarily *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, it does not really provide much new insight into the text. Anderson fails to mention that the text in question has been foundational for the posthumanist field of Animal Studies, and indeed does not even cite the relevant literature. Instead, Anderson proceeds to rehash the by now mind-numbingly familiar criticisms of postism. Derrida was right in being wary of oversimplification, but is anybody in the field of posthumanism unaware of the need to avoid strict categorizations? Anderson is entirely correct in emphasizing how naming is inherently hierarchical and problematic, but again, there is absolutely nothing new in this insight, if we can even call it that (Anderson, 2022, 212). For Anderson, the problem is that posthumanis, insofar as it presents itself as an era or Zeitgeist, risks becoming "an escha-teleological process," reinforcing a progressive or teleological view of history as a series of paradigm shifts (213). All things considered, we believe it would be a science marketing disaster if posthumanism were to shy away from its own postism: the very rhetorical power of this discourse lies precisely in the way it frames itself as a turn. To reject any generalization or categorization can be viewed as an exercize in deconstruction, but a universalization of the deconstructive method or its adoption by all posthumanist scholars would be the suicide of scientific inquiry. We are in agreement that deconstruction means more than blurring or

merely overturning hierarchies: as Anderson, following Derrida, rightly emphasizes, deconstruction is also about a „general displacement of the whole system" (217). But we must be careful not to overly universalize deconstruction itself. Difference itself should be in the focus, but again, this is not something any serious posthumanist would disagree with. Furthermore, respect for difference ought to extend to the very real distinction between deconstructionism and posthumanism: these two movements are not one and the same thing. As for Anderson's delightful story of a possum inhabiting the environs of her house, this mode of discourse is familiar for any reader of ecofeminist theorist Val Plumwood, and on the whole adds little apart from entertainment value to an otherwise staid, repetitively conventional, and quite frankly, derivative piece (220-3; Plumwood, 2000).

In the next chapter – „Deleuzian Cosmopolitanism: From the Capitalist Axiomatic to the 'Chaosmocene'" – Fred Evans presents another reading of Deleuzian philosophy, coupled with a reading of Michel Foucault's late lectures on parrhesia. Building on Deleuze's concept of the „chaosmos" („the cosmos consists of series of elements that intrinsically diverge from each other but, paradoxically, still communicate with one another"), Evans argues for a possible exit from capitalism, jettisoning the Anthropocene in favor of a „Chaosmocene" in which „all voices" can become audible (Evans, 2022, 229). Political theory recognizes a trade-off between diversity and unity: too much of either can lead to unworkable political and social constructs (228). Evans recognizes this issue, and believes that the Deleuzian chaosmos-concept can be of help in conceptualizing political alternatives open to differences, including nonhuman forms of agency. The author believes that any posthuman social form ought to satisfy three basic criteria: solidarity, heterogeneity and fecundity. This last point is particularly interesting, given the increasing importance of both human demography and species extinction in global geopolitics. An open utopia would, in Evans' view, provide adequate space for the production of both human and nonhuman differences. Our issue is with the use of what amounts, when all is said and done, to a cosmological claim (the world is a chaosmos, an order composed of disorder). What, if any, political relevance does an ontological concept have? There is no simple translatability between ontology and politics, and Evans seems to side-step this problem without addressing it. Evans holds that Colebrook is entirely correct in emphasizing the need for a „differential politics" that opens up the „elemental and inhuman" but regarding how this could be operationalized we remain none the wiser (Evans, 2022, 232; Colebrook, 2013, 179). Even if one were to agree with these assertions, a gap remains between ontology and politics that remains unfilled. Indeed, the author admits that language is not life (Evans, 2022, 233). If this is so, then we must also admit that *philosophical discourse is not yet political theory*. Something extra is needed, a step neither Evans nor Colebrook, nor any posthumanist philosopher seem willing to produce: a *systematic* social and political theory that outlines where we ought to go and how. While Deleuze and Guattari are correct in noting that the idea of "a world supergovernment that makes final decisions" is an "absurdity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 [1980], 461), and scepticism regarding social engineering is warranted on the part of posthumanists, the utter absence of a plausible posthumanist theory of governance is a thorny issue that we, as posthumanists, must address in the future if our research paradigm is to stay relevant. It is a very simple move to claim that a utopian parrhesiastic cosmopolitanism would be a "self-generating" "self-deterritorializing" process, but *how* we ought to create its preconditions remains unexplained (Evans, 2022, 240).

Chapter Twelve was authored by Glen A. Mazis, a leading scholar of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Entitled „A Posthumanist Truly Back to the Things Themselves: Merleau- Ponty's Embodied

Phenomenology and Literary Language," the chapter provides a marvellous elucidation of the continued relevance of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work for posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. As Mazis makes clear, even in Merleau-Ponty's relatively early works, we find a focus upon the more-than-human nature of perception. The role of philosophy for Merleau-Ponty is to shine a light upon all living relationships of existence (Mazis, 2022, 247). In this regard, from very early on, Merleau-Ponty was preoccupied with a thoroughgoing reworking of philosophical language. As Mazis emphasizes, Merleau-Ponty called into question the very idea of thinking being syonymous with conceptual grasping. Instead, the French phenomenologist practiced an „indirect ontology," increasing centering upon the power of things themselves and how they decenter humans. Consciousness is far from constitutive of reality: rather, things create our reality. To quote Rajiv Kaushik, Merleau-Ponty's system is „an ontology from within the middle of things" (Kaushik, 2019, 44). Mazis does an exemplary job of demonstrating how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology contains insights that can contribute to deepening posthumanism. Identity, far from being self-contained, emerges from the sum of appearances: there is a „co-birthing" between human and world (Mazis, 2022, 250-1). Instead of viewing signs and meanings as being mere human projections, for Merleau-Ponty the world itself always already gestures, pointing us in directions and providing agents with imperatives, affordances (253). Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that Merleau-Ponty in many ways preceded many of the later insights of ecological psychology. While Mazis' elucidation is exemplary, it is also somewhat surprising that neither Alphonso Lingis nor Graham Harman are cited by Mazis here, given the explicitly post-anthropocentric manner in which both philosophers interpret Merleau-Ponty. What unites Mazis with Lingis and Harman is the manifestly *realist* tenor of this interpretation. The „physiognomic imagination" would denote a mode of philosophical inquiry that follows the faces of things themselves, animated by attentiveness to the „solicitations" of the world (256). For the realist Merleau-Ponty, the „flesh of the world" is a plenitude, a „matrix of sense" already replete with meanings and significations prior to the advent of reflective language (259). One can only wish that Mazis would engage more broadly with Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO) here and elsewhere, given the striking similarities between his approach and that of OOO thinkers. Mazis' chapter is nonetheless also important in a methodological sense, because of its advocacy for speculative modes of philosophy. As Mazis stresses, „all ontology is a type of imagination," and imaginative flair, coupled with poetic use of language, is the most suited to elucidating reality in itself (260). We could not agree more with this statement.

Chapter Thirteen, „Eco-Phenomenology in the Dark," is penned by Cassandra Falke. The essay is an exercize in ecophenomenology, a subdiscipline within the phenomenological tradition first invented by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine in the early 2000s. Falke follows these pioneering phenomenologists in arguing for the centrality of an ecological description of the world for 21st century thought. As Falke writes, "phenomenology addresses the plenitude our concepts miss" (Falke, 2022, 265). Posthumanism is about more than just the critique of human dominance or the rejection of a specific, humanist concept of the human. Rather, posthumanism is also about „posthuman-ism," conceptualizing that which is beyond the human, "those aspects which are constitutively human, and nevertheless, beyond the constitutive limits of the human in the strict sense of the term" (Ferrando, 2019, 3). Posthumanists therefore cannot remain content by remaining within an exlusively deconstructionist or critical register: *positive* descriptions of the more-than-human nature of experience and existence are required. Falke's chapter is therefore a much-needed supplement

to critical posthumanism, displaying the hallmarks of what we may call descriptive or „speculative" posthumanism. Using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and Jean-Luc Marion's concept of „saturated phenomenon," Falke shows how the givenness of a situation can often exceed our conceptual grasp. Phenomena are in excess of our objectifications. If we are too hasty with our categorizations, "objectifying what is given as an event ignores what exceeds our intentionality" (Falke, 2022, 269). This is an insight Falke shares with both Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and Graham Harman's Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO), yet Falke, inexplicably, chooses to distance herself from these movements, much to the detriment of the text (266). Erroneously, Falke maintains that ANT and OOO do not acknowledge human agency, whereas in fact these schools of thought *situate* human agency within broader networks of nonhuman agency, the exact same goal as her „dark phenomenology." Similarly lacking in the piece is any engagement with Timothy Morton's OOO-inspired „dark ecology," which could have served as a vitally important theoretical anchor. Despite these lacunae, Falke's text works well and conveys the sense of inhabiting a dark forest very well utilizing a phenomenological thick description, drawing on the author's lived experiences. There are „saturated phenomena" in the world that display an „absence of human meaningfulness" while endowed with hidden meanings of their own (271). This assertion is something an OOO scholar would also agree with. Falke also argues for partially reintroducing the „wild" status of certain beings, such as „wildlife": similarly to Anderson, Falke also militates against melting all differences between the human and nonhuman into one undifferentiated mass. The ecological crisis in particular underlines the unpredictability of our touch upon earth (274). We shape the world, and we in turn are shaped by the world thus perturbed. Wildlife overflows our conceptually pre-inscribed intentionality: „more givenness than I can take is offered to me" in the „wild" situation, a description that also reminds us of Merleau-Ponty's „brute being" (276).

Nothing can entirely prepare the reader for the final chapter. Avital Ronell's essay „Nietzsche Apologizes for the Weather: A Storm Chaser's Report" reads like a fever dream or a prophetic vision. Instead of any real engagement with posthumanism, the reader is – literally - assailed by a storm of words, the intention of which remains shrouded in mystery. Ronell has managed to produce a flow of words even more enigmatic than David Fancy's chapter, which in itself is no small feat, but how or why this highly performative text contributes to posthumanist discourse remains challenging to decipher. Instead of any serious elaboration of post-anthropocentric thought, we get a feverish rendition of the 2020s North American *Zeitgeist*, various political references, and an attempt to textually reproduce the feeling of getting swept up by Hurricane Sandy. The reader is certainly left feeling disorientated, but whether we have profited or merely wasted our time by persistently slogging through, continuously buffeted by wind, we know not. In the end, dizziness is all that remains. Ronell's essay would certainly have profited by referencing at least a couple of storm-related disaster films (*Geostorm*, *Into the Storm*, and *Twister* come immediately to mind). From conspiracy theories to climate apocalypticism and mass media, Ronell's contribution summons up multiple images from contemporary American culture. Almost certainly we may only assess the cumulative effect of the storm in an unknown future.

In summary, Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki's *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art. Towards Theory and Practice* is a formidable anthology. While at times the thematic heterogeneity of the various chapters composing it threaten to tear the volume apart, this is without question reflective of the inherent ambiguity of posthumanism

as a movement. It would certainly have helped to have greater thematic unity, and the reader feels that as a whole the anthology remains inconsistent, but it also demonstrates that there is no lack of insights, ideas and provocations within and around posthumanist theory. Much remains up for debate, and we may only hope that newer volumes will be forthcoming in the future.

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