Posthumanism is something you want to know about. Not only will it enrich your academic work, but it will add invaluable perspectives to your existence.

Why

POSTHUMANISM IS A THEORETICAL frame, as well as an empirical one, which can apply to any field of enquiry, starting from our location as a species, to the individual gaze. Posthumanism addresses the question «who am I?» in conjunction with other related questions, such as: «what am I?» and «where and when are we?» The existential aspects are not disjunct to political and spatiotemporal elements. On one side, such an approach has a festive element: the loneliness of the Western subject is lost in the recognition of the others as interconnected to the self. On the other side, the awareness of distributed agency in the evolving body of spacetime becomes infinitely resonant, as does each existential performance: there is no absolute «otherness»; we exist in a material net in which everything is actually connected and potentially intra-acting. Such an awareness generates theoretical as well as pragmatic considerations. In the 21st century the impact of anthropocentric habits on earth has become so massive that geologists are addressing the present era as the Anthropocene, in which human actions are seriously affecting the ecosystem. In the past, humans were not recognized as agents directly causing climate changes. It is now common knowledge that the earth is collapsing under the massive quantity of non-recycled garbage produced daily, the high emission of atmospheric greenhouse gases and the level of pollution introduced into the natural environment. The way the majority of current human societies are performing their material interacting in this world is based on anthropocentric premises, which are leading to a point of non-return in ecological and sustainable terms. Since everything is connected, this damaged balance is also directly affecting human well-being: an example can
be seen in the alarming global rise on cancer rates. Humanism may not be of help in changing such a direction; posthumanism, on the other hand, can be the turning point, by bringing to the discussion crucial notions such as speciesism, entanglement and non-human agency, among others.

Who

What about humans? Are they going to be advantaged by a posthuman approach? If you think that sexism, racism and any other form of discrimination are impediments in the realization of desirable futures, the answer is: yes. Posthumanism was born out of the feminist reflection and nurtured by the studies of the differences. The Seventies called for a revisitation of the notion of the human by acknowledging that, in the Western tradition, only a specific type of human had been recognized as such: he had to be male, white, Western, heterosexual, physically able, propertied and so on. Such a revisitation called for a recognition of all the «other» humans, who had been left out. Western hegemonic accounts had mostly been dualistic, based on opposites which can be exemplified in the classical pairs: nature/culture, female/male, black/white, gay/hetero etc. Such a dualistic approach reflected the historical praxis of war («us» against the «enemy») and the political habit of contrast, instead of emphasizing necessary social performances of survival, such as coexistence and symbiosis. In the Nineties, the feminist discourse focussed around the notion of borders, which was essential in determining such opposites: how to define what is nature and what is culture? What is female, what is male; what is black, what is white? The answer was: these realms cannot be clearly separated. The feminist discourse developed around notions such as la mestiza (Anzaldúa 1987), the nomadic subject (Braidotti 1994), the cyborg, as the hybrid which has no origin (Haraway 1985). Judith Butler (1990) focussed on the role of culture in the reiteration of constructed notions of nature. By the end of the Nineties, the next step was taken within the field of New Materialisms, which is a specific branch of posthumanism: nature and culture were recognized as intrinsically entangled (Barad 2007). Donna Haraway thus spoke of «natureculture» (2003), to emphasize that the two terms are not discernible. The posthuman begins its reflection from this hybrid ontological acknowledgement, starting by revisiting the human realm: once we have recognized that the human is not one but many, what is the human anyway? What is the non-human?

When

Feminism is embedded in the genealogy of the posthuman. Posthumanism historically developed out of the feminist reflection in the Nineties. For instance, the key text which brought posthumanism to broad international attention is: «How we became posthuman» (1999), written in a critical feminist tone by Katherine K. Hay-
les. Here, it is important to open a parenthesis. Posthumanism is often simplistically assimilated to a philosophical approach focussed on the latest developments of science and technology. This is due to the fact that the term «posthuman» is used as an umbrella term to include different movements and perspectives (Ferrando 2013). Two movements, in particular, are often confused: transhumanism and (critical, cultural and philosophical) posthumanism. Transhumanism recognizes science and technology as the main assets of reformulation of the notion of the human, and employs the notion of the «posthuman» to name an era in which such reformulations will have irredeemably impacted the evolution of the human, giving raise to the posthuman. Posthumanism, on the other hand, sees the posthuman as a condition which is already accessible, since we have never been human: «human» is a human concept, based on humanistic and anthropocentric premises. Going back to the relation between feminism and posthumanism: can a feminist lose sight of sexism by opening the lens to a posthuman sensitivity? Expanding the perspective by detecting other forms of discrimination in the constitution of social and material narratives does not mean losing the hardly gained critical standpoint of feminism. Quite the opposite. As Crenshaw (1989) has clearly argued, feminism can only be intersectional: a closed form of feminism, which does not take into account other forms of discriminations such as racism, ableism or ageism, structurally undermines its recognitional intent. Any form of discrimination is a potential carrier for any other forms of discrimination, and it is related to all forms of discrimination: sexism is not separated from speciesism, biocentrism and so on; thus, it cannot be approached in isolation. For instance, Braidotti notes how the trafficking of animals precedes the one of women: «Animals are also sold as exotic commodities and constitute the largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms, but ahead of women» (Braidotti 2013, 8). In this concrete case, speciesism and sexism are working along similar lines. All forms of bias come from a hierarchical social and cultural episteme, whose origin can be traced, in the West, to the symbolic structure of the Great Chain of Beings (Scala Naturae). Rooted in Plato, Aristotle and the Old Testament, the Great Chain of Being depicted a hierarchical structure of all matter and life (even in its hypothetical forms, such as angels and demons), starting from God (Lovejoy 1936). Posthumanism deconstructs any ontological hierarchy; a multidimensional network depicts more closely what is at stake, even if there is no representational autonomy. The ways the physical realm is conceived and perceived, is not separated to the ways it is becoming, since the projection of such forms is simultaneously affecting the sensitive interconnected vibrational body of spacetime.

**Where**

Existence is entangled, symbiotic, hybrid. There is no clearly defined borders which allow fixed notions of being. The way matter appears on the large scale might be
misleading, if taken as its ultimate state: on a subatomic level, everything is in constant vibration. As famously demonstrated by Einstein (1905), matter and energy are equivalent. Energy is intrinsically relational, as well as matter is irreducible to a single determined entity; any reductionist approach has scientifically failed. From a physics perspective, anything which has mass and volume is considered matter: humans, for instance, are made out of matter, as well as robots. Let’s now go back to our initial question: «who am I?» We are material networks of relations, fluctuant becoming in symbiotic interaction with the «others», the environment, our surroundings; we are constant potentials. In nietzschean terms: we are «a bridge» («Thus Spoke Zarathustra», 7). Human existence is related to any other form of existence; nothing, in this dimension, is completely autonomous or totally independent. In this sense, the field of epigenetics is significant, with its emphasis on the heritable changes in gene expression caused by mechanisms which are external to the underlying DNA sequence. Posthumanism approaches the potentials opened by biotechnology, nanotechnology, cybernetics, robotics and space migration, in an ontological way, through Heidegger: technology is «no mere means», but «a way of revealing» (1953:12). We can thus talk of technologies of existence. Posthumanism has to do with theoretical philosophy as well as with applied ethics. More extensively, posthumanism can be perceived as a path of knowledge, which may eventually turn into full awareness: we literally are what we eat, what we think, what we breathe, what and who we connect to. Currently, posthumanism seems the most open and sensitive critical frame to approach intellectual tasks, as well as daily practices of being. Since any existential performance has interconnected agency, posthumanism will add to your perspective as much as your perspective will add to the posthuman shift. More than an exchange («ex» comes from Latin, meaning «out»), it is an intra-change, a fluid entanglement of being, an expansion of material awareness, a fractal movement of energy which will have simultaneously affected your existence as well as the evolution of spacetime. This is why I think posthumanism is something you want to know about.

REFERENCES


