



Book Review

Reworlding the Human: A Review of Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art

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Reworlding the Human: A Review of Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy and Art

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In recent decades, the interdisciplinary encounter between posthumanism and the environmental humanities has engendered rich intellectual terrain for rethinking the status of the human, the function of narrative, and the ethical imperatives of multispecies coexistence. The edited volume *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Western Literature, Philosophy, and Art: Towards Theory and Practice* (Peter Lang, 2023), curated by Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki, makes a significant contribution to this dialogue. Organized in three thematic sections—“Framing the Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies,” “Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Literature and Art,” and “Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Continental Philosophy”—the book weaves a cohesive tapestry that connects speculative fiction, ecological aesthetics, and continental thought to imagine symbiosis not only as a metaphor but as a practical and ethical mode of being in the Anthropocene and beyond.

The volume is part of the *Studies in Literature, Culture, and the Environment* series (Vol. 11) and is available in print (ISBN: 978-3-631-84501-1) and digital formats (E-ISBN: 978-3-631-88291-7, DOI: 10.3726/b20590). It is peer-reviewed and open access under a CC-BY 4.0 license. The editors, both affiliated with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, bring extensive expertise in literary theory, contemporary literature, and posthumanist thought to the project.

The editors’ introduction, “Towards a Symbiosis of Posthumanism and Environmental Humanities,” is a critical roadmap. They argue for a “symbiocentric” worldview, challenging both classical anthropocentrism and posthuman discourses that, paradoxically, risk erasing species difference under the guise of affinity. Instead, the volume insists on the necessity of preserving alterity as a condition for responsible multispecies dialogue.

The volume opens with two seminal contributions by Pramod K. Nayar and Francesca Ferrando. Nayar’s essay, “Looking through the Symbiotic Lens,” sets the stage by articulating four key shifts: (1) an ethical reframing

of nonhuman life, (2) a redefinition of corporeality, (3) a technological reconsideration of ecosystems, and (4) a philosophical revaluation of justice and multispecies entanglements. Ferrando's reflection, "We Are the Earth," proposes posthumanism as a form of ontological awareness, emphasising planetary co-belonging over anthropocentric sovereignty.

The first section of the volume, titled "Framing the Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies," is devoted to the conceptual and philosophical framework. Roberto Marchesini's "Somatizing Alterity" introduces the provocative notion of *techne* as a viral agent that somatically transforms the human. He argues that the fusion of organic and inorganic agents reshapes not only the body but also modes of perception, ethics, and kinship. Teresa Heffernan follows with a deconstructive genealogy of "queer kin groups," tracing how fictional representations of robots and animals disrupt species binaries and challenge legal frameworks for the allocation of rights.

Mieke Bal's essay, "How to Say It? Symbiosis as Inter-Ship," offers a semiotic and poetic reflection on the politics of prepositions such as *post-*, *trans-*, and *inter-*. Through her theory of "image-thinking," she articulates the conditions under which art can function as a symbiotic medium, engaging the viewer in affective ecologies that transcend categorical distinctions. Peggy Karpouzou's contribution, "Symbiotic Citizenship in Posthuman Urban Ecosystems," moves the discussion into speculative fiction and urban studies. She explores the concept of "smart biocities" and argues for "symbiomimicry" as a design principle that supports unplugged, biodiverse, and inclusive civic life.

The second section of the volume, "Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Literature and Art," examines narrative and aesthetic practices that articulate and stage posthuman symbiosis. Bruce Clarke's analysis of Richard Powers' *The Overstory* reads the novel as a "sentient symphony," focusing on vegetal communication, animacy, and the reconfiguration of temporalities. Clarke's notion of "involutionary momentum" describes the novel's downward movement into entangled, multisensory awareness—a cognitive descent that rewrites human perception through vegetal being.

Irene Sanz Alonso provides a compelling reading of Rosa Montero's *Los tiempos del odio*, focusing on the android Bruna Husky. The analysis highlights the affective and ethical dimensions of Bruna's identity crisis, proposing emotional entanglement as a precondition for interspecies understanding. The figure of the android becomes emblematic of the porous boundaries between memory, embodiment, and ethics in the posthuman condition.

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz's essay on Neil Harbisson and Moon Ribas expands the discussion into performance and cyborg art. Drawing on neuroscience and postmedia theory, she proposes the "cyborg body" as a new form of artistic medium that dissolves distinctions between human, machine, and aesthetic materiality. The body is no longer simply represented in art—it becomes the art.

In "Folded Tactility," Dimitris Angelatos examines metabolic artistic practices in sculpture, while David Fancy's "Geomancy vs Technomancy" investigates Gilbert Simondon's resonance theories about artistic divination. Both essays suggest that sculpture and sound can act as speculative technologies that "tune" human bodies into larger ecological and material flows.

The third and final section, "Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies in Continental Philosophy," returns to philosophical issues. Nicole Anderson interrogates the relationship between posthumanism and deconstruction, arguing that the erasure of difference in some posthuman discourses risks recapitulating humanist universalism. Through an autobiographical encounter with a possum, she advocates for a "situated deconstruction" that preserves ethical otherness.

Fred Evans develops the concept of "parrhesiastic cosmopolitanism," a form of planetary ethics drawn from Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault. His "Chaosmocene" emerges as a counter-model to the homogenizing forces of capitalist axioms, allowing for a plurivocal cosmopolitics grounded in mutual audibility.

Glen A. Mazis's phenomenological intervention revisits Merleau-Ponty's "flesh of the world" to argue that embodied experience is always already posthuman. He reads literary examples from Proust and Silko to illustrate how language functions not as representation, but as co-constitution of subject and world.

Cassandra Falke and Avital Ronell close the volume with eco-phenomenological and climatological reflections, respectively. Falke writes of Arctic darkness as a phenomenological ground for entangled becoming, while Ronell traces the history of climate as a psychic and philosophical medium, emphasizing futurity and political rupture.

The strength of this volume lies in its theoretical ambition, aesthetic range, and planetary scope. Its tripartite structure moves elegantly from foundational frameworks to specific case studies and philosophical extrapolation. The editors are to be commended for assembling a polyphonic and coherent ensemble of voices, all committed to reimagining the Humanities as a multispecies praxis.

Several conceptual innovations merit particular attention. First is the insistence on *symbiosis* as both a heuristic and an ethical imperative. Unlike instrumental metaphors of networks or systems, *symbiosis* foregrounds interdependency and affect, thereby resisting technocratic abstractions. Second is the critique of homogenizing tendencies within posthumanism itself. The volume does not simply celebrate hybridity; it calls for a vigilant preservation of species, affective, and epistemological differences as a condition for ethical encounter.

If there is a shortcoming, it lies in the density of theoretical language that may limit accessibility for non-specialist readers. Additionally, while the focus on Western traditions is explicit, a more sustained engagement with Indigenous epistemologies and non-Western cosmologies could have broadened the volume's resonance. Nonetheless, *Symbiotic Posthumanist Ecologies* is a landmark contribution that performs what it theorizes: an entanglement of disciplines, species, and narratives that together articulate a new ethics of planetary cohabitation.

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Asunción López-Varela Azcárate is Assoc. Prof. in the Department of English Studies at Universidad Complutense Madrid, Spain. In 2007 she created the research program Studies on Intermediality and Intercultural Mediation SIIM which she still coordinates. The program has received funding from national and international sources. López-Varela has been awarded various grants, including a Fulbright Visiting Scholarship at Harvard University and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship. A proactive member of the profession, López-Varela has been Vice-Chair at Marie Skłodowska-Curie European Postdoctoral Fellowships, Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC) and is a member of Marie Curie Alumni Association MCAA. She was also President of the European Society of Comparative Literature and is Research Chair of the New Directions in the Humanities Network since its creation. She has been founding editor of the journals of the network and continues to be chief editor of The International Journal of Literary Humanities (H-Index: 3- SCImago Journal Rank Q2; SJR 0.11) as well as its Spanish counterpart Revista Internacional de Humanidades. López-Varela coordinates the annual Seminar Series on Cross-cultural dialogue and Sustainability of the Eurasia Foundation. She has supervised 9 PhD dissertations. Her activities as editor and member of scientific committees in various academic journals are extensive and can be seen in her personal webpage at SIIM

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