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Why did the Man die? Rosi Braidotti and the Posthuman Project

Abstract: The radical philosophies of the 20th century analyze the general foundations of knowledge, establishing a series of positions that challenge common philosophical beliefs. The aim of this paper is to present one of the radical epistemologies' deconstructed concepts, namely the Man. Interpreting a series of ideas found in Nietzsche's works, Michel Foucault claims that God and Man are in a relationship of interdependence, both concepts being just constructions of the "demiurge of knowledge". In order to justify the so-called "end of Man", and to discuss the entrance into a posthuman age, I am going to have as theoretical reference ideas found in Rosi Braidotti's works. According to Braidotti's opinion, the posthuman is a natural historical condition in which we are located and not a futuristic dystopia. Using a neo-Spinozist approach, Braidotti builds a creative framework to overcome humanistic thinking and anthropocentrism. I am going to discuss this position and the imminent opening to an understanding of subjectivity based on community, relativity and positive affirmation. The last part of the present paper describes the importance of formulating a new ethical project that would also include the non-human (animals, environment and robots).

Keywords: Rosi Braidotti, posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, neo-Spinozism, radical epistemologies, posthuman ethics, creativity.

The dead of Man: a short story

In the history of human thinking, the process of knowledge is usually influenced by some idealistic perspectives which, in distinct periods, exist in various cultural spaces. Placed on a map of knowledge, concepts start to hold an archetypal function. These concepts become ontological models that increase the intellectual development from different cultures. The importance of this gnoseological model remains significant as long as its basic principles are not questioned. In the framework of this logic, the critical philosophies existing in the second part of the twentieth century must be perceived as a systematic approach that explores the foundations of this model of knowledge. For these epistemologies, Friedrich Nietzsche's position is fundamental because, according to the German philosopher, "all that philosophers have been handling for thousands of years is conceptual

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mummies; nothing real has ever left their hands alive” (Nietzsche 1998, 16). In the Nietzschean context, the atemporality in knowledge is explained by the fact that the metaphysical principles of philosophy have reached a limit that cannot be passed. Thus, in a poetic and, at the same time, prophetic manner, Nietzsche proclaims “God’s death”. In the view of the German philosopher, God is the concept from which all the metaphysical constructions of philosophy begin.

Interpreting some passages related to this subject in Nietzsche’s works, Michel Foucault presents another aspect of major interest in the approach of this study. As Nietzsche says “once the sacrilege against God was the greatest sacrilege, but God died, and then all these desecrators died” (Nietzsche 2006, 6). For Foucault, this is a clear sign that God and Man are in a relationship of interdependence due to the similarity of their content. According to the French philosopher, “by means of a philological critique, by means of a certain form of biologism, Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another, at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first” (Foucault 2005, 372-373). This proves that both concepts are simple epistemic constructions. These Nietzschean ideas are significant for Michel Foucault who, through his archaeological method, makes an analysis which determines that man “is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago” (Foucault 2005, 336).

Addressing to the crisis of the man which started several decades ago, Rosi Braidotti formulates a point of view, where posthuman is seen as a natural stage based on overcoming the Vitruvian model of representation. Developing only certain characteristics, especially those related to gender (male), skin color (white), space (European), a form of beauty and lacking any form of disability, this kind of representation is universalized by receiving the role of the transcendent model. In Foucault’s logic, Braidotti observes “that this Man, far from being the canon of perfect proportions, spelling out a universalistic ideal that by now had reached the status of a natural law, was, in fact, a historical construct and as such contingent as to values and locations” (Braidotti 2013, 23-24). Starting with these arguments, Braidotti’s central thesis is that the universalistic approach builds a binary model of representation that introduces the notion of “difference”. Between the positivity of those who are like the universalized model and the negativity of those who are different, we have some forms of discrimination that can very often lead, to a master-slave relationship. For Braidotti, “in so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as « others ». These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than the human status of disposable bodies” (Braidotti 2013, 15). From this problematic and fundamental point, Braidotti begins to build her own

approach centered on the description of the posthuman and also the post-anthropocentric model in which we are historically located.

Posthuman thinking is positive because it considers these “others” previously negatively treated as equal and also as acceptable alternatives of subjectivity. The separation of the old model, an extremely regulatory one, focused on exclusionary manners, introduces a new approach based on alternative models. Thus, the deconstruction of the Vitruvian human model leaves an empty space “and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives” (Braidotti 2013, 37). This empty space is one in which thinking becomes possible, and its products must provide working manners appropriate to the present.

This approach is doubled in Braidotti’s framework thinking by a post-anthropocentric vision. This proposal overcomes the vision where the man is perceived as the center of the living world, being not entirely a new one. Beginning with the period after World War II, anthropologists assert that the self-induced supremacy of the human species is a real danger. For example, Konrad Lorenz says in his work called *On aggression* that “to regard man, the most ephemeral and rapidly evolving of all species, as the final and unsurpassable achievement of creation, especially at his present-day particularly dangerous and disagreeable stage of development, is certainly the most arrogant and dangerous of all untenable doctrines” (Lorenz 2005, 221-222). Due to the development of sciences, and also through other phenomenon such as global economic issues, Braidotti considers the posthuman framework as an extremely complex one. The boundaries of what the human represents, are difficult to establish, and the development of a form of ecological justice is necessary due to contemporary ecological realities. These problems lead to a post-anthropocentric position. Considered a consequence of these realities, “the crisis of anthropos relinquishes the demonic forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact, the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play” (Braidotti 2013, 66) in a deep connection specific for Braidotti.

Aspects of subjectivity in post-human thinking

As described above in the previous section, Braidotti formulates a post-human critical theory based on a critical perspective, which also has a creative aspect. Therefore, posthuman thinking proposes the creation of new concepts that are necessary for the present historical period, but it also rediscovers and revalorizes certain forms of thought. This critical theory is highlighted when Braidotti presents the new model of posthuman subjectivity. Thus, the posthuman vision goes beyond the forms of dualism that are considered in this paradigm models that promote forms of negativity in relation with “others”. This unitary vision of the living world considers that

the difference between nature and culture is also outdated: “the boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances” (Braidotti 2013, 3). The consequence of these realities is that we must rely on a non-dualistic vision of the relationship between nature and culture.

In order to illustrate this vision, Braidotti goes to the neo-Spinozist approach of French philosophers, especially Deleuze and Guattari “which assumes that all matter is one (monism); that matter is intelligent and self-organizing (autopoiesis); that the subject is not unitary but nomadic; and that subjectivity includes relations to a multitude of non-human « others »” (Braidotti, Hlavajova, 2018, 340). Braidotti emphasizes this paradigm inspired by Spinoza’s work, perceiving it to be in line with the latest scientific developments: “the classical emphasis on the unity of all matter, which is central to Spinoza, is reinforced by an updated scientific understanding of the self-organizing or « smart » structure of living matter. These ideas are supported by new advances in contemporary biosciences, neural and cognitive sciences and by the informatics sector” (Braidotti 2013, 57). Alternatively stated, the processes described by Braidotti equate to a transformation model that includes the process of life. In the radical immanence promoted by the posthuman thinking system, and also as a result of the anthropocentric rupture, life is no longer regarded as a specific attribute given only to the human: “man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting each other – not even in the sense of bipolar opposites within a relationship of causation, ideation, or expression (cause and effect, subject and object, etc.); rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product” (Deleuze, Guattari 1983, 4-5).

We are led to an extension of the sphere of life, beyond the human-specific “Bios” to the larger domain of “Zoe”. This category “is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains” (Braidotti 2013, 60) and builds a form of relationship with “others”, such as animals, environment, robots. This complex perspective is emphasized by the relationships between people and non-human categories, based in particular on the chemical and medical industries. Here we are discussing about how the man wants to improve the existence of plants and also to protect the lives of some animals through medication and surgery.

All these arguments justify the need to understand “the diversity of life – as zoe – as non-hierarchical matter, which recognizes the respective degrees of intelligence and creativity of all organisms” (Braidotti, Hlavajova 2018, 340). Braidotti’s perspective on the subjectivity offers a vision in which the sexualized, racialized and naturalized “others” return as alternative and extended models of “self”. This neutral recovery of the “difference” can be

achieved by a developed sense of responsibility, where many aspects of community involvement and collective construction need to be well structured and functional. As Braidotti says,

a posthuman theory of the subject emerges, therefore, as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing. These non-profit experiments with contemporary subjectivity actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature-culture continuum and is technologically mediated. (Braidotti, 2013, 61)

By building this perspective, Braidotti attempts to embrace various problematic issues in which the notion of vulnerability is central and should be used when we manifest the desire for a planetary connection in which people are intimately linked to the destiny of other species. These ideas which build this vision lead us to a new ethical model. This topic will be presented in the next section of the paper.

Another utopia ? An ethical project for a better future

The system of ideas developed by Braidotti aims to provide practical models for solving contemporary global issues. These models of analysis continue to be developed in post-human studies and are an alternative to the theoretical thinking paradigms. In this complex and often conflictual contemporary world, various issues begin to concern contemporary philosophers. The lack of palpable solutions and also the few possibilities of intervention cause fear. Braidotti presents all these facts, but her vision is positive: “we need to actively and collectively work towards a refusal of horror and violence – the inhuman aspects of our present – and to turn it into the construction of affirmative alternatives” (Braidotti 2013, 129-130). Consequently, one of the subjects that Braidotti mentioned in her works is related to the foundation of a new posthuman ethics which “is based on the praxis of constructing positivity, thus propelling new social conditions and relations into being, out of injury and pain” (Braidotti 2013, 129). This ethic is an interdisciplinary one, so specialists from different fields have to share their knowledge and beliefs to build practical and viable solutions, “post-human theory also bases the ethical relation on positive grounds of joint projects and activities, not on the negative or reactive grounds of shared vulnerability” (Braidotti 2013, 190). From Braidotti’s point of view, fields such as science, philosophy and art need to interconnect. In this new ethical model, the conceptual rigor offered by philosophy must be related to the latest science results. Combined with the creativity of the arts, these theoretical patterns open up to a multitude of important aspects for the development of alternatives that can be materialized.

The project of this new ethic is not just a local one. Following the general beliefs of Braidotti's perspective, this new ethical model is not only about developing theoretical frameworks that embrace all human beings, but one that opens to the entire categories of the living world, from animals and the environment to robots. Or as Braidotti describes, "a sustainable ethics for non-unitary subjects rests on an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human or «earth» others, by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other" (Braidotti 2013, 190). Braidotti is not afraid to say that her own ethical project is, like all the others, one that lies at the limit between reality and ideality. In this sense, her beliefs also follow formulas that are only in the order of possible, but we must show optimism towards them. Thus, it is likely signify

that the conditions for renewed political and ethical agency cannot be drawn from the immediate context or the current state of the terrain. They have to be generated affirmatively and creatively by efforts geared to creating possible futures, by mobilizing resources and visions that have been left untapped and by actualizing them in daily practices of interconnection with others. (Braidotti 2013, 191)

In this logic, the mobilization of these global forces that Braidotti desires is an experimental one. Until we find those formulas that work and lead us to a positive development of life (Zoe), we have to try different approaches, "at this particular point in our collective history, we simply do not know what our enfleshed selves, minds and bodies as one, can actually do. We need to find out by embracing an ethics of experiment with intensities" (Braidotti, 2013, 190). Obviously, for this posthuman ethic model, we also have a set of rules that provides the conceptual bases of the field. In this area, in order to implement this new model, we need to develop some certain criteria such as "non-profit; emphasis on the collective; acceptance of relationality and of viral contaminations; concerted efforts at experimenting with and actualizing potential or virtual options; and a new link between theory and practice, including a central role for creativity" (Braidotti 2013, 191). Some of these concepts are mentioned in other works of Braidotti, and some of them are also developed in previous sections of this article.

What is more important to describe here is the function that creativity holds in the area of this ethics proposed by Braidotti. The understanding of this project "requires more visionary power or prophetic energy, qualities which are neither especially in fashion in academic circles, nor highly valued scientifically in these times of coercive pursuit of globalized «excellence»" (Braidotti 2013, 191). These views are provocative in relation to those areas of knowledge based on clear evidence. Braidotti develops them when she refers to what the future thinkers will be. Beyond a transversal knowledge,

which analyzes the living world as a whole, a thinker of the future will have prophetic and visionary abilities. These qualities are necessary

in order to secure an affirmative hold over the present, as the launching pad for sustainable becoming or qualitative transformations of the negativity and the injustices of the present. The future is the virtual unfolding of the affirmative aspect of the present, which honors our obligations to the generations to come. (Braidotti 2013, 192)

Therefore, this project does not mean turning back to the present problems, but it is rather a proposal for interdisciplinary dialogue, the exploitation of multiple variations and diversity. In this manner, we may face the real world we live in, which requires the development of positive ways of thinking, appropriate to the realities of this historical period.

Conclusions

The intellectual and theoretical aspects that Rosi Braidotti described in her studies proves why she is one of the most important contemporary thinkers. The rapid development of ideas such as those found in Braidotti's work, together with the support of the new studies that are published annually, and also the conferences held in important academic spaces all around the world, demonstrate posthuman thinking begin to be regarded with interest. And if we follow the basic ideas that this epistemic paradigm presents, we must develop a positive way of understanding what posthuman thinking means.

As I presented in this paper, "to be posthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be de-humanized. On the contrary, it rather implies a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental inter-connections" (Braidotti 2013, 190). With a number of inevitable utopian accents that exist in any project of thought that seeks to represent possible forms of future, Braidotti proposes a form of complex analysis of the present in its positive and also negative aspects. In this place, the desire is to identify those models that can "increase our freedom and understanding of the complexities we inhabit in a world that is neither anthropocentric nor anthropomorphic, but rather geo-political, ecosophical and proudly zoe-centered" (Braidotti 2013, 194).

To put it in another way, this perspective may educate us to establish forms of protection for future generations, not just by conserving planetary resources. It is up to us to protect the greatest benefit we enjoy, called the intellectual dimension, "these values may help us remember (...) that we are merely custodians for the present generation of a complex intellectual

inheritance which we did not create – and which is not ours to destroy” (Collini 2012, 199). Thus, we must accept these values with all their complexity and also increase them in various positive and responsible forms. This is the lesson that posthuman is trying to teach all of us.

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