

Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter*(Post-humanist Key Texts)*

2012, Studentlitteratur, 233 pp.

Ane Møller Gabrielsen
 (Norwegian University of Science and
 Technology)

What is posthumanism, and how can we as scholars best meet “the posthumanist challenge”? In the anthology *Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter*, Swedish for *Post-humanist key texts*, seven texts from the fields of feminist theory and STS are translated into Swedish. Oriented towards “all those interested in a wider ethic discussion, increased democratization and more valid approaches in research and society” (p. 26), the editors and translators Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman and Francis Lee want to present a “smorgasbord” (the Swedish word for buffet) of texts (p. 7) in an attempt to answer the questions above.

The first three chapters in *Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter* are introductory texts where the editors explain their take on posthumanism as well as introducing some central topics and discussions. The first chapter, “Reading Skills Beyond the Comfort Zones of the Humanities” is written by Cecilia Åsberg, while “Material-semiotics, Translations and Other Connections” and “Meet the Posthumanist Challenge” are written by the three editors together. Each of the next seven chapters consist of an

introduction to an author and guide to further reading, followed by a translated text. The last part of the book is a “Posthumanist dictionary”, explaining about 40 key terms, starting with “affect” and ending with “sociology of translation” (in Swedish: *översättningssociologi*). All the translations and introductions are done by Åsberg, Hultman or Lee, who thus become not only editors, but also translators and authors. However, to avoid confusing them with the translated authors, I will refer to them as “editors” throughout this review.

Post-humanistiska nyckeltexter could be termed as “posthumanism for beginners”, a guidebook for those curious about entering this emerging theoretical and analytical field. However, it is not just a collection of texts, but offers concrete guidelines for posthumanist analyses. Focusing on the performative function of the analysis and “onto-epistemological ethics”, the editors stress that posthumanist analysis should write the changes one wants to see in the world instead of repeating problems we are already aware of (p. 15). Thus, the posthumanism in this textbook is not just a tool to think with. But what is posthumanism? It is a concept with many different, and also opposing, connotations, ranging from utopian visions of technologically and genetically enhanced transhumans to dystopian and misanthropic views of humanity. The posthumanism presented in this book positions itself within the material, or ontological, turn in the

Humanities and social sciences. Challenging humanist anthropocentrism as well as the views and analytical range of the humanities, Åsberg, Hultman and Lee wants to take the (Scandinavian) reader “directly into a dynamic and unfinished phase of theory building and development of concepts which open up for fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology; ethics, technology and (environmental) politics; affect and pedagogics” (p. 26).

Åsberg, Hultman and Lee have chosen authors who have illustrated how posthumanist approaches relates to the prediscursive agency of the non-human, or who have formulated posthumanist insights formative for the field (p. 24).

The first text is, not surprisingly, by Donna Haraway. In the text “Companion Species”, an excerpt from *When Species Meet*, Haraway uses her dog Cayenne, Derrida’s cat and the baboons of Ebburu, to demonstrate how actors are the products and effects of relations. This text sets the tone for the entire collection of texts. Still, in her own text, Haraway refuses to be called a posthumanist, hence the title of the introduction: “The reluctant posthumanist”, which again underlines the many inconsistencies in this field. The next chapter, “Karen Barad: a Posthumanist Quantum Physicist” introduces Barad’s agential realism, followed by excerpts from Karen Barad’s “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”,

which focuses on how the phenomena which constitutes the world are the effects of intra-action. Then follows Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s introduction to “A Thousand Plateaux”, introducing the concept of rhizome to challenge the traditional notion of binary structures so central to many forms of analyses. The following translation of Rosi Braidotti’s “Becoming Woman, or Sexual Difference Revisited”, is the first time Braidotti is translated into Swedish. Åsberg writes in her introduction that this reluctance may have to do with Braidotti’s sexual difference-approach, an approach that doesn’t necessarily blend well with the Swedish focus on equality. Following Braidotti, Michel Serres and his text of quasi-objects from *The Parasite*, demonstrating how objects and subjects cannot be separated, brings us over to the more ANT-oriented part of the collection. Being one of the inspirators for actor-network theory, it seems only reasonable that the next author is Michael Callon, represented by excerpts from “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation”. The last key text is an excerpt from “Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions” by Anne Marie Mol, where she argues that different medical practices not only deal with different aspects of reality, but actually enact different versions of it.

The seven texts and excerpts are translated into Swedish for the first time. Translation is also a key term for this particular take on post-

humanism - the translation of knowledge changes the actors involved as well as the knowledge itself, and in translating these texts, the editors have also changed them. In her introductory chapter, Åsberg describes how they have adapted the original texts in an effort to create a common posthumanist ground, “transposing” the texts into a posthumanist language to enable communication between different disciplines and fields (p. 16-17). Through the introductions and the translations, they put these texts into dialogue with each other as well as with the posthumanist field. Still, in selecting, introducing and translating these texts, they have also been excluding. And although the editors assure us that they do not want to create any form for canon, the texts they have chosen inform us that the effects may be something quite different from the intention. The definitions in the dictionary at the back also remind us as readers that this is a specific version of posthumanism. Translated from other languages into Swedish, it creates something new, something that might be termed Swedish, or Scandinavian posthumanism. Histories, actors, agents, objects, relations, effects, materiality and meaning is what this posthumanism is all about. The posthumanist challenge posed in this book might be summed up like this: How to make sense of the complex realities of humans and non-humans in ways that includes the material, challenges anthropocentrism and are ethically valid? *Posthumanistiska nickeltexter* offers nu-

merous points of departure for anyone eager to venture into this landscape as well as a range of interesting, and creative answers to this challenge.

Dawn Goodwin

Acting in Anaesthesia. Ethnographic Encounters with Patients, Practitioners and Medical Technologies

2009, Cambridge University Press,

187 pp.

Ericka Johnson

(University of Linköping)

This book is about how anaesthesiology practices are formed, maintained, challenged and extended, and how these anaesthesiology practices are learned through doing, in an apprenticeship relationship. It is based on ethnographic research, both detailed, real-time observations and in-depth interviews, but it also benefits from Goodwin's past experiences as an anaesthetic and recovery nurse. It is obvious that she knows her ethnographic field very well, a knowledge which allows her to provide the reader with very detailed and helpful descriptions of otherwise confusing medical proce-