

## Editing a Glossary as Curatorial Practice

### *An interview with Rosi Braidotti by Lauren Hoogen Stoevenbeld (2019)*

Rosi Braidotti: “The *Posthuman Glossary* is the result of a rather complex collaborative process. It started in 2015 with a series of seminars organized by the Centre for Humanities, which I founded and was directing then, and the BAK, basis voor actuele kunst (also a MOED partner ed.), directed by Maria Hlavajova. These seminars were truly extraordinary events, bringing together local and international dimensions and mobilizing a broad range of academic disciplines. More importantly, they enabled academics and artists to work together on the key issue of the day: the rise of the new Humanities, such as the digital, environmental, medical and public humanities, in the background of the grand challenges of today. Most of the contributors to the glossary were selected from the seminar participants.

Maria and I had decided to choose the format of a glossary because it fitted with our respective research platforms: the BAK’s project of finding a language, a terminology for the contemporary and on the part of the Centre for the Humanities, my interest in new forms of posthuman knowledge production, new terminologies and an array of neologisms that were surfacing in the humanities and beyond. Two main points of our praxis during the production of the book were that it would be a collaboration between artists and academics and that the format would be non-linear, unlike traditional academic edited volumes. In fact, the glossary is not strictly academic, and it deliberately took the risk of falling into what critics dismissively call ‘activist research’. But we both found it important to highlight how much innovative thinking has been done in these hybrid fields. Our focus was on the creativity, energy and inventiveness of on-going developments in the Humanities, which so many people describe—wrongly, as it turns out—as being in a crisis.

Collaborations between artists and academics have a long, fruitful but also difficult history. By accepting art as a research practice, visual essays instead of language-based ones, and highly speculative material, within the format of a glossary, I shifted the grounds of my intervention as the academic editor. In some ways the operative model became that of a curatorial practice. While we did exercise quality control—the pieces had to be legible, scientifically accurate and verifiable—they were also allowed to be experimental in both form and content. That included the freedom to be associative and slightly utopian, which nowadays is frowned-upon in academia. Some topics we addressed were, however, very controversial, because they dealt with nothing less than our accepted notions of what it means to be human. Luckily, we benefited from solid advice from the editorial board and in particular from Goda Klumbyte.

The *Posthuman Glossary* captures a particular moment, which might have been when the posthuman was emerging and looking for its defining features. My sense is that by now the different strands of posthuman thought and practice are much more structured, as I argue in my new book *Posthuman Knowledge*. In this respect, I would have preferred to make the glossary into a website, so that we could keep on updating it. The proliferation of terminology and concepts is actually accelerating, and new keywords are emerging all the time. I hope that soon a younger generation of researchers will make a second volume of the glossary.

I chose three entries from the glossary to be republished at MOED: “The Pregnant Posthuman” by Rodante van der Waal, “The (Posthuman Icon) Pill” by Anneke Smelik and Elisa Fiore and “Placenta Politics” by myself. Through these entries I wove a zig-zagging line

connecting radical feminism to the posthuman moment. I showed how relatively established feminist notions, such as the pill and pregnancy, paved the way for the posthuman turn, because of how they are materially embodied and embedded. Feminist neo-materialism is the great connector. Moreover, my colleagues and I addressed in a non-anthropocentric manner an experience that is specific to females—including non-human females—which is reproduction. This expresses two concerns in one: the first is that pregnancy and reproduction have somehow taken back stage in the contemporary feminist agenda, except as social problems, or technological solutions. The second is to stress the cross-species force, the special potency that is the power to reproduce, which needs to be looked at materially and affirmatively.

The placenta is important because it illustrates the extent to which reproduction is inhuman. Between the female body and the body of the new being there exists this microcosm, the placenta as an extraordinary biosphere, which is neither human nor non-human, but rather its own thing. This shows that the body that reproduces is not one, but rather a complex assemblage of at least three elements, four if you include the provider of the sperm. It takes a village to make, not only to raise, a child. At the origin of anything, there is heterogeneity and hybridity. There's always transversal otherness and all these elements together constitute something we may call the maternal function, or the mother-machine. This term is not meant to dehumanize, but to take the placenta and reproduction away from the naturalized locations where patriarchal tradition put them. I want to bring them firmly into the third millennium as models of posthuman relationality. Life-generating heterogeneous assemblages, which used to be known as motherhood, are the property of certain bodies in alliance with a cluster of others. Femaleness alone does not make it. And the issue is ultimately not about identity, but about what bodies can do. That is what my next book, *Posthuman Feminism*, will be about.”