

PER FARLA FINITA CON LA FAMIGLIA: DALL'ABORTO ALLE PARENTELE POSTUMANE

by Angela Balzano, Meltemi, Milano, 2021.

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In her latest book, *Per farla finita con la famiglia* (2021), Angela Balzano introduces us to the current schizophrenia of the reproductive system.

We force heterosexuals to reproduce negating their abortion rights; lesbians, gays, and transgender people are taken away the right to reproduce when they feel the need for it. On top of this, induced sterilization is imposed at other latitudes or the access to contraception is prohibited. (p. 9)

As we live in times when with the CripCas9 we try to predetermine the genetic heritage of our biological children, an art project that represents a hyper-performing body designed to survive in an apocalyptic world Primo Post-human comes to life. The Primo Post-human is made of self-replaceable organs and has a skin type that can resist ultraviolet rays. All of this while we continue to perpetrate ecocides on a planet on the verge of collapsing.

To think about what possible ways-out we may have, Balzano provides us with a complex interweaving. Addressing the theme of re/production holds together feminist struggles (Lonzi 2010, Federici 2012) and compostist ethics (Haraway 1997, 2016, Braiddotti 2013). New technologies, especially reproductive ones, have subversive potential.

But they also lend themselves to becoming an instrument of exploitation of all terrestrial life. In her book, the author moves between these dimensions.

One of her first critical operations consisted of approaching the first historical action of life reproduction by confronting it with biocontrol and zoe capital as the main axes of the discourse. On the one hand, neo-fascist and conservative forces deploy governmental dispositives to pursue the reproduction of the workforce at the expense of women's self-determination. On the other hand, the neoliberal economy pursues an economical enhancement of life which would define itself within both dimensions of *bios* and *zoe*. Thus, reproductive and regenerative medicine become profitable areas of investment driven by anthropocentric care and self-therapy needs, having the *sapiens* as their primary and only beneficiary.

When we refer to the concept of *homo sapiens*, with Balzano, we are referring to that taxonomic category which was born around the mid-1700s—in conjunction with the birth of biology—. Linnaeus had elaborated the category of *sapiens* in the *Systema Naturae* with the pretence of making it rise to the scientific universal of the human. Still, it corresponds to the white, northern European, cultured, educated, neurotypical citizen. The same one who will be endowed with reason and recognized as a rights's holder.

Here, one of Balzano's book refrains displays itself: "Biology is not nature's truth; it is an historical product better understandable as culture" (p. 69). Concerning this, we can refer to Jasanoff's (2004) critical analytical understanding of co-production. Co-production refers to the concurrent formation of natural and social orders in western societies: here, scientific, legal and cultural systems are active in playing games of creation, systematisation and semantic stratification while descriptive (primarily attributed to science) and normative (only attributed to law) elements are blurring each other's lines.

Jasanoff puts biology and law in relation, explaining how the two disciplines—while affirming reciprocal neutrality—continuously influence each other, thus giving themselves legitimacy. It is through a long and stratified process of co-production of knowledge, that conceptual dichotomies of Western cultures are born. These are the dichotomies that attribute, as examples, passion to women and wisdom to men; social/biological reproduction in the private space to women and public space to men. Those dichotomies also permeate the separation between production and reproduction, whose critical approach assumes a central role in Balzano's thought.

In the speculative refrain "*Decrescita ri/produttiva*", the author re-evaluates critically some of Marx and Engels's theories. The author also dwells on the importance that capital and reproduction have undergone in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism.

The changes that took place in the early 1970s and the transition to the post-industrial economy will heavily influence the re/production issue, updating it in a neoliberal key.

With Cristina Morini (2010), Brunella Casalini (2018) and Donna Haraway (1991) we learn to talk about the feminization of work. This indicates the general spread of flexible and precarious forms of work and the outsourcing of relational, communicative, bodily and cognitive skills. With Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby (2014), on the other hand, we learn to talk about clinical labor, to indicate the *in vivo* labor of production, metabolism, gestation, oogenesis and spermatogenesis that tissue donors, surrogate and research participants do. Talking about the feminization of work, clinical work and cognitive capitalism allows us to focus on the extraction of value from the living that we inscribe in human beings.

However, Balzano continues this reflection and takes a further step. What the author points out is that it is not only human life that is an object of economic exploitation, but life as a whole, existing in all its forms. The existent that is not only sapiens, it is not only mammal, it is not only organic.

So, when we problematize the removal of reproduction from the economy, as well as the re/productive injunction and biocontrol dispositives that insist on our bodies, we have to remove those anthropocentric lenses that make us conduct analysis within the confines of the human being.

Here, the author offers us a series of figurations that display how non-human alterities allow the human species to exist and reproduce biotechnologically, like the diatom amazon, Dolly or Rosita, and to attain higher health levels, like the OncoMouse, fundamental in breast cancer research.

The author does not only share figurations with the reader, but proposes a real ontological reflection on the existing. This happens when she shares Beth Dempster's perspective and proposes to think about the existing as a sympoietic system (Dempster 2000). According to this framework, every subjectivity – the human one as well, does not have fixed borders; it cannot be thought as unrelated and independent from the rest. It is in that perspective that we should interpret the idea of reproductive multispecies justice.

The volume moves between figurations and speculative refrains. That's where we learn about precarious mammals, not-human animals and cyborgs.

We notice how the outsourcing of social and biological reproductive work does not fall only on racialized and marginalized human subjectivities, but goes beyond the boundaries of the human. As shown by the case of Rosita, the cow/nurse genetically

modified to produce compatible human milk, when research could be oriented towards male breastfeeding.

If we analyze the assignment of patents from which drugs and vaccines are obtained, the logic would not change. The agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, the TRIPS, for example, resembles the logic of bio-capital. It is not only possible to hold a patent on the generative principle of a plant by modifying its DNA, but also on human genes and cell lines as the story of Henrietta Lack demonstrates. It is therefore evident that the matter of capital is trans species. Its value is extorted in the case of the non-human, ambiguously qualified or disqualified in the case of the human.

Another figuration we meet is CareObot3—a robotic and interactive butler—which shows the attempt to outsource social reproduction with cybernetics. CareObot3 and biobags for ectogenesis, if we follow Balzano, can be subjected to the same critical operation. They all represent forms of externalization to the machinic or biomachinic. However, even this step does not eliminate the critical nodes identified by the book.

This is because CareObot3 and biobags, as well as their successors, cannot be for all. And, moreover, if we do not want to commit the mistake already committed by Marxism, Balzano teaches us to question ourselves: where will we get the material for their production? If they are no longer the mothers-friends-cousins, migrant and racialized women, cloned cows, who of non-human will bear, at the price of their existence, the reproduction of *sapiens*?

The question that the author seems to suggest is therefore: how do we reproduce those who reproduce us? Here emerges all the importance of recovering Haraway's slogan *Make kin not babies* (Haraway 2016), to guide us beyond the imperative of biological parenting and delve into the unfathomable possibilities of the refrain proposed by Balzano: *to generate posthuman kin for the regeneration of the planet*.

This also becomes a political project that brings us closer to creating new alliances and ways of coexisting.

Posthuman kin do not have the reassuring face and the romantic aura of anthropomorphizing friendship, they are conflicting relationships that do not concern the single human and non-human individual. (...) Taking care does not only mean nurturing/regenerating in relationships of proximity and dependence on an individual/family basis. Taking care is letting go in relationships of freedom and action on a collective-cooperative basis (p. 107).

We have to think of the concept of reproduction in collective terms, plotting alliances in liminal zones and refusing normative injunction: “there is no obligation for anyone; it is just a matter of desire” (p. 121).

The author refrains from normalizing our desires, instead urges us to appropriate them with awareness and imagination. It is no coincidence that she resorts to science fiction narratives, whenever reality and knowledge are not transfeminist enough. Technoscience is not a promise, nor is it destined to guide us towards dystopian futures: “will we be able to stir our desire for parenthood by allying ourselves with nun butterflies and welcoming migrant people (of all ages)?” (p. 120).

In the course of reading, the inevitability of Primo Post-human and that of the children of the nation state are replaced by the stories of Camille (Haraway 2016) stories in which people connect to animal symbionts at risk of extinction.

The prospect of a techno-perfected man capable of living in an apocalyptic world is replaced by that of posthuman kin and symbionts. The author herself imagines being able to give birth to «silica ovules» useful for diatoms, single-celled algae that are decisive for the planet's ecosystem. If we let ourselves be guided along this path, we discover that we have always been composed of humus and cyborgs; of non-human, animal and machinic life.

The invitation is therefore to stop reproducing the biopower: let's stop the reproduction of the *bios* in favor of the regeneration of *zoe*. Where weaving posthuman kin and dismissing *homo sapiens* does not mean “evoking the death of humanity. On the other hand, this means favoring intra-species survival, or even better life in common” (p. 162).

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