



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

FLORE

Repository istituzionale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze

Michel Serres and the Posthumanism: Silencing, Recognizing, and Working on Absences

Questa è la Versione finale referata (Post print/Accepted manuscript) della seguente pubblicazione:

Original Citation:

Michel Serres and the Posthumanism: Silencing, Recognizing, and Working on Absences / Orsola Rignani. - In: PHILOSOPHY STUDY. - ISSN 2159-5321. - ELETTRONICO. - 12:(2022), pp. 167-171. [10.17265/2159-5313/2022.03.008]

Availability:

The webpage <https://hdl.handle.net/2158/1263286> of the repository was last updated on 2022-03-30T12:04:23Z

Published version:

DOI: 10.17265/2159-5313/2022.03.008

Terms of use:

Open Access

La pubblicazione è resa disponibile sotto le norme e i termini della licenza di deposito, secondo quanto stabilito dalla Policy per l'accesso aperto dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze (<https://www.sba.unifi.it/upload/policy-oa-2016-1.pdf>)

Publisher copyright claim:

Conformità alle politiche dell'editore / Compliance to publisher's policies

Questa versione della pubblicazione è conforme a quanto richiesto dalle politiche dell'editore in materia di copyright.

This version of the publication conforms to the publisher's copyright policies.

La data sopra indicata si riferisce all'ultimo aggiornamento della scheda del Repository FloRe - The above-mentioned date refers to the last update of the record in the Institutional Repository FloRe

(Article begins on next page)

Michel Serres and the Posthumanism: Silencing, Recognizing, and Working on Absences

Orsola Rignani

University of Florence, Florence, Italy

Faced with a socio-political-mediatic arena that continues to return the ballet of pandemic, climate change, fourth industrial revolution, sixth mass extinction, war etc., the reflection of Michel Serres and Posthumanism put forth instances for silencing of the anthropocentric *logos*, and for recognition of the multiplicity, variety, possibility of things and of the human in co-belonging with them, as well as instances for working on these same multiplicities, varieties, possibilities, that are often absences, black holes, repressed of philosophical thought.

Keywords: Michel Serres, Posthumanism, silencing, recognizing, absences

Bearing off, I was dumbfounded to see an area almost two hundred and fifty acres square entirely populated by dancing bottles. [...] The coiling winds had compelled them all there, from far and near, from thousand different quadrants. Their constant and perilous collisions made for an acute and cacophonic carillon, and this noise mounted heavenward, wafted to the horizon, it filled all space with giddy ecstasy. (Serres, 1982, p. 1)

Taking the Pulse of Pandemics/Endemics Times

The months, by now we can even say the years, pass and the socio-political-media arena continues to return, against the light of events, news, and journalistic scoops, the ballet of pandemic (endemic?), climate change, fourth industrial revolution, sixth mass extinction, war etc.

If this happens, there will be a reason; but before the answers, overall, still more, or less to the state of risky hypotheses, it seems appropriate to ask us about the existence of needs/emergencies, and if necessary, give them attention. What at this point I find myself gathering from particularly sensitive contexts of contemporary reflection in taking the pulse of the current *milieu*, such as I consider the thought of Michel Serres¹ and the Posthumanism², not devoid of reciprocal affinities³, are above all instances, it comes to say, of

Orsola Rignani, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, University of Florence, Florence, Italy.

¹ As regards the themes of this contribution, on Serres I recommend Rignani, 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022; Moser, 2016; Dolphijn (Ed.), 2019; Watkin, 2020; Aa. Vv., 2020.

² It should be remembered here that Posthumanism critically rethinks the anthropocentric-humanist-dualist vision, according to which the human species, the *Anthropos*, is distinguished, by superiority, compared to other species on the ontological level (the human essence is superior to the others), epistemological (human knowledge is the model and reference of other forms of knowledge), and ethical (man is the only bearer of moral values), and Man is exclusively the male, white, Western, educated, which, as such, is the center (of reference) of the world, and he is separated from all the rest. For an overview of the various orientations within the Posthumanism, I refer to some recent manual and glossary contributions as well as to the bibliographic references contained therein: Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018; Rosendahl Thomsen & Wamberg, 2020; Baioni, Cuadrado Pareyas, & Macelloni, 2021; in addition, a synthesis of all these topics is provided by Ferrando, 2019.

³ Although I have always doubted, and continue to do so, the heuristic profitability of the “assessment” of Serres’s Posthumanism or not, especially considering the fluidity of the posthuman and the intellectual independence of Serres himself, I have nevertheless found and highlighted isomorphisms between them in relation precisely to the conception of human and of the interface between it and the world. I have developed these positions specifically in Rignani, 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022.

silencing, recognition, and work on absences.

I try to explain myself better. Faced with the pandemic swing, the recurring economic crises, unbridled capitalism, tornados, floods, droughts, wars etc., Serresian and posthumanist reflections, in noting and proclaiming, so to speak unanimously, the inconsistency of the purpose of returning to a factual normality no longer existing, as well as the enduring and/or permanent nature of the changes that have taken place, respectively has pointed out/would point out, and points out the need/emergency of the removal of myths such as hierarchical notions of man, economic success, unlimited earth resources (Rignani, 2021), with the contextual proposal to activate precisely processes of silencing, recognition, as well as work on absences.

It took me a long time to forget the press of romance and sex, in order to accede to this nakedness. Memory, however, preserves the hard odors of embrocations and restores the fabulous antiquity of gymnastics. From what mists of time does this absence return to us?

Why this torture? For nothing, literally, for *nothing*. The difficult technique of returning to zero. A path toward nakedness, indetermination, non-existence. The more I think the less I am me. If I think something, I am that something. If I simply think, I am no longer anyone. In any case, me thinking am nothing. (Serres, 1982, p. 39)

Thinking the Unthinkable

When Serres says that the I exist only outside the ego (Serres, 1985), that the more I think the less I am me (Serres, 1982, p. 39), that I receive the data outside of myself (Serres, 1985), that the language imprisons me and makes me an ego (Serres, 1987, p. 128), and when Posthumanism affirms that the human is a hybrid fruit, and that we are in and for the relationship (Marchesini, 2020, p. 22), both in fact express instances of silencing. Or, in other words, instances of the muting of a language, a *logos*, a reason which, by claiming to be exclusive, excludes or files differences—“we are fascinated by the unit; only a unity seems rational to us” (Serres, 1982, p. 2)—; which considers reality a human production; which, when a relatively stable phenomenon, a coherent period or era appears, works to make people forget the chaos, stretch marks, fragility, volatility of the possible (Serres, 1982).

With this, silencing is inter-implicated with recognition and work on absences; in fact, silencing is reducing to silence, which, as Serres maintains, expands, removes borders, leads to the world (Serres, 1987), and in so doing catalyzes the recognition of multiplicity, variety, possibility, interstitial zones, the interactions of things and of the humans in co-belonging with them.

But, in turn, silence, multiplicity, possible, interstices, thresholds (Marchesini, 1997), as the Serresian and posthumanist reflections eloquently testify, are often absences, that is, shortcomings, black holes, repressed from philosophical thought, on which work is therefore urgently needed: “I’m trying to think the multiple as such, to let it waft along without arresting it through unity, to let it go, as it is, as its own pace. A thousand slack algae at the bottom of the sea” (Serres, 1982, p. 6).

Trying to think the unthinkable, one can in fact become aware of a silence capable of removing barriers and separations, of emptying any sense of belonging, expulsion, inclusion, exclusion (Serres, 1987), thus catalyzing the recognition of a real in which purity, unique reference, and linearity reveal themselves to be *flatus vocis* (Marchesini, 2009); a real in which multiplicity and possibilities, that is the so-called absences, are pregnancies.

The philosopher is the shepherd [...] of multiplicities. The philosopher is no longer right or rational, he protects neither essence nor truth [...], the philosopher does not wrap himself up in truth as in breastplate or shield, he does not sing nor does he pray to allay nocturnal fears, he wants to let the possible roam free. Hope is in these margins and freedom.

The philosopher keeps watch over unforeseeable and fragile conditions, his position is unstable, mobile, suspended, the philosopher seeks to leave ramifications and bifurcations open, in opposition to the confluences that connect them or close them. He goes back up the thalweg a bit, he climbs the chreod, he is going to graze where branches multiply, where freshets are turbulent, where innovation burgeons forth, on the high plains.

The function of the philosopher, the care and the passion of the philosopher, is the negentropic ringing-of-the-changes of the possible. (Serres, 1982, p. 23)

Trying to think the unthinkable, one ultimately can become aware of a silence catalyzing the recognition of a real in which everything is able to do, albeit according to individual differences, what we humans believe we are the only ones to be able to do and speak.

And precisely in this respect, the Serresian and posthumanist proposals are particularly rich, varied, and intriguing. Among these, I cannot fail to recall the icastic statements of *Le Gaucher boiteux* on the writing by the wind a musical score on the waves of the sea and on the dunes of the desert, as well as on the calculation by the trees of their age in the wood (Serres, 2015, pp. 201-202). Nor can I neglect the Serresian and even posthumanist suggestion of noting that everything paints (Serres, 2014), everything plays concerts (Serres, 2011), not in the sense of making birds, wind, trees, sea, etc., become artists, but rather in that of recognizing artists as birds, wind, trees, sea, etc. (Galati, 2021); and therefore, of recognizing *that we do like the world* (Serres, 2015, p. 202) and that, ultimately, the highest art would consist, on our part, in capturing, intercepting, being impacted, corresponding, emitting, restoring this universal agency (p. ivi).

If all this, taken literally, may seem extreme or questionable, what seems to me to be collected as food for thought is the sub track, that is the idea, to say it again with Serres, that is the object that gives birth to the human which gives birth to the object; that the object begins a story that the subject, constituted by it, will continue; that objects and subjects replace each other (Serres, 1980; 1982). This, according to a commutability, for which the human is (with/between) things, and/or according to a hybridized relationality of universal co-belonging in the sign of the recognition that “We-Are-(All)-In-This-Together-But-We-Are-Not-One-And-The-Same” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 52).

This is probably the sense of emergences/needs for silencing, recognition, work on absences, and therefore it can be the sense of the Serresian and posthumanist call to the intentional/conjugative exit from the ego, to the idea of a human species in continuity and hybridization with other species and with the world, and to the idea of human not attributable to a single genus, to a single race, or to a single geographical context.

What with these instances Serres and the Posthumanism put first on the agenda is therefore a de-anthrop(ocentr/omorph)ized humanism, expression of the rethinking of human uniqueness, of the return to things, of adherence to other-than-human, and of the rethinking of agency in the sense of recognizing principles common to all entities, federative and inventive relationships, co-belonging.

Overcoming points of view, silencing of the human word, excessive and intentional listening to alterities (Marchesini, 2016), recognition that we have always been in this together, but we have never been the same, this means in a nutshell repositioning, placing ourselves again the creative relationship of co-belonging (Rignani, 2022, p. 96).

But then if that is the case, given that, good or bad, to real normality, presumed or longed for, it does not seem possible to return, that the changes that have taken place have no intention of letting go, and that precisely the humanist model does not work, nor does it seem work especially in the face of pandemics, wars, climatic and economic crises etc., what prevents you from trying to collect and refine these same emergences/needs?

We use nouns such as contagion, contamination, infection, and adjectives such as spurious, dirty, impure to depict something negative to avoid, as opposed to what is immaculate, authentic, aseptic, which corresponds to that ideal of purity, essence, identity, coherence that still pervades our programs. And yet the ecological dimension is anything but! Life is continuous contamination, it is construction of structures through syncytial and symbiotic practices; it is affirmation of complex organisms whose cells, for a considerable percentage, do not belong to the genome of a given species. In nature, organisms are anything but pure and they function thanks to complex mutualisms or infections that construct articulated synergies over time. On the contrary, sterile and pure is what corresponds to death—it is the coldness of crystal, not the sticky permeability and infiltrativeness of life. It is necessary, then, to assume full awareness that it is not possible to find assonance with the biosphere while remaining attached to a paradigm that denies the elementary logic of life. I cannot say whether we will be able to fully understand how far our thinking has strayed from sharing and belonging to the community of the living, whether we will realize that our destructive actions are not just reckless gestures, but represent the coherent consequences of a certain way of conceiving the human. (Marchesini, 2021, pp. 56-57)

References

- Aa. Vv. (2020). *Michel Serres. Hommage à 50 voix*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Baioni, E., Cuadrado Pereyas, L. M., & Macelloni, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Abbecedario del Postumanismo*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Braidotti, R. (2019). *Posthuman knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Braidotti, R., & Hlavajova, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Posthuman glossary*. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dolphijn, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Michel Serres and the crises of the contemporary*. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical posthumanism*. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Galati, G. (Ed.). (2021). *Ecologie complesse. Pensare l'arte oltre l'umano*. Milan: Meltemi.
- Marchesini, R. (1997). *Il concetto di soglia. Una critica all'antropocentrismo*. Rome-Naples: Theoria.
- Marchesini, R. (2009). *Il tramonto dell'uomo. La prospettiva post-umanista*. Bari: Edizioni Dedalo.
- Marchesini, R. (2016). *Alterità. L'identità come relazione*. Modena: Mucchi.
- Marchesini, R. (2020). *Essere un corpo*. Modena: Mucchi.
- Marchesini, R. (2021). *The virus paradigm. A planetary ecology of the mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser, K. (2016). *The encyclopedic philosophy of Michel Serres. Writing the modern world and anticipating the future*. Augusta GE: Anaphora Literary Press.
- Polizzi, G. (1990). *Michel Serres. Per una filosofia dei corpi miscelati*. Naples: Liguori.
- Rignani, O. (2012). *Umano? Una domanda per Italo Calvino e Michel Serres*. Fidenza (Pr): Mattioli 1885.
- Rignani, O. (2014). *Emergenze "post-umaniste" dell'umano. Prove di analisi storico-comparativa dal presente al passato e ritorno*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2016). *Emergenze "post-umaniste" del corpo. Una prova di analisi "orizzontale" via Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2018). *Metafore del corpo post-umanista: Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rignani, O. (2019). Toward a posthuman humanism: Serresian federative humanism between natural contract and political ecology. *Philosophy International Journal*, 2, 1-6.
- Rignani, O. (2020). The relevance of Michel Serres's idea of bodily hominescence for a convergence of posthumanism and transhumanism: A trans/posthuman body. *Philosophy Study*, 10(2), 119-126.
- Rignani, O. (2021). The virus in Serresian-posthumanist sauce: A hopeful monster parasite. *Philosophy Study*, 11(11), 820-825.
- Rignani, O. (2022). *Umani di nuovo. Con il postumano e Michel Serres*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Rödel, P. (2016). *Michel Serres, la sage-femme du monde*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Rosendahl Thomsen, M., & Wamberg, J. (Eds.). (2020). *The Bloomsbury handbook of posthumanism*. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Serres, M. (1980). *Le Parasite* (The parasite). (L. R. Schehr, Trans.). Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Serres, M. (1982). *Genèse* (Genesis). (G. James & J. Nielson, Trans.). Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Serres, M. (1985). *Les Cinq Sens. Philosophie des corps mêlés-I* (The five senses. A philosophy of mingled bodies (I)). (M. Sankey & P. Cowley, Trans.). London-New York: Continuum.
- Serres, M. (1987). *Statues. Le second livre de fondations* (Statues: The second book of foundations). (R. Burks, Trans.). London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Serres, M. (1999). *Variations sur le corps* (Variations on the body). (R. Burks, Trans.). Minneapolis MN: Univocal.

- Serres, M. (2011). *Musique*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Serres, M. (2014a). *Pantopie: De Hermès à Petite Poucette*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Serres, M. (2014b). *Yeux*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Serres, M. (2015). *Le Gaucher boiteux. Puissance de la pensée*. Paris: Le Pommier.
- Watkin, C. (2020). *Michel Serres. Figures of thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.